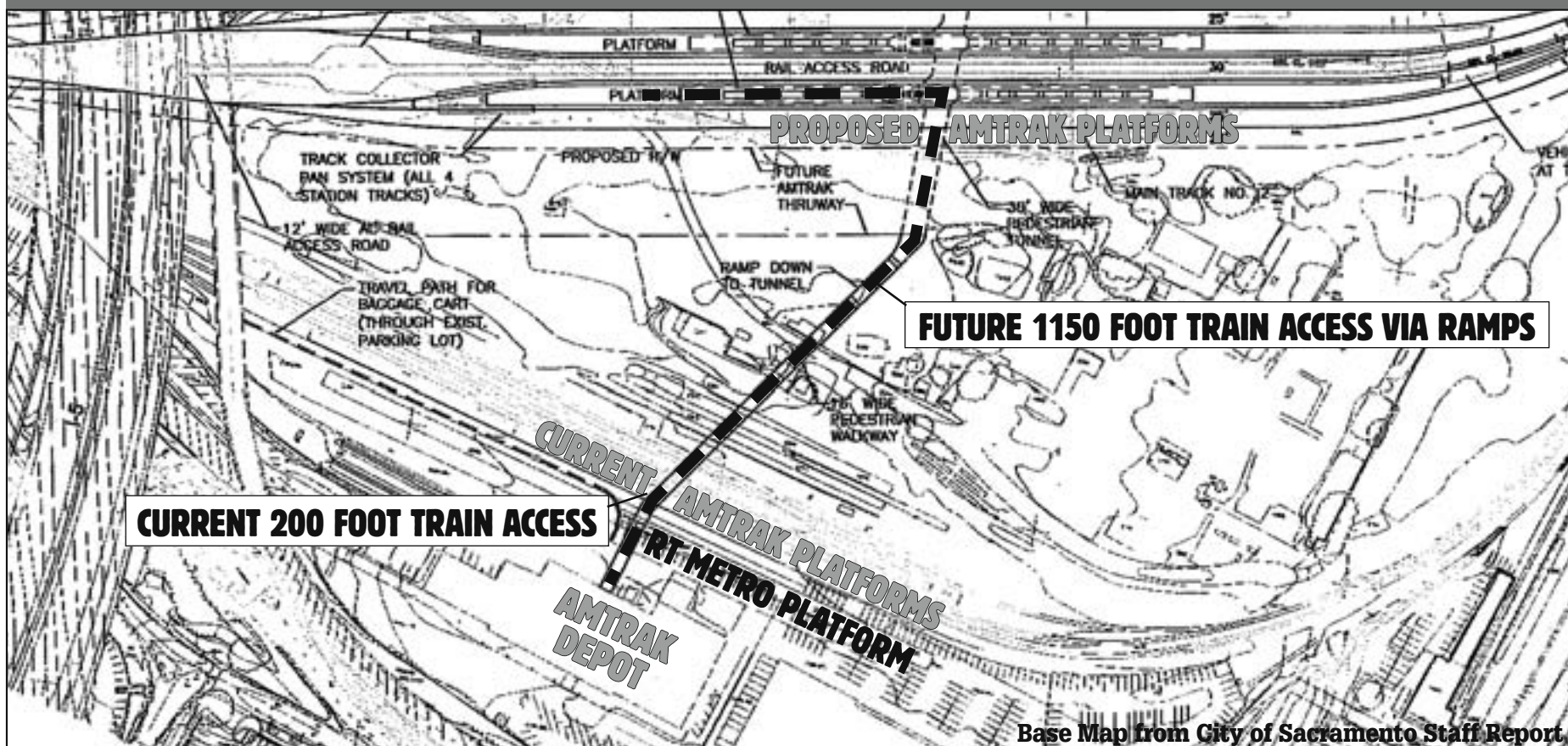


# SACRAMENTO TO PAY FOR RAIL DISCONNECT



(continued from Page One)

Ever since 1996, UP acted like a slumlord, refusing to fix roofs even after they collapsed at the REA Building adjacent to the station. Instead, UP broke up the historic station parcel two years ago and sold the REA to another of its development partners. The developer retains the only legal street access to Amtrak, making it landlocked.

The City reportedly ignored negative environmental impacts of this sale splitting up the historic site, because the REA building was so close to complete collapse, the result of nearly a decade of UP actions seemingly calculated to destroy historic structures. A few years before, UP illegally demolished another historic structure in the path of the current proposed bypass line, following a mysterious weekend fire.

Sacramento Amtrak traffic abruptly stopped growing in late 2005, when Union Pacific started obstructing passenger access with onerous new station parking and entry constraints. Shortly afterwards, light rail and bus stop construction began, taking an additional bite out of the parking lot.

Despite addition of eight daily Capitol Corridor trains, Amtrak ridership has continued to decline in Sacramento due to a combination of botched parking and pedestrian access decisions by the city, Regional Transit, and Union Pacific.

Capitol passengers have been angered and frustrated by a parking management company which seemed hell-bent on disrupting their commutes. The last straw for many passengers was the installation of

homemade parking ticket machines and gates by Platinum Parking.

Malfunctioning software, unintelligible messages, tickets which would not work, and \$91 default charges if a ticket couldn't be read by the machine brought the station parking issue to a boil, highlighted by *Sacramento Bee* editorials.

Eventually, the City of Sacramento knuckled under and let the railroad have its way on moving the tracks, even picking up \$40 million of the costs that Sacramento politicians had always promised that the railroad would pay.

An end-of-the-year *Sacramento Business Journal* article by Michael Shaw pointed out that the sale raises "a host of new questions about the ambitious plan" for overall development at the railyards site including the following; "How much will the public pay for a transit hub planned for the rail-yard? How long will it take to clean the site of pollution?" and "How will the city and the developer cover the estimated half-billion dollars in costs to build sewers, streets and other infrastructure needed to support redevelopment?"

## Damage Control at Sacramento

The day of the anniversary celebration, the president of a Sacramento bicycle organization was beamed on the head and knocked off his bicycle by a falling parking gate. Days after the sale went through at year's end, the gates were removed.

Picking up or dropping passengers at the depot has gotten a lot easier with gates gone, but parking at the station is almost

as much of a problem today as it was a year ago. Commuters grab most spots early in the morning, so availability is uncertain.

Mayor Heather Fargo, addressing bad press on the parking issue, said she was dedicated to solving traffic and parking problems at the year-end session that finally cleared the way for the land deal. Council member Steve Cohn went even further, inviting the public to suggest ways to improve conditions at the Amtrak depot.

## How to Undo the Sabotage

Passengers still face a daily obstacle course from downtown, with I Street signals for 5th Street set in peak hours for up to four minutes of east-west traffic. People about to miss a train because of the signal delay often become so anxious that they dart into traffic despite the red light. Pedestrians need more of a fair shake.

Then there are tank traps to navigate at the Federal Building, and the dangerous station parking lot with no pedestrian path marked. Since construction started at the old REA building, commuters have been forced to detour through the station. Re-establishing a line-of-sight path direct to trains would save another minute or more.

Light rail should be the first choice for access to the Amtrak station, but schedules are unfortunately set for maximum delay. Capitol trains depart just as light rail arrives 15 of 16 times weekdays, forcing a 15 minute wait. A tweak of seven minutes to light rail times (swapping times of the two LRT lines) could fix this problem and expand Capitol passengers' usage of the connection.

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