

Tunnel Vision at High Speed Rail

LINE AIMS AT STATE PARK INSTEAD OF ALTAMONT PASS

Is tunneling through 4 major mountain ridges east of San Jose a reasonable way for a new rail line to reach the Bay Area? The High Speed Rail Authority, although it lacks in-house engineering staff, has proposed a new and questionable route that could add a dozen miles of tunnel and over \$1.5 billion to the project cost. They call it, appropriately, "Diablo." The following is from TRAC's letter to CHSRA on the issue, sent April 12 by President Richard Tolmach.

The TRAC Board has reviewed CHSRA's latest selections of alternatives to be carried through the EIR process. We have also heard from industry experts and environmental groups who are concerned about removal of the Altamont route and inclusion of the Diablo Range route (tunneling close to Henry Coe State Park) in the study.

Now that MTC's Bay Crossing Study has priced a 4 mile transbay tube at \$11.8 billion, similar to the cost of your entire 350 mile San Francisco-Los Angeles route, you can no longer pretend that the Capital Corridor is any sort of viable or cost-effective alternative for handling the overloaded Sacramento-San Francisco travel corridor.

CHSRA must retain a routing like Altamont which will serve San Francisco-Sacramento effectively. We strongly urge you to put Altamont alternatives back into the project and carry them through the EIR process. The remaining alternatives in the study, Diablo Range and Pacheco, are clearly incapable of diverting significant Interstate 80 travel because they are so indirect.

The Diablo crossing, your newly preferred alternative replacing Altamont, would have San Francisco to Sacramento trains traveling to Atwater, California 130 miles mostly out of direction before they turn towards Sacramento and run for another 115 miles. This idea looks like no engineer was ever involved in its development. Sacramento is only 80 miles from San Francisco. Diablo, at 245 miles and 2 hours travel time, turns high speed rail into an energy-wasting non-starter in the Bay Area-Sacramento market.

Your own published data shows that Altamont clearly beats autos with travel times of an hour or less in all the following markets:

- San Francisco-Sacramento
- SFO-Sacramento
- San Jose-Sacramento
- San Francisco-Stockton
- SFO-Stockton
- San Jose-Stockton
- San Francisco-Modesto
- SFO-Modesto
- San Jose-Modesto

Diablo is slower in every single one of these markets, as well as costing billions more.

The adoption of this flawed routing as the preferred alternative makes us worry that the environmental groups we have courted for most of the past decade on the high speed rail issue will turn permanently against the project. We have received three very strong communications from environmental leaders since your announcement of the Diablo alternative, one of which raised a very disturbing scenario. According to that scenario, your engineering consulting firm is using Henry Coe State Park as a hostage on the

San Jose-Central Valley segment, attempting to use environmental opposition as an excuse to increase the amount of tunneling. Unfortunately, the ramifications have not been lost on these groups, who have read about past practices of aiming tunnels at fault zones, the La Brea Tar Pits, or fiber optic lines. The message we are getting back is that they have no intention of becoming the scapegoats for what they view as a flawed and manipulative plan:

- 1) The environmental groups view your Diablo Range alignment as an invasion of the Bay Area's last wilderness area, whether or not the line touches the surface of the fraction of wilderness currently inside park boundaries, so tunneling, which is not without its own environmental problems, does not help at all.
- 2) There is a perception that you are not in control of the engineering firm so much as it is directing your actions and rhetoric on the issue of Diablo. While no one is drawing a time line or making any conclusions about prior interactions with the firm, your stance is not helping your image as a leader capable of brokering an alternatives process that leads to consensus.

We are telling you about the above issues because we want your project to succeed politically and technologically. There is every reason that high speed rail must be relevant to San Francisco, the South Bay and East Bay's regional travel needs and provide congestion relief along Interstates 80, 580 and 680. Northern Californians stuck in gridlock are not going to vote for a plan that ignores their needs and focuses only on 400 mile trips or travel to Central Valley destinations

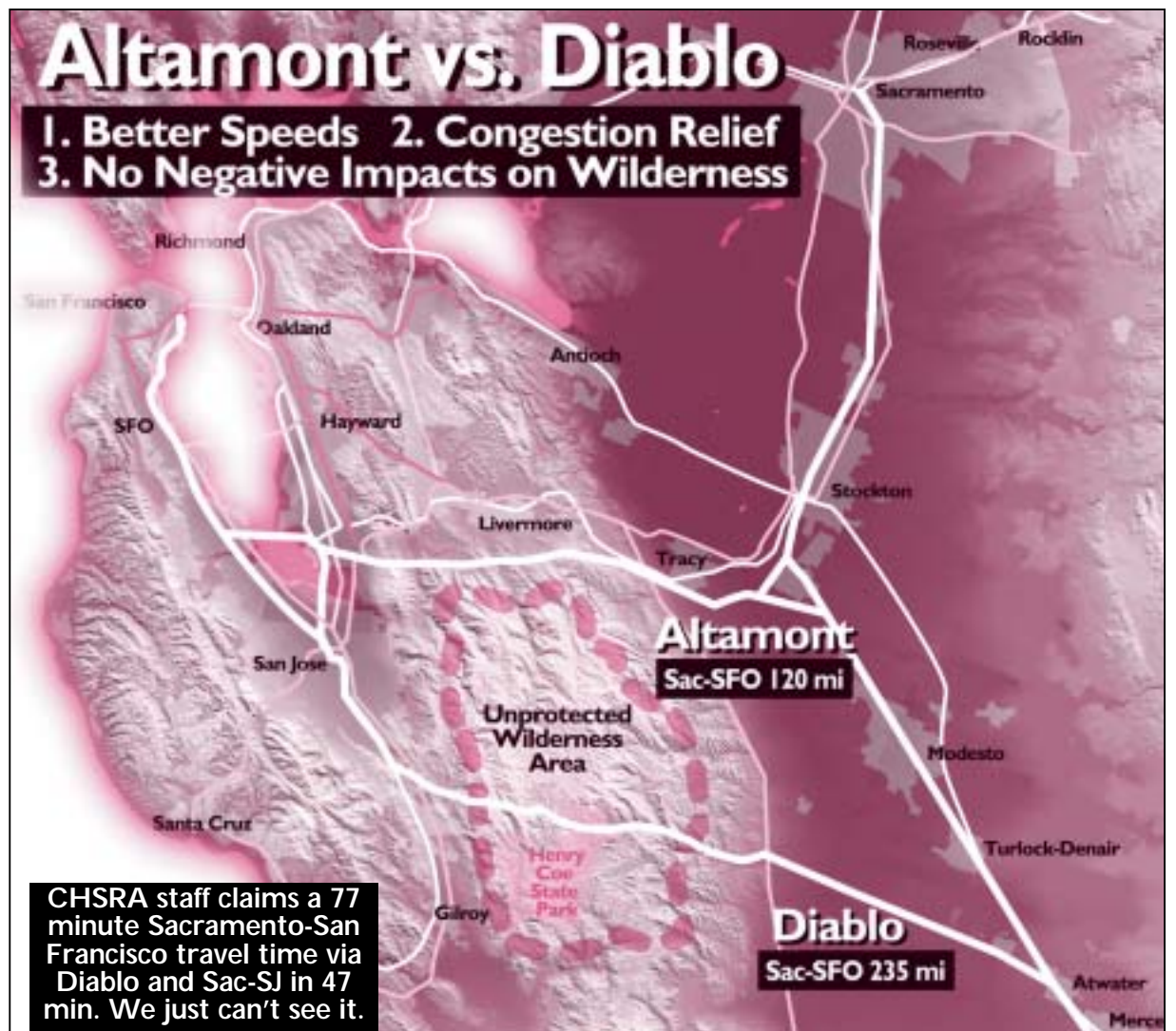
most Bay Area residents never willingly visit. The present preferred alternative does virtually nothing to help congestion.

San Jose is best served by a route plan which makes it a Northern California terminal on an equal footing with San Francisco and Sacramento, not a way station. Your idea that this puts San Jose on a "branch line" is wrong and implies that San Jose deserves or would receive less service. Your present preferred alternative would force dozens of San Francisco-Los Angeles expresses to blast through Diridon Station at top Peninsula speeds, and relegate San Jose passengers to hunting for left over seats on stopping trains.

Your present preferred alternative is as bad for San Jose as it is for all the other cities up and down the Peninsula who would be subjected to 172 additional trains a day. The European advice is that high speed rail should use Caltrain tracks the very minimum possible to avoid delays.

To us this means San Jose expresses would begin at Diridon Station, stop at Mineta International Airport and stop next in the Central Valley, making San Jose's airport the closest to Valley cities. San Francisco expresses would head for the Central Valley after a total of two stops at SFO and mid-Peninsula. This configuration would spare the rest of the Bay Area the environmental effects of trains which could not stop for local residents anyway.

We respectfully ask you to consider the above information and open the study to all feasible alternatives as required by California and Federal environmental law.



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