

# Fast Forward for the Capitols

**New TRAC President Bill McGeehan and Board Member Michael Kiesling sat down late in 2006 with Gene Skoropowski, Managing Director of the Capitol Corridor Joint Powers Authority. We learned of interesting future plans for California's second busiest passenger rail corridor.**

## Benicia Bridge

There is a need for an eventual replacement of the drawbridge at Benicia. The project could be in conjunction with UP or as a stand-alone passenger-rail bridge. With the UP in on the project, the ruling grade would be 0.8%. As a passenger-rail only bridge the grade could be up to 3.5%. This difference has huge ramifications in design and cost for both the alignment and bridge. This is a long-term but necessary project and no funds have yet been identified to pay for it.

## New Stations

Stations are moving forward at Santa Clara, Fairfield (Peabody Road) & Hercules. The plans for Fairfield are further along than those for Hercules.

The Capitol Corridor is going to be using the Caltrain platforms at Santa Clara, the junction point where the Capitol Corridor comes into the Caltrain line just north of San Jose. Caltrain is making improvements at Santa Clara to allow the Capitols to stop at the station. New crossovers are being installed, and a new platform is under construction on the outside of the northbound Caltrain track, inside the UP freight lead. The platform will be connected to the station by an underpass. Once complete, ACE and Capitol Corridor trains will not need to cross the Caltrain lines to access a platform at Santa Clara.

The Capitol Corridor is developing a "standard" design for future stations that is impressive. Fairfield (at Peabody Road) will be the first to use this design standard. There will be a center platform, accessed by a wide underpass and ramps. The entry to the station will be a wide, sloping bowl that is designed to provide an open and safe feeling. The Capitol Corridor should be commended for this well-considered, passenger-friendly design. Pedestrian bridges at some locations have proven time-consuming and

difficult for passengers changing platforms, while elevators are often out-of-service or used as make-shift urinals.

The Peabody station will be designed for four tracks. Too often capital projects are designed for current needs and known long-term improvements that could be cost-effectively incorporated into the design are ignored. The result is taxpayers pay for ripping out the old project, then designing and building a new one. The Capitol Corridor should be further commended for this pound-wise thinking ahead.

New stations require mitigations along the entire corridor to allow for more efficient and/or faster train movement so that there is no loss to overall end to end runtime.

## New Neighbors & "Noise"

With redevelopment of trackside industrial areas into housing projects, much new development has occurred near the right-of-way. Meanwhile, the Capitol Corridor and Union Pacific have increased train frequencies. This has produced a conflict for some of the new neighbors, who are complaining about train noise. In response, some cities are requesting sound-reducing walls and looking into quiet zones where trains sound their horns at crossings only in an emergency in exchange for improved (and expensive) safety features at crossings.

The Capitol Corridor is working with local governments to establish buffer zones between new development and the tracks. The goal is to minimize impacts on people who CHOOSE to live next to a railroad and then realize that a railroad is loud and causes vibrations.

## Electronic Train Status Signs

New signs have been ordered, and the software that runs the signs is being upgraded to increase reliability. At Jack London Square the neighboring residents were hearing loud announcements all night long, even after trains were no longer running. The City and Capitol Corridor met to adjust the announcement volume. There is a delicate balance with the volume, as some passengers have now complained that the audio is inaudible.

## Train Frequency

The Capitol Corridor is at the limit for

frequencies with the current equipment allocation. The rail bonds should provide some money for additional equipment, but an order hasn't been placed and new equipment cannot be expected within three years of placing such an order. The Capitol Corridor is considering going to 18 round trips when they are able.

## California Car Doors

The "improved" door hardware works worse than the equipment it replaced. Dust and grime must constantly be cleaned and there is no set procedure with Amtrak crews to do this work. A single trip on the San Joaquin route will almost surely take at least one door out of service.

## Train Scheduling

Memory scheduling is desirable and is a hoped-for eventual goal. The inability to establish trains on more of a memory schedule is affected by the different origins and destinations of the trains, the differing meet locations and threading through schedule slots on single track. The scheduling is also affected by UP's requirements for scheduling minimum windows through which to operate their freight trains. There will be an effort to coordinate weekend and weekday schedules in future schedule changes so that the weekend schedule will more closely resemble a subset of the weekday schedule and most of those weekend trains that operate will be on the same schedule as their weekday counterparts.

## UP Tie Replacement Program

The Capitol Corridor will have a morning schedule reduction while UP is undertaking a massive tie replacement program. This will also result in the annulment of a few trains. From January 17 to February 17 40,000 ties will be replaced between San Pablo and Cordelia. These dates were chosen as this is the period with lowest ridership of the year.

## Other Capitol Corridor Tidbits

There was discussion of retraining conductors to use wheelchair lifts more efficiently . . . . A permanent "wifi" system is under development. It will cover a great deal of train diagnostics and security features, as well as internet access for riders . . . . New automated ticket machines are coming to all stations.



## METROLINK'S NEW CARS HAVE CRASH SAFEGUARDS

Metrolink's new cab cars have a new look based on new technology. The new passenger cars will be the first rail cars in the U.S. to incorporate crash energy management technology (CEMT) to enhance the safety of passengers and crew members in collisions.

The front coupler of the cabs is the key link in the technology. It is a "push-back" design which is less rigid than a conventional coupler, and designed to absorb collision energy, similar to the buffers on new European cars, which have taken on a new safety role instead of just softening impacts of normal train assembly.

Inside, the cab cars will have controlled crush space built of honeycomb material which can absorb and deflect energy. Metrolink staff and consultants have worked closely with the Federal Railroad Administration and the U.S. Department of Transportation's Volpe Center transportation safety research team to develop the design specifications for including this technology in the new cars. The SCRRRA contract is for a base number of 54 trailer cars and 33 lead position cab cars at a total bid price of \$176,334,755.

Metrolink has signed up for several options. Option one is for 10 additional

cab cars at a total cost of \$17,788,200. Option two is for 10 more cab cars at a total cost of \$17,859,400. These two options will be implemented as additional funding becomes available. Three additional contract options are included for 14 trailer cars and 10 cab cars to be delivered to the South Florida Regional Transportation Authority, operators of Tri-Rail commuter train service. The total value of the contract with all options exercised would be \$305,974,486.

The Rotem Company has committed to deliver the first trailer car in this order in December 2008 with the first new cab car to be delivered in February 2009.