

What am I bid for a Metric Ton of Salisbury Steak? Barely Used! It's the Dubious Rail Achievements 2002

U.P.'s Public Confession: It Suffers from Constipation

For years unable to pass a single passenger train daily between northern California and Los Angeles on its primarily double-tracked Tehachapi line, Union Pacific officials in September 2002 admitted publicly that the railroad is constipated. Caltrans officials proposed studying the problem, but UP says it would rather everyone go away and mind their own business.

What Hath Rod Wrought?

The San Jose *Mercury News*' ongoing series has illuminated certain problems of the San Jose light rail line (slowest route, lowest ridership, highest loss per passenger, and the current financial meltdown leading to the first abandonment of a post-1970 light rail line in the United States).

Quite an achievement. The series has also unintentionally highlighted its mentor Rod Diridon's flawed approach on his current task on high speed rail. After all, the San Jose line planning also ignored citizen input, chose the least popular route with the most environmental problems, and imposed unnecessary delays between downtown San Jose and points north. Ready to vote for a \$30 billion statewide repeat, everyone?

Did \$4 Billion BART Extension Come with Free Air Miles?

Was it good transportation planning or was it the air miles that convinced state officials to put \$700 million into the San Jose BART extension? The line's fish-hook routing and budget busting costs have had rail activists wondering how this bad project stays in the state budget despite a looming \$30 billion deficit. Turns out it could really be the air miles! Tutor-Saliba, famed for its L.A. Metro Red Line and SFO cost overruns and subcontractor scams, and a favorite for BART extensions, provided use of its jets to Gov. Davis during his last campaign.



Span Stuck in the Middle?

Bridge construction firms once interested in learning more about the last major segment of the Bay Bridge East Span rebuild have dropped out of contention for the bid, citing intractable staging and assembly problems. Are the Caltrans bridgebuilders trying to make the *Rail News* staff look like geniuses? In August 2002, we printed a story saying that the Caltrans specs for the asymmetrical self-anchored suspension (SAS) section on the east span project made it nearly impossible to build, therefore a real problem to estimate the costs. In May 2003, a conference of some of the world's most qualified bridge builders threw cold water on the chances of bidding on the project, even after Caltrans moderated conditions on the main contract for the SAS. All say that \$786 million is too cheap for the span because of uncertainties.



Since Caltrans made the fatal (some say illegal) mistake of approving the project start before design work is proven, it now faces the embarrassment of a several mile viaduct leading nowhere. Not that this would be a new sight in the Bay Area.



¿Perché è tanto piccolo, questo Campanile di Capitol?

To the dismay of Sacramento's Mayor, who was really hoping for something bigger, plans for the clocktower at Sacramento's SP Depot seem to have been misconstrued by masons and built in inches rather than feet. Kind of like the Stonehenge set in Spinal Tap? Subsequent events made the physical inadequacies of the rather size-challenged clocktower starkly obvious. And how symbolic! Run over by an SUV before its planned January dedication, the token gesture of commitment to the station by the Capitol Corridor and City of Sacramento still sits in ruins five months later. The auto attack has resulted in the station becoming completely anonymous, as the old Amtrak sign was removed and the new one lies useless on the ground. Is it just my eyes, or is the tower leaning slightly?



Need (for Hummers, for War?) Is a Very Subjective Term

Is there really any need whatsoever for the Hummer, except as a statement of hostility to other drivers? As U.S. auto energy efficiency hit a 22 year low, a joint project of the National Resources Defense Council and the Detroit Project rolled out a set of ads ridiculing the SUV.

Paraphrasing the famous statement of his uncle, Robert F. Kennedy Jr. said "It's time

What's This? A Gift-Wrapped Extortion Opportunity?

Perpetuating longstanding Sacramento traditions, Union Pacific has ignored preservation law and divided the SP Depot Historic Site into two properties and is deeding the REA building (neatly wrapped) and land from I Street to the tracks to a developer active on UP's bid to remove the depot from public use. Major city council fundraising seems to have been part of the package. But is the real prize the parcel, not the REA? The parcel owner obtains exclusive control of access to the depot, and coercive leverage over RT and Amtrak. Clearly, other developers enviously watched the Lumberjack curve scam, in which grabbing land in the path of RT light rail construction crippled access to trains and set planning back for years. But did Sacramento learn anything at all from Lumberjack? Maybe just bad behavior.

for the Bush Administration to stop asking Big Energy and Detroit what America can do for them and start asking what they can do for our country." Kennedy has pointed out that Americans are buying 17 million new cars, trucks and SUVs annually, and that the ballooning requirement for oil caused by the "need" to consume unlimited amounts is behind our geopolitical problems in the Middle East. Kennedy says "raising fuel economy to 40 mpg by 2012 would save nearly 2 million barrels of oil every day.; that's more than we imported from Saudi Arabia last year, and three times our Iraq imports. Boost that to 55 mpg by 2020, and daily savings grow to nearly 5 million barrels, almost twice our current Persian Gulf imports."

Guppy Bites Octopus

While Caltrans and the Capitol Corridor appear afraid to challenge Union Pacific over its inexcusable delays of Amtrak trains, the spunky little Yolo Short Line has no such problems battling the behemoth. Finance Docket No. 34114 posted February 3 on the Surface Transportation Board site makes highly entertaining reading. In it, the "Surf" Board denies Union Pacific's attempt to stop the Yolo Short Line from having an exclusive lease and operating rights on a 3.1 mile section of track to the Sacramento Yolo Port District. That action takes away rights that had belonged to Southern Pacific since 1951, and puts Yolo Short Line in a prime position to solicit business from Burlington Northern Santa Fe, which has also been notably unhappy with Union Pacific's "service" on its port-bound shipments. Big doesn't always mean powerful. Sometimes it just means stupid.

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