

California Rail News

Volume 16 Number 2

Published Six Times Annually Sacramento, CA

May-June 2002

Grapevine Rail IS Affordable

AUSTRALIAN QUANTM STUDY PUTS COST AT \$2 BILLION, FRACTION OF 1994 PB ESTIMATE

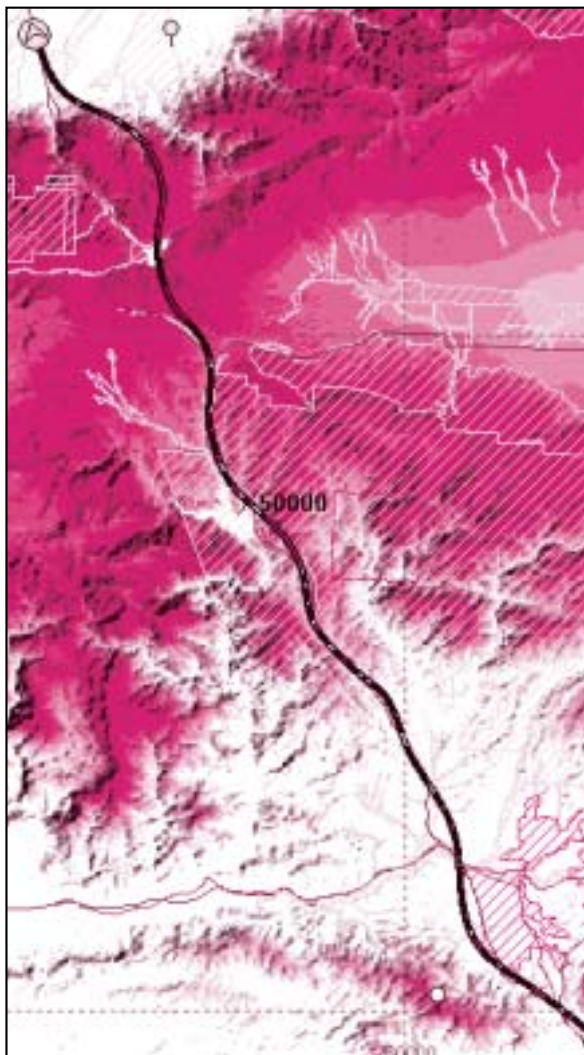
Remember that Bakersfield-Los Angeles High Speed Rail study done by Parsons Brinckerhoff (PB) for Caltrans District 07 in 1994? Someone came up with a better idea on how to do it. Way better.

Disregard everything the California High Speed Rail Authority (CHSRA) staff has said about a \$26 billion price tag on a California network. Also throw away the 5-year and 20-year Amtrak improvement plans.

Quantm, an eminently qualified rail engineering firm based in Australia, has used digital elevation data and its advanced geo software to chart a 200 mph route through the Tehachapis, and has estimated it to cost \$2.4 billion in a 3.5% grade version or \$1.9 to \$2.1 billion with 5% maximum grades. Its findings are nothing short of iconoclastic.

For most of a decade, California intercity rail planning has proceeded under a pair of false premises: that the cost of closing the gap in California's tracks between Bakersfield and Santa Clarita is too high to consider and that passenger rail upgrades should consist of improvements to existing freight lines. Both must be re-examined, and the Amtrak improvement programs must be redrawn in light of the Quantm work.

Parsons Brinckerhoff charged Caltrans \$5 million for the dubious advice that a rail line over the pass would cost between \$6 billion



Wheeler Ridge to Santa Clarita over the Grapevine: Quantm proposed to use the next canyon east, avoiding tangling with I-5 at the tight spot. Map: QUANTM

and \$8 billion. At the time, TRAC panned the "ski-jump" route PB selected for study, observing that the firm seemingly sought out the toughest terrain in order to maximize tunnel lengths and capital costs.

How different Quantm's concept is from PB's! Instead of aiming tunnels through methane-laden formations and seismic hazards, Quantm has alternatives passing over both the San Andreas and Garlock faults at grade, and has picked relatively benign locations for the few miles of tunnel. This fiscally conservative approach means years could be cut from development and construction time, not only billions from costs.

The lower cost for Grapevine should put it ahead of many projects listed in Amtrak's

\$3.9 billion California 5-year plan, and force an independent redrafting of that plan.

Even in the absence of high speed rail, a Bakersfield-Santa Clarita line now appears to be a viable incremental project for closing the biggest gap in California's rail network. Supporters of this idea say San Joaquin trains and tracks could be extended within 3 years to the foot of the Grapevine.

The second stage could see new 120 mph Talgo sets running through to Los Angeles via Metrolink tracks by 2008. Private investment in a true high speed service through the Valley to the Bay Area could follow, using the same new Grapevine route. Taken one step at a time, we could get a statewide high speed network without the sticker shock induced by CHSRA pricing. All that is needed is a rail agency that really wants to build.

Although Quantm was brought in to review PB's work, insiders say PB is still in control of CHSRA's planning and is extremely jealous of the attention given to Quantm. The Australian firm's independence and integrity have been a breath of fresh air for California rail. Let's hope they get taken aboard by other California rail organizations needing a fresh look at challenging projects.

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SERVING THE SAN JOAQUIN VALLEY WITHOUT SUBWAYS

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PASADENA BESET BY PUC RULING

Correction Regarding Report of Caltrans Subcontractor Use

In the January-February issue of CRN, we reported that Caltrans hired a subcontractor of Glass-McClure to evaluate the effectiveness of its advertising. It appears now that this information was incorrect and that Caltrans did not, in fact, hire a Glass-McClure subcontractor to perform such work. The original information was given to CRN by a person in Caltrans Division of Rail who we believed to be a reliable source. However, that source has since disavowed the statement, and therefore we now believe the item to be inaccurate.

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Address Correction Requested