

Caltrans Rail Considers Making Performance-Based Decisions

The appointment of a new Chief of the Caltrans Rail Division may provide a long-overdue chance to fit train and bus service to market needs. Will Caltrans seize the opportunity?

Opinion by Richard Tolmach

All throughout Caltrans headquarters the buzz is about using performance measures. Caltrans Director Will Kempton wants staff to think about cost-effectiveness and service to the public. This is a shock to many in the organization.

Kempton helpfully sent managers copies of his PowerPoint talk promoting decision-making practices that enhance the effectiveness of programs, even in areas so divorced from a financial bottom line that it is hard to develop relevant measures. He is apparently sincere in his goal of a performance-driven organization, which may impact the Rail Program, the sole business in Caltrans directly vulnerable to commercial losses. Rail would especially benefit from economic thinking, as Deputy Business Transportation and Housing Secretary Dana Reed showed in the early 1980's by applying standard business measures and reviving the popularity and effectiveness of the program.

Performance measures may be applied sooner than expected in the Division of Rail. Several weeks ago, Amtrak told Caltrans that it is several hundred thousand dollars ahead of projections on operations of Surfliner bus feeders. This was interpreted by Caltrans middle managers as invitation to add new buses. A proposal for a new San Joaquin bus feeder between Merced and Monterey appeared, without alternatives of any sort considered.

For a brief period, it looked as if Merced-Monterey was going to fly, although it has the same problems as routes abandoned by Caltrans for lack of ridership in 2003 and 2004. It has a lower market population than any successful bus route Caltrans currently operates. Highway volumes in the corridor are not impressive. Also, similar to Routes 17B (Surf-Solvang) and 33 (Fresno-Porterville), it was presented to management without a convincing financial justification.

Why Single Out Monterey?

The logic behind the case for Monterey was that abandonment of bus service by Greyhound and the Capitol Corridor this spring makes the city an attractive market for new Caltrans bus service.

Not everyone would agree. The Capitol Corridor made the painful decision to abandon Monterey-San Jose service at the May schedule change because despite years of effort, the service couldn't seem to break even, as required by state law. Monterey service failed to attract three passengers per bus over the past three years, even with connections to extremely popular trains in San Jose. Until service was cut back to the strongest single run, loss per passenger averaged as much as \$40. The area is not losing all service, since through buses serving Salinas from Capitol Corridor and Pacific Surfliner cities are profitable, and are being kept.

Greyhound's planned April 3 changes are remarkably similar. It is removing its money-losing Monterey stub runs while keeping profitable Coast Route service through Salinas. Market conditions seem to be sending a signal to intercity bus operators, but

it is not necessarily a green light for service expansion to Monterey.

Caltrans Starts Comparing Options

In the old Division of Rail environment, back-of-the-envelope calculations suggesting a 50 percent farebox ratio could be achieved on a new Merced-Monterey service would be enough to proceed, even if it meant losing hundreds of thousands of dollars over three years. That mode of decisionmaking seems decidedly out of favor today. The right questions are finally being asked by top management, including, "Is this the most productive use for \$300,000 of our scarce capital?"

Acting Rail Chief Bill Bronte has said he wants to consider all potential bus feeders statewide and develop service based on its economic potential. "There are no sacred cows; we want to consider all possibilities," he said. Population, demographics, and existing travel volumes all figure into the decision. For Bronte, the goal is to improve the economics of the *Surfliners* and the *San Joaquins*, not to just draw lines on maps.

Performance-Driven Bus Planning

Bronte's approach could eventually revive the dynamism of the feeder bus experiment, which rescued rail service by making the economics more acceptable. The necessary ingredient in such a transformation is buses calculated to make money from the first day.

Designing profitable bus feeders is not rocket science. When buses connect riders to trains they also produce rail fares and can succeed on as few as six rail riders per bus if rail trips are long. Caltrans was able to successfully pick winners from 1980 to 1993, and again briefly in the late 90's, using basic math to assess size of markets and prioritize those expenditures which have lower risk.

The rigors of this comparative analysis makes it unpopular among some planners

but it always seems to improve the quality of route decisionmaking. San Joaquin bus route planning would benefit by considering which major California population centers remain sparsely served by the bus feeder network.

Here are a few:

	2004 residents
Los Angeles County	10,103,000
Orange County	3,017,000
Riverside County	1,776,700
San Bernardino County	1,886,500
Santa Clara County	1,731,400
San Mateo County	712,400

Maximum Results, Minimum Cost

One of the most reliable ways to produce positive cash flow is short extensions into productive territory that turn money-losing services into profitable ones. The San Joaquin's Stockton-San Jose Route 6 feeder provides one such opportunity. For example, a 20-mile extension to Sunnyvale and Palo Alto costing \$100,000 per year for four round trips could deliver revenue at least double its cost and tip the whole route into the black.

Another low-risk technique to boost performance is to identify specific buses which are turning away reservations because they scrape up against capacity limits. The over-taxed Route 19 bus serving the San Gabriel Valley, Riverside and San Bernardino County service has 35,000 riders annually on 4 round trips and needs more capacity. One way to do this is to split peak runs to divide out stops, speed up schedules, and add service to end-points. Augmenting this route also looks like it could return double the investment.

Carefully targeting bus capital in this way has the potential to goose revenue-cost ratios and expand markets, just as it did for the cash-short 1980's rail program. Progress may have been slow to arrive at Caltrans, but the new rail management appears sincerely motivated to help Amtrak California's economics by looking critically at the numbers.

Sunset Adds Hours to Schedule

TRAC wrote to President David Gunn of Amtrak in March expressing concern about the recent rescheduling of the Los Angeles-Jacksonville, FL Sunset Limited.

TRAC recognizes the reality of freight congestion on the Union Pacific segment and the severe impact late trains have had on ridership. Amtrak's effort to preserve connections at San Antonio and New Orleans required a rethinking of the schedule.

Northern California connections, however, were needlessly cut, a move that will adversely affect ridership. Further, TRAC was concerned about the very short notice given to passengers. TRAC has heard from passengers who were forced to take an extra day of vacation for travel when northern California connections were broken.

Eastbound service is particularly harmed. Previously, rail passengers from northern California had a choice of five Amtrak trains (four San Joaquins [Trains 702, 712, 714, & 716] and the Coast Starlight) to the Sunset Limited/ Texas Eagle [train 2/422] departing Los Angeles at 10:30 pm three days per week. The new 2:30 pm Sunset/Eagle departure from Los Angeles, breaks every one of the Northern California connections. Even using the earliest San Joaquin, the bus from Bakersfield arrives Los Angeles 5 minutes before the Sunset/Eagle departs, surely not an acceptable connection.

TRAC believes it is financially worthwhile to restore same-day connections from Northern California, and that doing so is feasible. The eastbound Sunset/Eagle had over three hours added to its travel time, and

modifying this by a few minutes would not harm the reliability, considering that there would remain a two-hour layover in San Antonio and a six-and-a-half hour layover in New Orleans.

TRAC proposed the following changes to restore a Northern California connection:

The Sunset/Eagle would depart Los Angeles 2:55pm, and San Joaquin #702's Bakersfield to San Bernardino bus (#5402) would be modified to run nonstop to Ontario. The nonstop bus could be scheduled to arrive there reliably at 2:49pm. The Sunset would have a 3:49pm Ontario departure. This would give a reliable one-hour connection at Ontario, at a point where passengers can easily transfer to the train without having to make their way through a large station like LAUS. Any negative impacts on the bus network are negligible, and outweighed by improved running times to Ontario, Riverside and San Bernardino, which constitute more than two-thirds of #5402's traffic. The 1.5 daily Pasadena bus passengers could be served via Los Angeles and La Crescenta dropped from #5402's schedule, since it produced only 48 passengers in all of FY 2004. The bus could backtrack 5 miles from Ontario to Claremont on days when there is a passenger for that point.

Hopefully by fall, TRAC would like to see reliability across the Sunset Route improved to the point that the entire schedule could be moved up another two hours, allowing a 5:00pm departure from Los Angeles and connections from #712 for direct, convenient service from the Bay Area

21 GOP REPS OPPOSE AMTRAK CUT, CITE AIR AND HIGHWAY SUBSIDIES

Early in March, twenty-one Republican Members of Congress wrote to House Budget Chairman Jim Nussle to express their opposition to language in the fiscal 2006 budget resolution that would eliminate all funding for Amtrak.

"While we share your desire to develop a fiscally responsible budget blueprint, we believe the President's proposed zero-ing out of funding for Amtrak would be a dangerous step backwards in our efforts to improve the efficiency of passenger rail," the letter said.

"The government directly or indirectly subsidizes all transportation in the United States, and rail gets the least support. Unlike aviation, highways and transit, there is no dedicated fund for investing in passenger rail development," the letter signed by the representatives says.

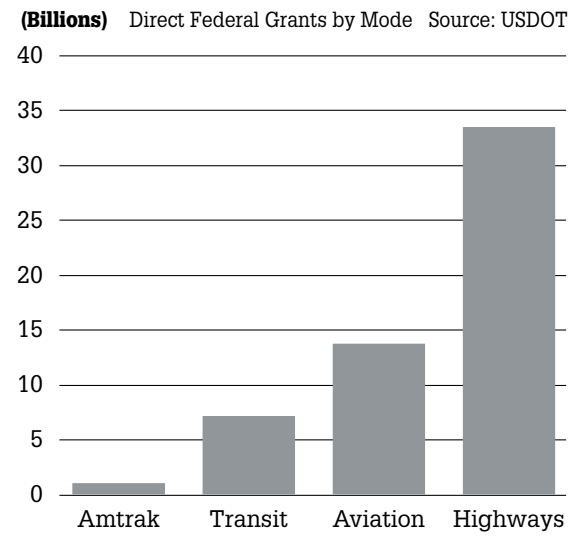
2005 budgets for transit, aviation, and highways are basically unchanged from prior year figures but the administration plans a complete cut of the Amtrak grant. 2004 federal grants to transit totalled \$7.3 billion, aviation \$13.9 billion, and highways \$33.6 billion.

The representatives' letter points out that the "other modes all operate on predominantly federally owned or federally-assisted infrastructure, and rely on government-supported security, research, and traffic controllers. While we are willing to listen to new proposals for reforming passenger rail, we are concerned over the implications of a budget

resolution that would cut Amtrak's operating subsidies and effectively strand millions of passengers."

Signers included Steve LaTourette (OH), Mike Castle (DE), Sherwood Boehlert (NY), John Sweeney (NY), Rob Simmons (CT), Frank LoBiondo (NJ), Tim Johnson (IL), Todd Platts (PA), Curt Weldon (PA), Bob Ney (OH), Peter King (NY), Jim Saxton (NJ), Jim Walsh (NY), Phil English (PA), Jerry Weller (IL), Jim Gerlach (PA), Michael Fitzpatrick (PA), John McHugh (NY), Denny Rehberg (MT), Sue Kelley (NY), and Chris Smith (NJ). No California Republicans signed.

2004 US Funding



SAN DIEGO RAIL PROJECTS MOVING

by James R. Mills

In 1987 the voters of San Diego County approved an increase in the general sales tax of one half of one percent to finance various transportation programs and projects. One third of that money went to construct state highways, one third went to build county and city streets and roads, and one third went to support transit. In the years since the passage of that measure, money from it has provided the local share of funds for construction of the light rail lines from Downtown to Old Town and Mission Valley and subsequently east to La Mesa, as well as an extension of the East Line from El Cajon to Santee.

The voters were asked to extend that half-cent sales tax on election day in November of last year, and by a narrow margin they did approve it. The measure is projected to produce \$14 billion over the course of the next forty years, and once again the money is to be divided equally between state highway projects, county and city streets and roads, and transit.

Among the rail projects to be financed will be the improvement of the main line used by Amtrak and the Coaster commuter service to and from downtown San Diego from the north. In a recent newsletter to Coaster passengers, the Executive Director of the North County Transit District states, "As part of the TransNet Extension, about \$200 million will be spent on capital improvements to the Coaster. The improvements will include completing the double-tracking of the rail corridor, bridge improvements and construction, a tunnel in the Del Mar area, station improvements, additional rolling stock, and parking facilities."

"In particular, double tracking the Coaster rail system will increase efficiency and improve service along the corridor, which is now at capacity. Currently all trains, including the Coaster, Amtrak and freight trains share a predominantly single track."

"Capital and operating funds in the

Trans-Net extension should double the Coaster's service capacity for customers. Coaster trains currently run an average of every 36 minutes. SANDAG's Regional Transportation Plan, titled 'Mobility 2030,' is focused on achieving a 20 minute frequency during the peak commute. The TransNet extension could provide \$170 million to increase Coaster service, in addition to the \$200 million allocated for capital projects."

The largest allocation of funds for rail capital projects is \$660 million for a light rail line from Old Town to the University of California campus and the University Towne Centre area, which is a combination of business buildings, shopping malls, and very dense residential housing. This project relies on Federal funding, which now appears to be forthcoming. It will probably be operated as an extension of the Blue Line, which comes up from the Mexican border to Downtown and Old Town.

Other Blue Line improvements include station enhancements, signal upgrades, and purchase of low-floor vehicles. Grade separations on E and H Streets in Chula Vista are specifically provided for, to allow for increased frequencies of trains without adverse impacts on automobile traffic. The amount allocated for all these Blue Line improvements is \$268 million.

Another \$69 million is assigned to improvements on the Orange Line, which is the one that goes east from Downtown San Diego to La Mesa, El Cajon and Santee. The improvements specified in the ballot proposition are station enhancements, signal upgrades, and conversion to low-floor vehicles.

\$110 million was allocated to the improvement of the Sprinter light rail line between Oceanside and Escondido, specifically for double-tracking to allow fifteen minute headways. Finally, operating support for the rail service and the bus rapid transit lines to be built under the terms of the proposition is set at \$1,100 million.

Coast Observations

COLLABORATING WITH NARP, TRAC's national associate, we were able to get media focus on the rebuttal to Sec. Mineta's attack on Amtrak. Thanks to Dave Johnson and Jim Salvador of NARP, who mobilized locals quickly to turn out at the Capitol... TYRONE BLAND, former head of Amtrak Government Affairs West, will be working with TRAC as our official lobbyist at the state Capitol in Sacramento for the 2005 legislative session. Tyrone was a featured speaker at our annual rail conference and membership meetings both in 2003 and 2004. Tyrone was very well liked by all those in attendance, especially those who got a chance to speak with him personally. TRAC is pleased to welcome Mr. Bland as part of the TRAC team... TRAC's BOARD MEETING in National City on the San Diego Trolley's original Tijuana line will have a special open public session Saturday July 16 from 1-5pm. San Diego area rail advocates are welcome to attend at no charge... THE VENUE IS National City Railroad Depot, home of the San Diego Electric Railway Association, 922 West 23rd St (at the corner of Bay Marina Drive and Marina Way) National City, CA 91950... RAIL 2020 IS RETURNING TO THE BURBANK AIRPORT HILTON Saturday October 15, 2005. TRAC's annual rail conference and membership meeting is convenient to the Burbank Airport and Metrolink Rail Station. The Hilton is at 2500 N Hollywood Way, Burbank, CA 91505. Airport Hilton reservations are (818) 843-6000 (ask for special TRAC room rate)

SUPPORT THE RAIL NEWS: BECOME A CRN SPONSOR!

Unlike most organizational newsletters that only go to members, the California Rail News is distributed widely to educate agencies, representatives, press and the traveling public about rail transportation. The cost of this additional printing and distribution is beyond the budget of TRAC, the membership organization itself. TRAC's educational arm, the California Rail Foundation, funds a major portion of this effort, and large contributions to this cause are tax deductible. TRAC and CRF are seeking sponsors to continue this educational effort of the mass statewide public distribution of CRN, which has increased tenfold in the past three years.

As a strong incentive to jump start the 2005-2006 effort, long-time TRAC Office Manager and Rail News mega-fan Jeanie Sherwood has placed a generous sum of money in a holding account and will MATCH ALL CRN SPONSORSHIP CONTRIBUTIONS UP TO \$6000! That means if you pledge a \$500 sponsorship for CRN this year, \$1000 will go towards this effort. We're looking for large donations for this sponsorship drive, for those that are able. Do you enjoy CRN and want to get the rail advocacy message out to more Californians? Can you give \$100, \$200, \$500, or \$1000, and have it turn instantly into a \$200, \$400, \$1000 or \$2000 contribution? TRAC wishes to thank Ms. Sherwood, and you, for your sponsorship and support.

Sponsorship checks should be mailed to the TRAC Office, 926 J St. #1107, Sacramento 95814 and made out to the tax-deductible California Rail Foundation. Your sponsorship of CRN will help build a rail future.

“Californians can't get from place to place on little fairy wings.”

—Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger, State of the State, 1/5/2005

That's why California needs more trains.



TRAC is pleased that Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger realizes trains are important to California's economy and is taking practical steps to support them. The Governor has put full funding for Amtrak California operations in his proposed budget, and supported emergency measures to protect threatened tracks in the Chatsworth tunnel and on the Del Mar cliffs.

But it's time for the Governor to also take a realistic look at how to preserve mobility for California's future. Gridlock continues to stretch further, strangle more urban freeways and make commute times longer year by year. Despite Californians' obvious love for SUVs, new freeways are about as likely to spring up around the state as little fairy wings. California simply can't afford them.

Trains are a sensible alternative. Even modest rail investment can provide an effective way to handle peak travel, without breaking the budget. And trains may be the only place California can find more capacity to handle freight and passenger travel, especially around our booming ports.

In the post-2001 travel environment, Californians are no longer so eager to take 400-mile trips by air. Now, more than ever, California needs its antiquated rail infrastructure to be brought up to current world standards.

Improving California's trains could help us reduce our dependence on foreign oil, cut traffic fatalities, and foster compact development which can spare more of the natural beauty that makes California such an appealing place.

So enough of the little fairy wings. We want more fast trains, like they have in Europe!

TRAC is a 2000 member citizens lobby advocating improved rail service. Help us change California transportation!!



TRAC Wants Railways Even Hummer Owners Might Appreciate:

1. Faster than Driving

Who's kidding who? If our trains ran at typical European speeds of 120 mph or more, California's highway speeds of 65 mph or less would be for losers only. A lot more Californians would be using trains, maybe even the Governor.

2. Predictable Service

Regular hourly [rhythm] schedules like those used in Europe are long overdue on the Capitol Corridor, Surfliners, ACE, Metrolink and Coaster, so Californians know when the train is coming without having to carry little timetables from place to place. For the San Joaquins and the Coast Route, the Austrian innovation of *Zweistundentakt* (2-hourly rhythm) would be an improvement on the few randomly scheduled trains we have.

3. Good for Business

California may be the world's fifth or sixth largest industrial power, but we have railway infrastructure resembling North Africa or Middle Eastern countries, including strategic gaps in the network of tracks that are a barrier to trade. The gaps like San Francisco-Oakland and Bakersfield-Los Angeles are so primitive, they are just more proof California has needed to import competent leadership from Europe. **Memo to Arnold:** How about trading a few Caltrans engineers for some Swiss and Austrian engineers and get to work on a modern rail line across the Tehachapis linking northern and southern California?

Join TRAC and Help Promote California Rail Service

Clip, mail with your check or money order payable to:

Train Riders Association of California (TRAC)

926 J Street, Suite 1107 Sacramento, CA 95814 (916) 557-1667

Please fill out the following, or attach address label:

_____	Regular member	\$35	<input type="checkbox"/>
Name _____	Contributing member	\$60	<input type="checkbox"/>
_____	Sponsoring member	\$100	<input type="checkbox"/>
Street _____	Sustaining member	\$200	<input type="checkbox"/>
_____	Benefactor	\$500	<input type="checkbox"/>
City _____ State _____ Zip _____	Fixed income member	\$25	<input type="checkbox"/>
_____	<input type="checkbox"/> Renewal		<input type="checkbox"/> New Member
Telephone _____ E-mail _____			

To help TRAC keep its staff at full-time, I am enclosing a special donation of \$ _____

Enclosed is a donation to TRAC's Legislative Action Fund in the amount of \$ _____

I want to support the *Rail News*. Enclosed is a tax-deductible donation to TRAC's Educational arm, the **California Rail Foundation** in the amount of \$ _____

California Rail News

Volume 18 Number 3

Sacramento, CA

April 2005

Zero Dollars for Trains?

MINETA CALLS AMTRAK "NUTS," CRITICS FAULT BUSH PRIORITIES

U.S. Transportation Secretary Norm Mineta's campaign against Amtrak began with a "Valentine's Day Massacre" for Amtrak in Chicago. At a press conference February 14 at Chicago Union Station, Mineta fended off suggestions that the administration is trying to kill the railroad by proposing elimination of its budget.

"Amtrak 'is dying and everyone knows it,'" said Mineta. Dozens of rail activists held "Fund Amtrak" picket signs and chanted protests during Mineta's speech.

Mineta, the former aviation lobbyist and congressman from San Jose, flew in from Washington to buttress President Bush's call for zero funding of Amtrak, labeling the shutdown budget a "reform" for passenger rail. The slogans are predictable, reused at every new stop in the campaign. "It's nuts," Mineta said. "We cannot afford to continue to waste money this way when there are critical investments that have to be made in passenger rail."

Still unreleased as we go to press weeks later, the Bush Administration "Passenger Rail Investment Reform Act" is said to promise a 50 percent federal match for rail facility construction, but will eliminate existing federal operating support to trains and transfer maintenance responsibility for major infrastructure to states. For example, the Administration proposal would transfer ownership and the maintenance responsibility for Chicago's Union Station to Metra, Chicago's regional commuter railroad. "We think it makes sense to put control into local hands," said Mineta.

Administration critics see the legislation as a transparent attempt to bribe commuter agencies to be collaborators in a national Amtrak shutdown, by offering them control of stations and other assets currently held by Amtrak. However, despite press events in the Northeast and in Chicago, and broad hints



Norm Mineta is on a nationwide road tour to cut off Amtrak's air supply.

about the benefits to commuter agencies, there was little positive reaction to the idea.

The Chicago regional carrier Metra remained ambivalent. The agency has no interest in taking over Amtrak service, according to Metra spokesperson Judith Pardonnet, and has a full plate of expansion plans for its own trains. It would pick up Union Station only if adequate capital and operational funding were provided by the federal government.

Mineta's proposal was not well-received by Illinois elected officials, either. Senator Dick Durbin (D-IL) suggested Mineta hadn't done his homework with Metra. According to Durbin, cash-strapped states such as Illinois are "not in a position to pick up the subsidy for Amtrak."

"Secretary Mineta didn't come here with a plan. He came here with an excuse for this terrible budget decision," said Sen. Durbin. "It is time for the Bush administration to realize that if federal support is important enough for our nation's highways and airports, then an investment in passenger rail should be a priority."

Congressman Ray LaHood (R-Peoria) also spoke against the Bush plan. "We've got a good Amtrak system in Illinois and I don't

Continued on Page 2

INSIDE

PAGE 3
COAST
OBSERVATIONS

PAGE 6
CALTRANS RAIL
PUTS A PRIORITY ON
PERFORMANCE

PAGE 7
BUS RAPID TRANSIT
CITY OPTS FOR RAIL

TRAC
Train Riders
Association
of California

926 J Street, Suite 1107
Sacramento, CA 95814

Address Correction Requested

**MEMBERS, PLEASE CHECK
THE RENEWAL DATE ABOVE
YOUR NAME AND RENEW YOUR
MEMBERSHIP IF THE DATE IS
APPROACHING OR PAST**

Non-profit Org.
U.S. Postage
PAID
Sacramento, CA
Permit #811

Bush Attack on Amtrak (continued)

think we want to destroy it by talking about privatization," LaHood told the *Peoria Journal Star*. "The subsidies need to continue. These subsidies are the lifeblood of Amtrak continuing the kind of service they have to the college towns and the small communities in Illinois and around the country. I don't see us really tinkering with that."

Sen. Barack Obama (D-IL), one of the Senate's brightest new leaders, called the Mineta speech predictable and "just ideological... It strikes me that we should make a greater investment in upgrading our rail system rather than eliminating the subsidies that already exist. If you look at the amount of subsidies that we provide the highways relative to the subsidies that we provide rail transportation, it pales in comparison." Obama also observed that, "We're the only developing country in the world that doesn't make a significant commitment to our rail transportation system."

On March 15, the U.S. Senate made a bid to head off the Bush plan, by introducing new language calling for a restoration of Amtrak's budget. An amendment authored by Sen. Robert Byrd which failed by 3 votes, (D-WV) put forward a \$1.4 billion budget for Amtrak in the next fiscal year. Byrd said the money could be raised by closing corporate tax loopholes.

Republican Senators Arlen Specter of Pennsylvania and Lincoln Chafee of Rhode Island signed on as co-sponsors, while other backers included Sen. John Corzine and Sen. Frank Lautenberg both (D-N.J.). Sen. Hillary Clinton (D-N.Y.), Sen. Tom Carper (D-DE) and Sen. Max Baucus of Montana also showed up at a Washington Union Station rally to oppose the Amtrak cuts. Westerners were largely missing from these rosters although Sen. Daniel Inouye (D-HI) and Sen. Patty Murray (D-WA) earlier sent a letter critical of Mineta's plan.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

To help get Amtrak full funding, let your Senators and Congressman know you support the Amtrak five year plan proposed by David Gunn. Let them know how important Amtrak is to your mobility as a senior, as a parent, or as a commuter. You can use the TRAC site to send a message to both your senators and member of congress with a single click at www.trainriders.org

California Rail News

Published 4 times annually by the California Rail Foundation in cooperation with the Train Riders Association of California

Richard Tolmach, TRAC President
Alan C. Miller TRAC Executive Director

Signed opinion articles represent the views of their authors, not necessarily those of the above organizations.

926 J Street, Suite 1107,
Sacramento, CA 95814
Telephone: 916-557-1667
e-mail: trac@omsoft.com
www.calrailnews.com
www.trainriders.org

The California Rail News encourages letters, comments, and reports on local issues. Please submit your material to California Rail News, 926 J Street, Suite 1107, 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 May 1, 2005.



Capitol Corridor Executive Director Gene Skoropowski counters Mineta's assertions.

LEGISLATORS, SEN. BOXER COUNTER MINETA CAMPAIGN AGAINST AMTRAK

Assembly Joint Resolution 18, authored by Dave Jones (D-Sacramento) in late March, memorializes the Congress of the United States to provide adequate operating and capital funding for Amtrak, preserve and improve the four national network Amtrak trains serving California, and establish a multi-year capital funding program to match state expenditures to initiate, improve or expand services.

The resolution points out that Amtrak is the only entity in the nation with a statutory right-of-access to the private freight railroads for the purpose of providing rail services, and that Amtrak-operated intercity and commuter passenger services within California carried 9.3 million passengers in 2004.

The measure also points out that the current freight rail network is failing to keep pace with goods movement demand in the ports throughout California and that any passenger rail network improvement benefit freight mobility.

Assemblymember Tim Leslie (R-Tahoe City) is a joint author of the resolution, and other co-authors of the resolution include Senators Abel Maldonado (R-Santa Maria), Christine Kehoe (D-San Diego) and Denise Ducheny (D-San Diego).

"De-funding Amtrak is directly at odds with our interests here in Sacramento," said Assemblymember Dave Jones. "As a growing region with congested freeways, we need more federal support for rail transit so we can encourage more travelers to get out of their cars and onto public transport like Amtrak and Regional Transit."

The resolution was triggered by a visit to Sacramento by Mineta, who held a press conference attacking Amtrak, but apparently failed to gain open support by any elected officials. Even Gov. Schwarzenegger's staff

are said to have concerns about the impacts of the White House plan on California.

Mineta also had a San Francisco press conference, originally intended to praise Caltrain, which turned into another Amtrak bashing session. Sen. Barbara Boxer faulted the transportation secretary for his support of the Bush reorganization plan that calls for eliminating federal funding for Amtrak.

"I do wish Norm would consider resigning," she said. "I don't understand why someone who has been an advocate for transportation for so many years can do this." Boxer pledged to battle the cut of federal money, arguing that public support for passenger rail service helps the economy, the environment and the traveling public.

"To see Norm Mineta change his colors like this is rather sad," said Boxer, who cited Mineta's consistent support of Amtrak funding when they were colleagues in California's Democratic congressional delegation.



Press questioning Assemblymember Dave Jones (D-Sacramento) about AJR 18 following the Mineta event.

TRAC members and CC Riders activists met media outside the Capitol before the Mineta press conference. All photos this page courtesy of Laurence Smith.



Curitiba, Other BRT Cities Convert to Rail

CONFIRMING EVIDENCE BUS RAPID TRANSIT HAS LOST ALLURE, BUS POSTERCHILD CITIES START LAYING TRACK

by Roger Christensen

We will soon be seeing tracks appear in some of the most surprising places...

CURITIBA, BRAZIL

Curitiba is the Brazilian city with a bus network that America's own politically pressured Federal Transit Agency (FTA) calls a "role model for transit planning." Curitiba is rightly praised for innovative bus service improvements like use of fare pre-payment, level boarding, and signal priority, borrowed from light rail's playbook.

What makes faraway Curitiba, Brazil so important an example for American anti-rail propagandists? Its ridership success is a platform for the fraudulent claim that Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) does everything that rail does at a fraction of the cost. Various downsides of the Curitiba success story have been submerged in FTA accounts, such as the fact that the bus artery is clogged and conditions on board the buses are miserable, leading to citizen complaints.

What is the latest bulletin from FTA's favorite third-world bus project? Curitiba is

about to replace its famed BRT route with a surface light rail line.

Stories of Curitiba by bus advocates rarely mention that the city never saw its bus plan as a solution but rather an interim step. On four previous occasions Curitiba explored rail options it couldn't afford. In 1998, the city eyed a 9-mile subway project, but suffered sticker shock. In 2002, Curitiba was poised to implement a monorail system until funding from a Japanese bank collapsed. Today the newly elected Mayor Jose Richa has announced his intention of implementing the "already approved" Metro Leve (english translation: Metro Light) along the city's famed north-south axis.

The 12.1-mile light rail line with 23 stations would replace sluggish crush-loaded bi-articulated buses with commodious new light rail cars capable of carrying 450 passengers per vehicle.

The \$291-million project is 60% funded by a World Bank Loan, 16% funded by the Brazilian Ministry of Transport, 10% from the local Curitiba municipal government, and the remaining 14% by private investors who will also be the operators. Mayor Richa also intends to conduct a public debate on the future of transit in Curitiba.

OTTAWA, CANADA

If Curitiba is the South American poster-child for BRT, its North American sister is Canada's capital of Ottawa with the most fully developed BRT system on the continent. Amid complaints of sagging ridership and backed up peak hour buses creating addi-

tional congestion downtown, the city opened a short 5-mile DMU rail starter route ("The O-Train") in 2001 that was a roaring success and continues to have a rapidly growing ridership. Aware that Calgary's 15-mile light rail has one of the highest riderships in North America and enjoys a lower unit cost than Ottawa's bus network, the city is now aggressively planning future rail lines.

WINNIPEG, CANADA

After 20 years of hyperbole about a magic bus system with dubious-sounding magnetic guideways in a town where rubber tired vehicles perform poorly on snowy roads, the City Council scrapped plans for construction, the new Mayor announced that BRT was dead and was last seen inspecting Ottawa's O-Train. Light rail options are now being mulled. Could this be Canada's version of "If Dallas can have light rail, why can't we have it here in Houston, too?"

SEATTLE, WASHINGTON

That famous bus subway tunnel built in the 1980s will close down in September, 2005 for two years as the city plans to retrofit it for rail. The tunnel will become part of Seattle's starter light rail system now under construction. The first segment heads south to SEA-TAC airport. A future extension will head north through the University district.

HONOLULU, HAWAII

The recently opened "E-Bus" BRT project approved two years ago by the heavily lobbied City Council is the latest object lesson in how "just like rail but cheaper" is a lie. The near empty \$749,000 diesel hybrid vehicles are already proposed to be rerouted away from the city's core. In a recent mayoral election, traffic was the number one issue and both candidates stated support for switching to a rail plan. The major-elect's newly appointed transit chief Ed Hirata, noting the bus debacle, stated his regime's priority at the start of the year: "We need to get started on a light rail line."

New TRAC Office Volunteers

GARY PERRAZO Sacramento County

Mr. Gary Perazzo was born in 1943. In 1961 at age 18 he started working for the Southern Pacific during the summer months while attending San Jose State. After graduation he worked full time for the railroad and joined the Naval Reserve.

After doing his active duty he became a programmer and was involved with computerizing the railroad's accounts receivables.

Disenchanted with programming he quit railroading in 1973, only to return in 1977 closer to the operations as a field implementer for various TOPS projects, traveling the entire system.

In 1981 he became the Terminal Agent in Phoenix only to have his position abolished after two years due to the recession. Next was Office Manager at the Oakland Pig Ramp which was more like working for a trucking company than a railroad. Upon departing the railroad in 1983 he spent nine years working at his brother-in-law's investment firm in charge of computer operations.

His last nine years before retiring were with Siemens Transportation Systems in Sacramento building LRVs. He retired in 2002 to be a full time care giver for his father. Railroading started in his family in 1892 with his grandfather and later his uncle. He has loved trains since he was two years old when his mother took him cross country on the train to Galesburg, Ill, during W.W.II.



BOB REYNOLDS Sacramento County

Bob Reynolds is a St. Mary's College of California graduate and has taught college and high school, flown Navy carrier jets, and managed several military programs over a 37 year career. In 2003 he retired from Air Force civil service as the business manager for the F-117 Stealth Fighter program office. He fills his retired days baby-sitting two avid railfan-toddlers, supplemented with volunteer activities and teaching religion to fourth and fifth graders.

He married Kathy in 1974 and they have two adult daughters. She served thirty years as an Air Force nurse, retiring in 2001. Her father and grandfather were railroad men, too.

Bob is a second-generation Californian. His ancestors and relatives have worked on American iron horses since the mid-1800's. He has traveled on the rails in Europe and Asia and has visited many of the US's steam excursion operations over the last twenty years. Trains Magazine's web site recently featured one of his trackside photos. He started volunteering at TRAC after last year's Rail 2020 conference with an interest in California's evolving rail passenger network.

Bob Reynolds standing amid the makings of a good, cheap bottle of wine, the only thing he likes better than watching a good, long train.



A WAY TO CHANGE THE FUTURE OF CALIFORNIA'S TRANSPORTATION

TRAC welcomes all donations in excess of membership dues. A good way to insure that rail passenger service is promoted in California is to leave a gift in your will.

You can choose to leave a portion of your estate to TRAC or to the California Rail Foundation which publishes CRN. This can include money, investments, property, real estate or other parts of you estate. By indicating your wish to donate in your will, you can make a substantial gift that will not encroach on your current life style.

There are even trusts that can be set up for this purpose. The charitable remainder trust can enable you to do three things: leave a planned gift, realize tax benefits, and play a role in determining how that gift will be utilized.

Each bequest, whether large or small, can have an impact on our ability to help improve passenger rail service in California.

You may call or write the TRAC office for detailed information.