

California Rail News

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Debate on Amtrak's Future

CUTTING OIL HABIT REQUIRES TRAINS THAT MEET WORLD SPEED STANDARDS

In the past four months, the fate of U.S. rail passenger service has seen more than one reversal. Up until September 11, even Amtrak's Acela Express looked to be a victim of low air fares and low rail speeds. That changed in an instant. Action January 11 by the Amtrak Reform Council (ARC) recommending restructuring of Amtrak may make for another reversal. The ARC was formed by Congress to decide whether Amtrak would achieve self sufficiency by the end of 2002. Self-sufficiency has been dubious since August, when Amtrak mortgaged property at New York's Penn Station to pay debts. All parties now admit that the railroad cannot run without some type of public support.

Amtrak Board Chairman Michael Dukakis argues that the railroad earned rights to more support by showing it can be "the safety net for our entire transportation network." The value of Amtrak is better understood since Sept. 11, but performance is the problem. Even Acela has not achieved its original ridership projections. In the wake of the attack on America's air travel system, Amtrak is doing well wherever it offers a decent alternative to air travel. At the same time, it has become clear that the service levels offered on most rail corridors will not attract air travelers. And it is painfully obvious how severely American rail service lags Europe and many third world countries.

The primary handicap is speed. Amtrak set a North American speed record when Acela Express started Washington to Boston runs a year ago, but even America's fastest train has yet to measure up to its promise of world-class speeds. As a competitor in the world railway Olympics, the United States is far from scoring even a bronze medal.

The 226 miles from Washington to New York with five stops currently takes 2 hours and 44 minutes, no faster than the 1970's Express Metroliners at 82.6 mph average speed. The Baltimore-Wilmington speed of 102.3 mph that makes the U.S. a high speed player is similar to that of 1960's Metroliners under Pennsylvania Railroad operation.

On the 232-mile New York-Boston leg of the trip the train takes 3 hours and 28 minutes, nearly half an hour longer than originally promised. The resulting 66.9 mph speed looks lame alongside China's 94.0 mph Fex G trains or Russia's 89.6 mph flagship Sokol. (see chart, page 2)

Why is Acela so slow? A European view



is that Amtrak spent enough to have a true high-speed service, but made poor choices: a winding Boston-New Haven route and a train too heavy for the job.

U.S. officials refused the French TGVs originally offered by Bombardier. Federal Railway Administration (FRA) safety rules date from the early 1900's, and dictate heavy cars instead of modern safety features. Amtrak's choice of stainless steel added more weight. Acela axle loadings are 45 percent heavier than TGVs at 23.2 metric tons. Acela's weight per seat, 4180 pounds, is about three times the TGV bilevels, with track-damage and energy consequences. Skeptics believe track costs will eventually force Acela's 150mph speeds downward.

The planned 3-hour N.Y.-Boston runs that were supposed to fix Amtrak's revenue problems are now unlikely. Most critically for its future, Amtrak has now failed to deliver on its promise of modern high speed trains.

Meanwhile, Amtrak's financial slide, due in large part to Acela's nonperformance, has forced the issue of rail passenger service reform to the forefront. Although the Amtrak Reform Council is contaminated by anti-rail figures such as Wendell Cox, other members with pro-rail credentials including Paul Weyrich have close contacts with the Bush Administration and likely will influence the next stage of rail passenger development.

Amtrak's mortgage of Penn Station lands for \$300 million underscored critics' concerns about Amtrak management. The deal bought only months of breathing room, until deficits yawned again. In this debacle, Amtrak lost many of its traditional allies, such as the United Transportation Union.

According to UTU International President Byron A. Boyd, "recent calls that Amtrak be

Amtrak Vice Chairman Michael Dukakis at the Acela launch a year ago. Dukakis led efforts to introduce higher speeds on new Amtrak corridors. Photo: www.trainweb.com

liquidated are largely the fault of Amtrak President George Warrington.... While Warrington and his inner circle of managers have been falsely asserting the railroad is on the verge of operating with-out subsidies, Amtrak's own internal studies, which are kept secret, show that not a single scheduled passenger route, including service on the Northeast Corridor, earns a profit."

"As a result, Amtrak, which perpetually has been teetering on the edge of bankruptcy, is again in danger of running out of cash - this time by March," says Boyd. "Worse, its goodwill is so badly tarnished in the eyes of many lawmakers that calls for its liquidation are likely to be taken seriously this time."

On January 11, the Amtrak Reform Council (ARC) met and adopted three related options for Amtrak restructuring. Under all options, a variety of units would replace today's Amtrak.

A new independent organization, the "National Railroad Passenger Corporation," (Amtrak's current legal name) would disburse federal funds, plan corridor development, manage any franchising of train operations, implement a plan to bring Northeast Corridor (NEC) tracks to a good state of repair, and hold the statutory franchise to access freight railroad rights-of-way.

A new government-owned infrastructure company would maintain and manage the NEC, with "operating shortfalls covered by track use fees" and capital funds coming from "a mix of federal and state funds."

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Calls for Amtrak Reform Gather

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

Three operating organization scenarios were studied, but ARC voted to endorse #3:

- 1 national or regional monopolies
- 2 long haul [only] competition
- 3 competition for all intercity markets (with a 2-5 year transition).

The ARC approved amendments to option 3 requiring the new Amtrak to let workers "follow" their jobs in seniority order, with existing contracts intact, and have Railway Labor Act bargaining to follow expiration of contracts. Also, "franchising" in Option 3 becomes optional (blurring the distinction between options 1 and 3).

The Council's vote in favor of Option 3 was 8-1-1, with labor representative Charles Money Penny voting no, and Democratic appointee James Coston abstaining. Coston has been vocally critical of both Amtrak's financial dealings and the ARC's sometimes antidemocratic staff actions. At December's meeting, Coston said ARC had undermined its credibility by rushing the decision.

Option 3 makes the Federal government responsible for long haul trains, but after the transition period, states become responsible for losses on existing and new corridor trains. The ARC sketchy recommendations include "Train operators responsible for privately financing new equipment. If necessary, federal funding of long-haul equipment and state financing of corridor equipment."

The ARC announced a vote on February 7, the deadline for the Council's advisory recommendation to Congress. Additional detail will be developed by ARC staff and a teleconference may happen before then.

Milwaukee Mayor and ARC Member John Norquist pitched the Council to recommend availability of highway and aviation trust funds for passenger rail. Norquist believes that Congress might not decide to change Amtrak's structure but almost certainly wants to change funding methods.

The National Association of Railroad Passengers (NARP) focussed on potential funding threats in the ARC proposals. NARP criticized Federal spending of "\$13 billion a year on aviation, \$33 billion on highways, and only about \$570 million on passenger rail. At the same time, the federal government offers states 80% matches for most road and aviation projects, but no match for most intercity passenger rail projects."

"Addressing this inequity," says NARP, "is the key to developing attractive, affordable ... service the public will embrace." NARP also notably said, "Amtrak must be clear about the ongoing costs of maintaining and improving the existing network. This clarity must include outlining the funds needed for operating grants, not just capital investment." Warrington's use of capital assets to cover operations precipitated the ARC storm.



Acela Express on its first day of operation near Philadelphia. Photo courtesy trainweb.com

With "operational self-sufficiency" gone as a promise, some in Congress may favor ending funding altogether to avoid pouring money down a black hole. Ross Capon of NARP told both the press and the ARC that methods of insuring "value for money" and credible incentives for Amtrak to perform are more useful than restructuring ideas.

NARP says, "separating operations from infrastructure does not magically create ... funding... and a meaningful federal-state funding partnership, nor does it create the will to provide those things." NARP fears that splitting Amtrak into an operating unit needing grants mostly for non-Northeast trains, and an infrastructure unit needing capital grants for the Northeast, threatens to break apart the consensus for a passenger-rail network with national reach. NARP questions whether a Congressional majority will exist for either Amtrak remnant.

In its January 10 letter to ARC, States for Passenger Rail Coalition (SPRC) conveyed its belief that the "success of a rail corridor structure will be severely limited if the corridors are not connected by a national system framework."

"The states believe that regional corridors offer the best opportunity for passenger rail development in the United States.

However, a series of unconnected corridors, while serving regional needs, will not form a coherent, national system. Connectivity has been the basis of success for the interstate highway system and, as the events of September 11 have so clearly demonstrated, the security and resilience of our national transportation system require that such connectivity and redundancy exist within and between modes. A national intercity rail network should be supported by the federal government, as the federal government has supported such investment and operation of the interstate highway, aviation, and maritime systems."

NARP also directly attacked the ARC idea that states bear more of the cost of providing passenger rail, saying it "is likely to mean major service reductions" due to major budget problems at the state level. "Such reductions are inappropriate," said NARP, "at a time when Amtrak has been gaining market share from the airlines and the public is demanding more, not less, service."

Some state governments are interested in the ARC idea of granting them franchised access to tracks, partly to keep state service payments at fair levels. Amtrak is notorious for its wildly varying pricing, ranging from \$7 to \$40 per train mile for different states.

Acela Places 9th in Rail Olympics

This table lists the top 12 countries, ranked by fastest stop-to-start times for scheduled services. Data is based on a speed survey published in 1999 by *Railway Gazette International*, updated by CRN with 2001 timings from European on-line timetables and other sources. RGI plans a new survey, so visit www.railwaygazette.com to subscribe. California, the world's 6th largest economy, is off the chart about 18th in speeds, about Morocco's level.

Rank/Country	Train	From-To	Distance (miles)	Time (min)	Average Speed (mph)
1 Japan	Nozumi	Hiroshima-Kokura	119.0	44	162.3
2 France	TGV	St. Pierre des Corps-Massy	126.1	51	148.4
3 Belgium-Intl.	Thalys	Brussels Midi-Paris Nord	174.6	80	130.9
4 Spain	AVE	Madrid-Seville	291.7	135	129.6
5 Germany	ICE	Fulda-Würzburg	57.8	29	119.6
6 Britain	IC225	London-York	188.0	101	111.7
7 Sweden	X2000	Skövde-Södertälje Syd	171.7	96	107.3
8 Italy	Eurostar	Piacenza-Parma	35.3	20	106.0
9 U.S.A.	Acela	Baltimore-Wilmington	68.3	40	102.4
10 Finland	Pendolino	Salo-Karjaa	32.9	21	94.1
11 China	Fex G	Guangzhou-Shenzhen	86.2	55	94.0
12 Russia	Sokol	Moskva-St. Peterburg	403.0	270	89.6

TIME TO RUN SAN JOAQUIN ALL THE WAY TO LOS ANGELES

by George Gaekle
TRAC Vice President Emeritus

One of the original goals of the Train Riders Association of California ever since its formation in 1984 has been extension of San Joaquin service from Bakersfield to Los Angeles. We have tried in the past to get Amtrak and Caltrans to actively press for this long-overdue service, but each time have been told that the railroad (first SP and now Union Pacific) was opposed because of freight congestion, or that it would be too expensive, or both.

On December 15, Amtrak began four daily round trips a day between Boston and Portland, Maine, the first passenger train service since 1965! This service did not come easily. It took 14 years of valiant effort on the part of the Train Riders Northeast organization to persuade Amtrak and the states of Maine, New Hampshire and Massachusetts to achieve the goal of restoring service on this route—at all times with the “Over My Dead Body” opposition of the railroad involved.

Union Pacific apparently takes the position it does not have room for just one more train each way overnight on the Tehachapi Route. Do you suppose that UP would not find room for just one more freight train each way? TRAC President Emeritus Arthur Lloyd can tell you that during World War II when the railroads were busier than at any time in our history and at a time when communications were primitive compared with what exists now, there were at least six passenger trains run daily by the SP and Santa Fe over Tehachapi.

I strongly urge that TRAC members take some actions now to mount an offensive for this needed service. Not for all five San Joaquins. Just for 718 and 711 so that customers do not have to arrive Los Angeles by bus at the absurd hour of 2:35am or leave at the equally absurd hour of 1:35am. True it might take between three and four hours longer by train than by bus. In 1959, SP's overnight train, the West Coast, was scheduled for 5 hours 15 minutes southbound and 5 hours 40 minutes northbound between Los Angeles and Bakersfield with one stop at Glendale.

With additional stops to serve important places like Mojave, Lancaster and Palmdale allowing for trains to take sidings for important freights, a southbound arrival in Los Angeles arrival at 7:00 or 7:30 am and a northbound departure at Los Angeles between 10 and 11 pm are far more decent times for customers than is the case with present buses.

I realize this service will not be an easy thing to accomplish. Money and the railroad are the two biggest problems. But it is time to act on this longstanding public need and we should begin the task **now**. The tragedy of September 11 is fresh in people's minds, and the public wants an alternative to flying and dealing with airport problems.

We should lobby our local, state, and federal government administrations and representatives and Amtrak. We should meet with newspaper editorial boards and hold press conferences. We should petition Amtrak to take our case before the Surface Transportation Board in Washington if necessary.

If people in the Northeast could win their fight for Boston-Portland service for four daily round trips, why can't we win this one? For just one train—not four. Surely we are as capable as they are.

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The *California Rail News* encourages letters, comments, and reports on local issues. Please submit your material to California Rail News, 926 J Street, Suite 612, Sacramento, CA 95814. Sorry, we do not guarantee return of photos or articles submitted. Deadline for material to be included in the next issue of the *California Rail News* is February 15, 2002.

ADVERTISING RATES

Business card \$30, 2 col. x 6" \$100, half-page \$200, half-page color \$300, full-page color \$500, 15% reduction for run of 6 ads, 10% reduction for TRAC members.

Coast Observations

MAINE FINALLY GOT ITS TRAIN Dec. 15 when four daily Downeaster round trips on the Portland-Boston corridor began. Guilford Industries, owners of the track, tried for years to block the service, even after losing a Surface Transportation Board appeal. One thing the new trains have going for them is fresh cafe food that puts California Cafe fare to shame. Epicurean Feast, a private contractor, serves Rosemary shrimp over Caesar salad, grilled marinated Portabella mushroom sandwiches on foccacia bread, award-winning clam chowder and fresh-baked hot apple crisp. No plastic Sara Lee food for Maine... **NOW EVEN TEXAS HAS AN EXPRESS**, as an intensive Dallas-Fort Worth commuter rail service began service December 2. The Trinity Railway Express, a 34 mile combined service of the Fort Worth T and DART, mixes four new bilevel trains with slick DART rebuilds of Canadian RDC cars. Bargain fares top out at \$2 and 25 trains daily run to CentrePort station (near DFW airport), 12 continuing to Fort Worth. In Dallas, TRE trains share renovated Union Station with DART light rail trains and Amtrak. Tracks were bought from the former Rock Island (CRI&P) 18 years ago for \$1 million per mile... **IN A REMARKABLE 11/24/01 N.Y. TIMES OPINION PIECE, ROBERT F. KENNEDY JR.** called auto energy inefficiency the cause of U.S. dependence upon Persian Gulf oil, and called for closing the SUV/small truck loophole in “CAFE” standards. He cited President Jimmy Carter's success in getting standards that cut imports from the Persian Gulf by 87 percent, and pointed out that the Reagan rollback of CAFE in 1986 to help Texas oil industry buddies doubled oil imports by the very first year... **A SEARING LETTER FROM SENATOR JIM COSTA** to Union Pacific CEO Dick Davidson complaining about the years of delays to the 2nd San Joaquin-Sacramento run has reportedly moved UP lobbying staff into action trying to spread blame for the delays. Speculation is that UP was going to try to miss a Spring 2002 start entirely, based on the company policy that “additional service cannot be started until” every crosstie and every piece of ballast paid for by Caltrans is in place, regardless of the fact that the delays were caused by the railroad. UP's recalcitrance has also led others to talk about alternatives to rail improvement projects ... **SURFLINER RIDERSHIP ROSE** in the last quarter of 2001 while San Joaquins were static and Capitols slid. New Surfliner cars took the Southland route to its highest point since 1993, but ironically even two new round trips couldn't stop the Capitol's downward trend. Rides per train in October were 179 on the Surfliners, and 162 on both the San Joaquins and Capitols. Revenue per passenger was \$22.63 on the San Joaquins, \$15.22 on the Surfliners, and \$8.83 on the Capitols... **IT'S A GREAT TIME TO FAX OR E-MAIL** Congress concerning the need to retain funding for Amtrak service. E-mailing a letter to Congress is much more accepted, since regular mail became scary for staffers this fall. **www.capitoladvantage.com** allows you to send a message to both your senators and member of congress with a single click. We hope to soon add their e-mail button at **www.calrailnews.com**

2-mile Bay Span Rivals 10-mile Øresund Cost



by Robert Freehling

During the news shadow of the September 11 attack, a group of construction industry lobbyists sneaked a bill through the California Legislature to double the appropriation for a new eastern span of the San Francisco-Oakland Bay Bridge to \$2.6 billion. Even this vast sum is not likely to be enough.

On December 19 the first of four contracts received a winning bid of \$1.04 billion from Kiewitt FCI Manson, a Concord joint venture, far outstripping budget projections. This contract was expected to be between a quarter and a third of the total project cost.

Ever since State Sen. Quentin Kopp used SB60 to hijack bridge toll surcharges for this project, transit has lost billions. The highway builders controlling this project want a road-only solution that shuts out rail and public transit and adds no transbay travel capacity. Caltrans' replacement design was a lackluster standard heavy concrete highway viaduct. An extra cable-supported span was added as decoration, which raised the cost dramatically, and threatened to stall the project unless more funding was found.

\$2.6 billion was originally supposed to pay for retrofits to all California toll bridges. Now, with all parts of the Bay Bridge over budget, \$3 bridge tolls are back on the table, and legislators openly worry whether the

The 2-mile Bay Bridge east span is rapidly approaching the \$3.2 billion price of the 10-mile Øresund link, the road/rail bridge and tunnel linking Denmark and Sweden. Maps: Øresundsbro Konsortiet & Richard Tolmach

bridge funding gap can be closed this year. Southern California lawmakers are reportedly sharpening their knives for the out-of-control Bay Area project, because cutting it could go a long way toward solving the \$4.5 billion state budget crisis.

How did a 2-mile steel bridge retrofit morph into a new concrete highway bridge that rivals the cost of the 10-mile Øresund Link connecting the rails and roads of Scandinavia with Europe? And given the tiny size of the East Span, why is rail unaffordable? Why are Californians gullible?

Immediately after the 1989 Loma Prieta earthquake, Governor George Deukmejian called together an inquiry board which recommended that the bridge be retrofitted to a high performance level, guaranteeing the bridge would be serviceable immediately after a major earthquake.

Caltrans, rather than rising to this task, downgraded the performance standards and pursued some flawed retrofit concepts for the vulnerable eastern span. They proposed entombing the foundations and towers in massive concrete. Yet, to an earthquake, even the largest amount of concrete is triv-

ial; the extra weight would rattle the bridge with extra force if it were set in motion. Caltrans engineers thought they could isolate the main superstructure, a rigid lattice of steel beams, from earthquake vibrations.

This can be done for suspension bridges, where flexible cables allow for a kind of shock absorber effect which partly isolates the deck from the vibrating towers. But to try to do this in the east span structure is impractical. The Army Corps of Engineers coolly called the approach "unreasonable." U.C. Berkeley's Dr. A. Astaneh, a world expert on structural failure and seismic retrofits, urged that a steel retrofit would have better performance than Caltrans' design.

As the scope of the project collided with poor planning, estimates of costs for the retrofit fluctuated wildly, from a few hundred million to over a billion dollars. At the end, Caltrans and its advisors chose the highest price figure in order to reject the retrofit.

A Shaky Panel of Seismic Experts

On December 10, 1996, seven footdragging years after the earthquake, a pair of Caltrans advisory panels wrote a letter to Caltrans Director James van Loben Sels to say that the bridge ought to be replaced rather than retrofitted. Two principal justifications were given. First, they said a new bridge could be built to a higher standard of

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MTC Road-Only Design 5 Times the Cost of Rail

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 4

safety than achievable by retrofitting the old one, providing a dependable lifeline crossing the Bay. They also claimed a new bridge could be built for the same amount of money as the highest estimated price for a complete retrofit—around \$1 billion.

Today, these justifications have crumbled. The cost of the new bridge is approaching \$3 billion, ten times the original retrofit cost. And last year, the Army Corps of Engineers determined that the new bridge design could not do even the basic thing it was supposed to do—provide a lifeline after an earthquake.

The Caltrans claim that it would be easier to construct a new bridge is also subject to reassessment. Among many other serious problems, the Army Corps pointed out a critical welding procedure that would require workers to stand in tightly confined spaces six inches from steel plates preheated to 300 degrees. When Caltrans defended this at a meeting with contractors, the contractor expected to do the work bluntly said, “No offense ... but that’s baloney,” and refused to do the work unless the preheat temperature is dropped to 150 degrees. This may force a decision between the safety of the workers and the safety of the bridge.

Public Indoctrination Proposed

The Caltrans seismic advisors’ letter also volunteered the interesting advice that: “An indoctrinational program may help the public understand the choices and convince the concerned environmentalists of the benefits of building the new bridge.” They also warned that “Bicycle and rapid-rail enthusiasts may advocate placing these facilities on the structure. ... Such issues and weighing of alternatives must be addressed by the Caltrans management.” Yet, Kopp’s SB60 helped Caltrans fend off transit with a clause banning “local and state permitting agencies from imposing any requirement that a bicycle, pedestrian, or mass transit facility be constructed on the bridge.”

Bay Area citizens clearly want rail on the bridge. Berkeley, San Francisco, Oakland and Emeryville each passed a voter referendum that urged restoration of rail on the bridge. The Metropolitan Transportation Commission (MTC), the Bay Area transportation planning agency, paid for a study that concluded rail was feasible. But Caltrans advisors fought rail because it would require scrapping their bridge design and replacing it with a sturdier one. Perversely, they pushed the specs for rail to require an east span capable of holding a train on every one of the 10 automobile lanes simultaneously. MTC hid initial figures as low as \$758 million for a full heavy rail facility on east and west spans. The final study pumped this up to over \$3 billion for a grossly overbuilt version. The bridge planners had learned how price tags can manipulate policy.

Problems by Design

Caltrans proposed a minimally functional

concrete viaduct. It lacked rail, bicycle or pedestrian access and did nothing to relieve traffic congestion. Also, its heavy concrete design was similar to ones that collapsed in the 1989 quake.

But it was the singularly unaesthetic quality of that proposed design which allowed MTC, ostensibly representing the Bay Area, to turn the selection of a replacement bridge into a charade. MTC’s process helped spread both blame and liability. The San Francisco *Chronicle* ran front-page stories calling for a more attractive bridge. MTC sponsored a design competition, allowed members of the jury to enter and win—and then wasted a year debating which of two cable-supported sections to use as an ornament on the west end of the massive concrete viaduct. The *Chronicle*, ignoring seismic safety, published color pictures of the designs and conducted a reader poll. The *Chronicle*’s pictures mostly showed the purely decorative cable structure. It would occupy only 14% of the length of the two-mile span, yet would (at that time) render the project \$400 million more costly. That surcharge, too, has now likely doubled.

When the decision was made, a whole new controversy arose. The winning design was a contraption in the style of Rube Goldberg, known as the “asymmetrical single-tower self-anchored suspension span.” Some experts consider it unsafe, and possibly unbuildable.

While T.Y. Lin International was awarded a major design contract for the “asymmetrical, single-tower self-anchored suspension span,” internationally renowned bridge designer T.Y. Lin himself has said that the design lacks the stability of a conventional suspension bridge, and he called it a “monument to ignorance.” Designing a viaduct-with-suspension-span to withstand a major earthquake proved so difficult, something had to be sacrificed. The victim, as it turns out, was seismic safety.

The advisory board and Caltrans insisted that the bridge should withstand the largest earthquake that they thought reasonably likely to happen over the next 150 years. This was to be a Richter 8 on the San Andreas fault, or a 7.25 on the Hayward, referred to as a “Maximum Credible Earthquake.” The term is optimistic; geologists say there is at least a 10% chance that the next big quake could exceed this design strength. But Caltrans planners abandoned the Maximum Credible Earthquake for a weaker one, called a Safety Evaluation Earthquake, a fact uncovered by the Army Corps of Engineers in Fall, 2000. Engineers in the Corps continue to say the new standard is inadequate, particularly for a large and distant earthquake.

Cooking Up a Half-Baked Bridge

Meanwhile, project engineers were trying to make the numbers on their bridge survive computerized earthquakes. The Army Corps’ report in 2000 documented numerous flaws in the design that remain unad-

dressed. Having run out of time, Caltrans’ chief project engineer said he would continue to “improve the project all the way through, even construction. And then I just delegate it to maintenance.”

And of course to the toll-paying public. The 78 percent cost overrun on the viaduct bid is a clear indication of the problems in the Caltrans bid package. The transcript of the pre-bid meeting documents that contractors voiced serious questions about the design.

Trying to allay concerns, new Caltrans director Jeff Morales, the third in three years, offered a view that Caltrans’ carefully crafted \$1.3 billion budget was “little more than glorified cocktail napkin figures,” a remark that caused an e-mail firestorm at Caltrans. If true, this would be disturbing for a number of reasons. The price figures were codified into California law, were used to raise tolls on the bridge, and were the basis for all the subsequent planning and design decisions.

Caltrans cites 18% inflation in bridge costs in 2000, delays and economic prosperity as reasons why the bridge cost has doubled. But these factors do not add up to a doubling. Inflation, the main cost of delay, would only add about 6% to the cost. In light of these facts, the problem appears to rest more with Caltrans and MTC, and the admitted design difficulties. Contractors are being cautious and building some protection into their bids.

With known problems remaining, further escalation of the price is certain. This unsafe bridge is a dubious luxury at a time when needed state programs are being slashed. This ten-lane automobile bridge is not being built to the highest standards, excludes transit priority provisions and rail, is far overpriced, and offers little inspiration or solution for the new century’s most difficult transportation problems.

Why Can’t We Hire the Pros?

Californians often ask why world-class firms like Ove Arup, designer of the \$3.2 billion bridge-tunnel Øresund link, don’t get a shot at designing for California. Perhaps the answer is that their talent intimidates established Bay Area power brokers.

MTC’s Steve Heminger rather publicly dangled the prospect of a future Bay rail crossing study before Ove Arup last year, seemingly as a hint for the firm to not break ranks on bridge rail. Ove Arup is thought to be interested in proposing a rail alternative without the MTC-designed flaws.

After all, Ove Arup’s work on Øresund shows the firm can design a cost-effective, popular cross-bay rail solution. MTC seems terrified of an alternative emerging which could break its autocratic control of Bay transportation funding and challenge its road-biased view of the future.

R. Tolmach

What, You Spent How Much on That? Far Freaking Out, Man! It's the Dubious Rail Achievements 2001

UP Throws Stations a Curve

In Sacramento, Union Pacific says it wants to move the Amtrak station because trains (only ones longer than 13 cars) have to let the baggage cars stay on a piece of curve. Huge, scary safety problem, according to their flak. Funny thing, just 14 miles west in Davis, the weather is different or something and no one at UP seems concerned about safety on one of the curviest stations in the West with a hidden inside track. In fact, UP removed Davis station-occupied signals and more than once has terrified passengers by forgetting to slow down their freight trains as a *Capitol* was letting out students on the hidden south track. Funny, also, how UP has built bigger curves at new stations in Martinez and Richmond, adding new blind spots and a unique unprotected Richmond grade crossing for wheelchair passengers. Yeah, it must be the weather.

Kopp Under Cover of Gown

Undaunted by the loss of legislative power and his prized Senate Transportation Chair, former Senator Quentin Kopp is reportedly having the time of his life as a San Mateo County Superior Court judge. Judges can't endorse candidates, but previously quiet Mrs. Kopp has started doing the honors. Da Judge can tool down the (not Memorial yet) Quentin Kopp Freeway (Interstate 380) to SFO where so many projects he helped arrange are still moving, years and years after he got them going. Some of them are not going too well, like the little old 8.7 mile \$1.5 billion BART SFO extension, 3 years late and facing more overruns, or the SFO expansion contracts, under scrutiny by S.F.'s new City Attorney (not endorsed by Mrs. K). Best thing of all about his new job: judges get to wear black, not dayglow orange.

What Exactly Does Caltrans Get Out of the Raiders?

Repeated Caltrans promotions featuring the Oakland Raiders have struck many Capitol observers as an odd purchase. The usual logic in a team deal is you want the market that identifies with the team. Team tie-ins do sell beer and sports shoes, but how many train tickets? Lack of a Coliseum station means Caltrans has to pay for buses to games, and barely a dozen trains a year get a boost in riders. The worst aspect may be the variety of Raider fans attracted, primarily young, loud types who plan to arrive hours early and party hard at tailgate



I like your team. Do you like my train?



parties. Typical AM cafe order: hard liquor. Attracting this sub-market has the definite effect of driving away loyal passengers. *Capitol* conductors recently were heard discussing how bad the Raiders fans car smelled following a return trip; fans drink copiously but don't exactly hold it. So, it wouldn't be the revenue, it's not the sub-market and it can't be the prestige. What does Caltrans see in the Raiders? Season tickets? Hospitality suite? Raiderettes?

Sorry, we haven't tried that since the 60's. It gave us headaches. But aren't you the guys building trains to Folsom and Elk Grove? Here's a far out idea: Put your product, instead of your last acid trip, on your \$15,000 billboards!

Please send transportation items of humorous interest care of D.J. Russell, TRAC, 926 J St. Suite 612, Sacramento CA 95814

2001: Not a Smart Time for Cute Terrorism References

RT riders at a Sacramento state office near the Capitol noticed something distinctly disturbing about the June 17 RT Timetable cover (right). It shows a driver's eye view of the south Capitol facade, the same one that was hit by a suicidal trucker with a full load of fuel January 16. The facade had \$18 million of damage, was scorched black by the fire and was under wraps all the way to summer, so this picture had to be a file photo. By the way, RT doesn't run buses on the street shown, so the bus may have been pasted into the shot; the train definitely was, and that took a bit of time and thought. What an interesting subliminal reminder of a not-very-nice event! What an dumb way to position transit in the market!



Designing an Earthquake That Won't Upset the Bridge

The fatal flaw in the Bay Bridge East Span replacement design according to the Army Corps of Engineers is that Caltrans and bridge designers have rejected their own highest earthquake standard and have substituted a less stressful virtual quake. The Army Corps is concerned that the bridge is not being designed to withstand the Maximum Credible Earthquake as Caltrans once boasted. Instead, the Corps says, a gentler model is being developed to assess the bridge. (Oops, not that strong.) No excuse has been offered to legislators, the press, or the public. No one, least of all Bay Area politicians, wants to believe that Caltrans' design is faulty. However, a leading seismic geologist independent of the project recently said, "maybe they'll believe it when the new bridge falls into the Bay."

Just Don't Call It Abandoned

The *Sacramento Bee* reported December 12 that the Sacramento City Council voted to change the name of the Sacramento Amtrak station to "Sacramento Valley Station" or SVS. Councilman Jimmie Yee objected, saying "the SP Depot will always be the SP Depot." Walter Gray, archivist at the Golden State Museum points out that with a vague name, folks may wonder what city to find it in. He may have some direct experience. SVS also got an immediate thumbs down from another prominent Sacramento transportation advertiser, the Sacramento Volvo Service. They also are called SVS.

Orange County Rail Hopes Revived

by Kirk Schneider

In a last-minute turnaround that has surprised nearly everyone, Orange County finally got consensus on a Santa Ana-Costa Mesa-Irvine rail transit starter line that looks buildable.

On October 22, 2001, the Orange County Transportation Authority (OCTA) Board of Directors unanimously approved a plan brought forth by the cities of Irvine, Costa Mesa and Santa Ana to send the CenterLine light rail project into preliminary engineering.

The governing councils of all three cities approved moving forward with the next phase on a 20-mile alignment that begins at the Irvine Transportation Center, travels to John Wayne Airport, up Bristol, past South Coast Plaza, and cuts through the Civic Center area of Santa Ana to the Regional Transportation Center. The proposed route would provide excellent connections for Amtrak and Metrolink riders from the north in Santa Ana and the south in Irvine.

Two options could connect the University of California, Irvine and Santa Ana College to the alignment. Future extensions would provide service to The Block, UCI Medical Center, Anaheim Stadium (Edison Field), the Disneyland Resort Area and Fullerton, thus serving additional Amtrak and Metrolink stations in Anaheim and Fullerton.

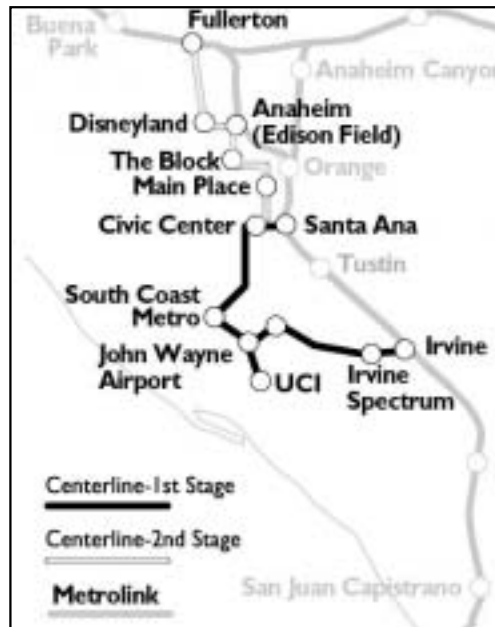
The much-needed rail system, first proposed in the early 1980's, would operate mainly above Orange County's congested arterial streets and freeways providing service directly to local activity centers. Unlike other cities, Orange County had no available railroad right-of-way in the corridor and surface street operation would be much too slow to attract choice riders.

Orange County's "Measure M" local transportation sales tax is expected to generate \$3.1 billion over 20 years. A portion of that amount is allocated for both enhancing the Metrolink rights-of-way and initiating a high capacity urban rail extension to connect Metrolink to employment centers. \$340 million is allocated to the system, for which the rail transit proposal qualifies.

CenterLine was supposed to go to preliminary engineering earlier this year but local cities balked after previous OCTA management neglected to include them in the process.

The OCTA Board of Directors then hired new CEO Art Leahy, who fresh from his recent success in getting the Minneapolis light rail project going after years of debate, wisely put the project on hold while he worked to get consensus among the cities. Leahy, a self-effacing problem-solver, managed to find a formula to proceed after just a few months of work. That's quite an accomplishment, considering that twenty years of planning had led to stalemate.

In the meantime, local transit advocates organized to help generate grassroots support for the CenterLine and improved Metrolink service.



Details of Metrolink service additions have not been confirmed officially, but the word on the street is that either half-hourly or quarter-hourly Metrolink service may be able to run as soon as double tracking of the last segment between Fullerton and Irvine is completed and trainsets found. It is thought that Leahy sees the Metrolink shuttles as strong elements around which coordinated bus service can be structured.

Rail Advocates of Orange County (RAOC) is the organization that has done the most to spur local acceptance of rail. They meet monthly near the Fullerton Transportation Center (Amtrak/Metrolink). They are always looking for new members and can be reached toll-free at 1-866-476-2282 or on their website at www.railadvocates.org

NEW TRAC OFFICERS

Results of the election of TRAC officers included Richard Tolmach as President and Dan McNamara Vice-President for 2002, with Treasurer Bill Kerby and Secretary Bruce Jenkins continuing in their posts. Outgoing President Arthur Lloyd continues as a board member. One new member, Neil Bjornsen, joined the board. Chairman Emeritus William Scholz and Vice President George Gaekel were thanked for their years of service.

At the December Board Meeting, outgoing Executive Director Ric Silver was replaced at Sacramento TRAC headquarters by new administrative Director Alan C. Miller.

Miller has been piecing together the membership and organizational files, at the same time as reviving TRAC's legislative presence. Last month he made presentations at the Planning and Conservation League legislative symposium and Board Meeting, and started an e-mail effort to raise public awareness about the threats to Amtrak.

TRAC Annual Meeting Notes

TRAC's November 15 meeting at the Burbank Airport Hilton featured strong panels on Southern California light rail starts and commuter rail, as well as an illuminating discussion of pending coordination between Metrolink trains and Amtrak Surfliners.

Representatives from the Orange County Transportation Authority (OCTA) and the Pasadena light rail line both had amazing tales of revival of rail projects once thought dead. OCTA's CEO Art Leahy described steps in obtaining the newly approved Centerline agreement (see story on left).

Thomas Stone, Chief Project Officer of the Pasadena project gave an overview of history and current status of construction on this revived turnkey project. The light rail line will connect L.A. Union Station with Pasadena via Chinatown and Arroyo Seco. The line will initially be 13.7 miles, all double-tracked with 13 stations, projected to carry 33,000 passengers daily. Target date for service is July 2003. Peak headway will be 7.5 minutes. At Union Station, the line will use Tracks 1 and 2. No connection will be made to the existing Blue Line (to Long Beach). The route is now the Gold Line.

Two relatively short portions of the line will be underground (cut and cover) including a few blocks of the Old Pasadena portion. The project is having major problems with California Public Utilities Commission staff, which is trying to force addition of grade separations. For further info on status, see the web site: www.la-pasblueline.org.

Darrell Clark of Expo-Rail gave a brief talk on the citizen-initiated L.A. to Culver City/Santa Monica proposal, and its June 2001 success in obtaining approval from the MTA. The route follows an existing, but basically abandoned freight rail line along Exposition Blvd past the Stables Center (sports venue), USC, and many museums, industries, and businesses. About 800,000 people live in the service corridor. Over 50,000 riders per day are forecast. Details of the route: members.aol.com/friends4expo.

David Solow of Metrolink gave a detailed update on its success. Growth continues, with 416 route miles, about 128 daily trains, and about 33,000 daily riders. Metrolink has 33 locomotives on order, plus 28 new cars from Bombardier. Two new stations are due to open soon in Orange County on the Orange County line: Tustin and Laguna Nigel. Both will serve trains between LAUS and Oceanside, and between San Bernardino and San Juan Capistrano. Metrolink is working with FRA staff to improve speeds. The desire is to increase 90 mph segments to 110 mph, and some 79 mph segments to 90 mph.

Metrolink travel is very dispersed; 76% of inbound riders go through LAUS, but 56% have destinations other than LAUS. A third of riders make under \$50,000 annually, contrary to the image of commuters being upper income riders. 67% formerly drove alone.

The Code Sharing/Track Sharing panel with OCTA, Metrolink and TRAC, covered technology and politics of separate operators sharing either train seats or track capacity. Solow said new ticket machines will be implemented which sell both Metrolink and Amtrak tickets for through service in a single transaction. Metrolink and Amtrak are also discussing coordinated scheduling.

Please Think Strategically!

CALIFORNIA ONLY HAS A FEW BILLION TO SPEND

By Richard F. Tolmach

California's rail network map isn't a pretty picture. A 65-mile gap separates Metrolink's tracks in Santa Clarita from Amtrak's end of the line in Bakersfield. Amtrak's north-south bus gap is even worse at 105 miles, all the way from L.A. to Bakersfield, and there isn't even an attempt to make *Surfliners* and San Joaquin buses connect. Is this a system?

Trying to use Amtrak's *Surfliner* for access to LAX? Let's talk frustration! Once you get to Union Station you have to connect to the Red Line, then the Blue Line, then an outdoors connection to the Green Line, then a shuttle bus. Missed your flight yet?

The Bay Area has an even worse set of connectivity problems, with Amtrak service landlocked in the East Bay, buses that get caught in Bay Bridge traffic and miss trains, and no trains direct to SFO from north, south, east or west. Ready to rent a car?

Is it any wonder Europeans laugh at us when we say our rail program in California is booming, or we say that trains are better here than they have ever been? Our visitors know perfectly well that conditions on U.S. railways are not only worse than Eastern Europe, they seem to be more like Somalia or Afghanistan.

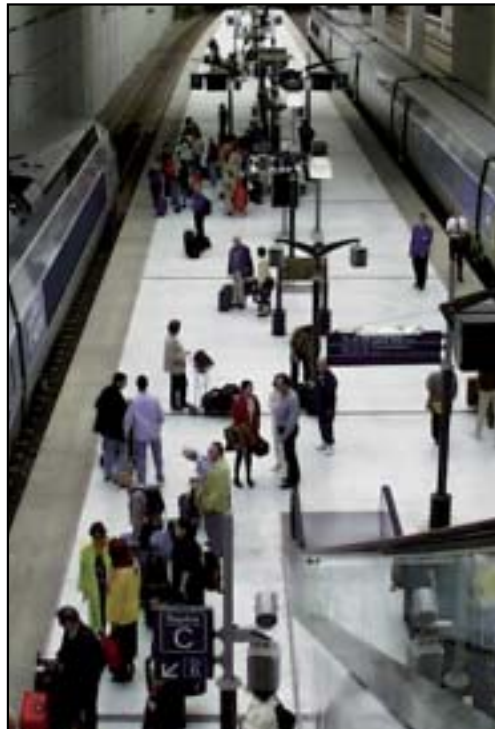
That's why I expect more compelling proposals for rail spending from people like Jerry Meral of the Planning and Conservation League or Gil Mallery of Amtrak-West. They both are well-acquainted with trains, and both have experienced the strategic gaps in our train network. But instead of targeting capital at California's rail network gaps, their draft plans appear to scatter it to the wind.

PCL gives intercity rail barely 5 percent of its proposed ballot measure's budget, less than recent governors have programmed for Amtrak, and fails to list any actual earmarks for rail. It looks like PCL doesn't consider Amtrak or high speed rail a priority anymore. PCL **does** earmark huge sums to programs we all know have failed, such as freeway interchange projects. The PCL bond plan is long on dollars and short on content, to the extreme that one draft bestowed \$95 million annually on "connectivity," without defining its often fuzzy meaning. Connectivity is great, but how about coming up with a project that does it instead of just using the word?

The Amtrak-West 5 and 20 year plans are more positive about rail but even less focussed. The first stage would spend \$3.9 billion to upgrade existing routes, but when all is done, it would still take 8 hours via two bus transfers to get from downtown San Francisco to Los Angeles, about the same trip time Santa Fe had in the 1950's. The elapsed time for the single coast route train proposed between those cities is even longer. That is painfully ineffectual.

If we are going to spend \$3.9 billion of taxpayer funds on tracks in California, we better be thinking a bit harder about how we get value for our money, and how we can tilt growth toward trains more effectively. Here's a short list of principles I propose to anyone putting together rail project lists:

- Upgrading bad routes shared with freight that miss key markets is no longer good enough. It's time to put passengers first, and build tracks to rapidly link our cities.
- Fill the key missing gaps in California's



Strategic gaps in California's rail network need to be filled, like France did in 1996 with a 66-mile line that placed Charles de Gaulle Airport and EuroDisney on the national network. Cost was less than \$1.5 billion. Photo: R. Tolmach

rail network like San Francisco-Oakland and Bakersfield-Santa Clarita first before getting around to expensive low-traffic segments like San Luis Obispo-Salinas.

- Highest priority on intercity rail funding should be new routes in areas of heavy traffic, and I propose that we designate by law rail routes of statewide importance, to be defined for example as being rail routes more than 50 miles in length running within 10 miles of state highways with average daily traffic (ADT) of 60,000 trips or more.*
- Expand upon segments already in public ownership, with the goal of continuous Bay Area and Southern California networks with double track in public control wherever ADT exceeds 120,000. This would make possible frequent headway service that poses a feasible alternative to highway expansion.
- Use trains to guide smart growth. One of the main points of new rail infrastructure should be to foster private investment in community development and encourage transit-friendly projects around stations. Europe's national railways have become agents of urban change, boosting development in the centers of large and small cities close to stations. Swiss, German, Dutch, Spanish and French cities have been particularly successful models of this trend because in those locales, frequent headway train service has substantially improved mobility, increasing the attraction of central cities and close-in suburbs. Both compact residential developments and retail/commercial developments have resulted adjacent to stations.
- Let capable international financial institutions and private industry take a role designing fundable projects. When politicized public agencies like BART, Amtrak, or the High Speed Rail Authority develop routes without adequate in-house staff,

projects rapidly take on the public works aesthetic of cost being no object.

Passenger projects do best when the capital has to be paid back to the bank someday, and the bank has an interest in assuring the design works. This may be a new idea in the United States, but it is basic to rail in Europe and Asia.

California can benefit from the same types of rail-supported smart growth seen in Europe in the next decade, but only if we maximize the use of existing rail investments and actively encourage smart growth in places it is most feasible. Public agencies most of all need to take advantage of current public ownership of rights of way and support provision of new capital and operating funds for a core group of efficient new urban services of statewide importance. Here are two of California's fastest chances for economic growth:

1. **Los Angeles Mainline, Santa Clarita to San Bernardino.** Caltrans should consider paying Metrolink to run existing trains half-hourly on a 90-mile swath of publicly-owned tracks paralleling clogged freeways in the San Gabriel and San Fernando Valleys. At present, Metrolink runs frequent service only in the peaks and terminates most trains in Los Angeles, making through travel unattractive. Land at Glendale, Sylmar, El Monte, Covina, Pomona and other potential stations in the corridor is inexpensive, but new service would make development of TODs at these sites highly attractive.
2. **Connect Caltrain and Capitols to Build a Bay Area Mainline.** Hourly Baby Bullet trains start running in about a year, the fastest rails in the Bay Area, linking San Francisco, SFO, San Mateo, Palo Alto and Silicon Valley. Caltrans needs to ignore MTC posturing and retain a capable firm to design a cross-Bay railway link to carry Amtrak and Caltrain between East Bay stations and SF and the Peninsula. Such a line still can be built for less than \$1 billion dollars, according to European sources. The positive economic impacts of such a link are huge, especially for inner East Bay cities. West Oakland, Emeryville, Berkeley, Richmond, and Contra Costa stations become prime sites for major office and residential centers. At the same time, San Francisco and Millbrae stations could become office/retail megacenters like Euralille or Lyon Part-Dieu.

It's not too late to fix the California traffic mess and make this state a great place to live again. California can have a real train network by the end of this decade, but only if leaders grow up and put the brakes on purposely wasteful projects like the East Span or BART extensions which cost five times what they should and don't deliver promised benefits. If we target funds to projects that truly reshape regional mobility, all of California can benefit.

* **The 60,000 average daily traffic routes include Auburn-Sacramento-San Francisco-SFO-San Jose-Gilroy, Stockton-Livermore-San Francisco-Santa Rosa, Livermore-San Jose, and Modesto-Sacramento.**
In southern California, Bakersfield-Los Angeles-San Diego, Goleta-Santa Barbara-Los Angeles-Riverside-Palm Springs, and San Bernardino-Riverside-Orange County-LAX fit this criteria.