

HIGHLIGHTS FROM CALIFORNIA RAIL 2020

TRAC'S NOVEMBER 2003 PASADENA CONFERENCE ON THE FUTURE OF RAIL IN CALIFORNIA

California Rail 2020 was sponsored by TRAC and the California Rail Foundation. Summary and photos of speakers by Carl Morrison of TrainWeb, additional text and editing by TRAC Intern Lauren Hilliard.

On Saturday, November 1, 2003, train advocates came together in Pasadena, California to take a look into the future of rail. The location for the conference was chosen primarily because of its accessibility via the new Gold Line train, which runs from the Los Angeles Union Station to Pasadena. However, the MTA strike prohibited conference attendees from arriving at their destination by means of rail transit. This irony serves as a reminder of the need for further development of rail in this state. "California Rail 2020" featured several keynote speakers addressing the pressing issues that the state is facing today regarding rail transit and the solutions being undertaken to solve these dilemmas.

Summaries below are from the point of view of the speaker, contain news as it was up-to-date at the time of the conference, and do not necessarily reflect the point of view of TRAC or CRF.



Rescuing Amtrak: What will it take?

Tyrone Bland, Amtrak Director of Government Affairs-West, spoke first, titling his segment: The State of Amtrak. Mr. Bland noted that during its 33-year history, Amtrak has been continually underfunded. He addressed three common myths about Amtrak:

- 1) Amtrak can be profitable without assistance;
- 2) The private sector is lining up to take over Amtrak;
- 3) There is a quick fix even though California is in a \$27 billion deficit.

Bland said that the three state-supported routes in California are doing extremely well; however, Amtrak will need proper funding to continue national operation. While Amtrak needs \$1.8 billion from the federal government to correct the years of shortfalls, the Senate has only passed a \$1.3 billion bill and the House has passed an even smaller \$900 million version. David Gunn, CEO of Amtrak, has said that Amtrak will shut down if the final amount is \$900 million. With the Senate amount (\$1.3 billion) Amtrak could get through the year but would not be able to begin activities intended to bring the railroad back to a state of good repair.

CR 2020 IN SF

Plans have been set for the next Cal Rail 2020 at the Canterbury Hotel, 750 Sutter St., San Francisco Saturday, November 6. To make it an unsurpassed gathering, we are planning a Friday night reception and a Sunday tour of all surface Muni Metro lines with a historic car operated by the Market Street Railway.

Space is extremely limited on the Sunday trip. The first 40 persons reserving for the conference and the historic streetcar tour will receive a commemorative poster suitable for framing. All inclusive price until July 1, 2004, \$100. Conference only is \$60.

Don't delay! Send your check to CRF c/o TRAC, 926 J Street, Sacramento CA 95814.

TRAC President Richard Tolmach criticized Britain's privatization for its high subsidies, resulting from the creation of separate track and infrastructure companies. He also pointed out on the positive side that the influx of private capital in Britain by operators like Virgin had resulted in traffic growth. Tolmach cited German and French models as being less destructive, and having clear advantages over the British experiment. He also identified certain sorts of privatization which already have proven out in the U.S., such as the California operation of bus service under contract and Maine's food service on the Downeaster.

Jim Seal, a transportation consultant from Jim Seal Consulting Services, spoke in support of privatization. Citing Japan Rail East and West as examples, he noted that in urban areas with 1 million boarding passengers daily, 65% of services are profitable as private entities. Stockholm, Sweden has privatized its whole transportation system including their busses and trains. In the United States, Seal referenced the MBTA privatization of Boston commuter rail as being a positive model for other urban areas.



Integrating Bicycles with Rail

Chris Quint spoke on behalf of the Los Angeles County Bicycle Coalition, showing how bicycles can be integrated with rail travel. He had traveled with his wife to the Netherlands because his wife wanted "a flat place to ride." During his trip, he took pictures of how well the country has integrated rails and bicycles.

His goal was to remind conference attendees of the need to accommodate wheeled passengers including bikes, strollers, wheelchairs, and hand carts. He found Dutch airports and train stations had good connectivity.

Quint would like to see the United States provide bikeways and walkways to train stations, like European countries do. California has made some strides towards being "biker-friendly" with Long Beach's busses with racks for bikes and the BART system's electrical outlets for electric bike charging.

We need better facilities for strollers, chairs and bikes. Areas on trains designated for bikes should be kept clear of luggage.

Quint suggested the following websites for interested bike advocates: www.calbike.org/, LABikeCoalition.org, BikeLeague.org.

A Vision of Los Angeles' Rail Future

Roger Snoble, Executive Director of Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transit Authority, attended the Conference despite the Gold Line Del Mar Station strike. Snoble said there are 10 million people in Los Angeles County, and most of them were affected by the rail strike in one way or another.

Snoble stated that the state budget crisis had taken \$2 billion from transportation, putting 400 projects on the back burner. He complained that federal money seems to go to San Francisco and San Diego instead of L.A., the leading city in traffic congestion and air pollution.

Problem areas he sees are high speed rail because of the need to fund costly bonds. Snoble instead feels that an emphasis should be placed on smaller projects like the Gold Line extension. Pass holders on LACMTA will see an increased fare in the future, while single trip fares will decrease.

Planning a Connected Network

Mike McGinley, Metrolink's director of engineering, discussed the importance of planning a connected transportation network for Metrolink. He believes that being connected means being informed, and that GPS-based passenger information systems should be utilized



to inform passengers of train arrivals into stations. The "rail to rail" program has boosted ridership from Oxnard to Oceanside, where approximately 1,000 passengers per week have the option of traveling with Amtrak or Metrolink.

One major problem that train travelers incur is the transportation to their final destination from major stops such as LA Union Station, where 50% of travelers connect to the Red Line, 12% to automobiles including private and carpools, 16% bike or walking, and 20% take some form of bus.

Darrell Clarke from Friends 4 Expo Rail focused his talk on the different light rail transit lines around Los Angeles County. In the early 1980's many LRT lines were built, including the Red Line, which later became part of Metrolink's service to Orange County. A line near Interstate 405 has been suggested for several decades, but never has seen funding. In 1989, the LATC mapped a 30-year plan that is still being adhered to today.



California's First Diesel Light Rail Project Gets Moving

Don Bullock, Project Manager of the NCTD Oceanside-Escondido line, spoke on the new train called the Sprinter. The 22-mile, 15-station line upgrades the circa 1886 right of way that will be used for light rail.

The project authorities decided to use Diesel Multiple Unit (DMU) technology to keep the cost down to \$352 million, including \$152 million in federal money and \$200 million in local funds. Smart cards will be used for fare collection, and the first revenue is expected in midyear of 2006.

DMUs use two articulated, or "married pair," cars per set. Fares will be the same as that for the bus at \$1.75. Operating costs will be lower because there is no electric overhead catenary needed. The diesel motors are Mercedes V-12 truck engines with Euro 3 standards on emissions.

A DMU was on tour approximately ten years ago, setting the momentum for the project. Since this project was only for 12 vehicles, there was little interest by manufacturers to bid. In fact, only three companies submitted bids, none of them from the United States. [A contract to purchase 12 Siemens Desiro DMU's was signed by NCTD in March-Editor].

Since this is still a freight line with two or three freights a week at night, there had to be complete separation of light rail passenger from freight. There are plans to build 37 grade crossings, few sound walls (as they have been proven ineffective), and double fencing along the entire 22 miles. For more information, look at their website (part of Coaster site): GoNCTD.com

High Speed Rail Gets Hot

Mike McGinley, Chief Engineer of Metrolink; Dan McNamara, Project Director of California Rail Foundation; Adrian Brandt, TRAC; Michael Kiesling, Regional Alliance for Transit; and Walter Strakosch, USDOT-retired, spoke on a panel discussing the latest developments in California High Speed Rail.

Successful high speed rail has been running in Europe long before the United States has begun to consider it as an alternative to the automobile. Michael

Kiesling examined the question: "If it works there why doesn't it work here?"

High speed rail must operate at a minimum of 200 mph to compete with airplanes and automobiles, and to generate enough revenue to pay for other lines. The Paris to Lyon line in France has covered the expenses of the other lines in the system. High speed rail reduces pollution by 90 percent compared to auto travel and is significantly less than the emissions produced by air travel.

Europe's English Channel line was desired both by the government and the people as ideal for both international and domestic transit. Other high speed rail lines in Europe such as Germany's ICE trains and France's ATV trains travel through many countries in Europe.

Many European nations have united in both the design and construction of new rail lines as a practical way of decreasing operating costs. Kiesling points out that California should be examining the success of Europe's high speed rail lines instead of trying to "reinvent the wheel." He also claims that the California High Speed Rail Authority, while proposing a massive high speed rail project from San Francisco to Los Angeles, is ignoring ways to decrease costs and improve engineering technology.

Wanting the best for the state of California, environmentalists are questioning why Pacheco Pass is being chosen by the California High Speed Rail Authority when the Altamont Pass has been noted as a better alternative.

San Diego: LRT Grows with New Lines and New Cars

James R. Mills, former California Senate President Pro-Tem, believes that solving transportation problems must also focus on spending funds efficiently. In 1974, the California Senate did not want to take away highway money to build light rail transit (LRT) in the state. However, Mills advocated for the city of San Diego to receive funding for LRT as a means of reducing congestion in the most effective way possible. The state Senate began to view transit differently, as most of the state money for public transportation came from the Senate during the term when Mills served.

Tom Larwin, from SANDAG, gave an update with maps of current and future plans for light rail in San Diego. He noted that early 20th century San Diego had a good rail network, and now the city is focusing on a six-mile LRT project called the Mission Valley Expansion, which is expecting its opening day to be in May of 2005. It will benefit land use by going through the center of San Diego State University rather than along the nearby interstates, and will serve over 35,000 students, faculty, and staff in addition to heavy pedestrian traffic. The bus transit on the ground level will connect with the underground LRT at a point where activity centers will be served.

East County will have increased accessibility to activities centers, the University, and downtown San Diego. The Southeast corner of downtown will provide a new central park with three stations. There will also be several mixed-use projects opening in 2005, providing a vertical link between the station and shopping center/residential/business area.

TRAC's Sacramento Office Team: (left to right) Jeanne Sherwood, Office Manager; Rich Tolmach, President; Alan Miller, Executive Director; Lynn Franks, Treasurer; Lauren Hilliard, Intern; and Ted Buehler, Staff Volunteer.



IMAGINARY BART PRE-EMPTS 2004 IMPROVEMENTS

by Michael Kiesling

In March of 2000, the Santa Clara Valley Transportation Authority (VTA) announced plans for an hourly, bi-directional commuter rail line from the Union City BART Station to Diridon Station in San Jose, via Warm Springs, Milpitas/Great Mall, and East San Jose. \$139 million in funding was available, including \$95 million from VTA, with another \$35 million earmarked to buy the right-of-way from the Union Pacific. Service would be up and running by 2003. By August 2000, VTA had authorized orders for 5 locomotives and 17 passenger cars.

One month later, in September 2000, VTA acted to put off implementation of this commuter rail service between Union City BART and San Jose so it could expedite a \$5 billion extension of BART to San Jose, claimed to be buildable by around 2008.

Now it is 2004. How is the BART to San Jose project doing? \$600 million of funds for the project have been eliminated from the state budget and a "Not Recommended" rating letter has arrived from the Federal Transit Administration. With that negative rating, another \$834 million in funds for the project have evaporated.

Does the loss of \$1.4 billion in state and federal funds, along with the recent "Not Recommended" federal rating, mean Silicon Valley leaders are now asking for that March 2000 commuter rail plan, improvidently shelved by VTA, to be revived?

Unfortunately, VTA's decision is clear. Instead of having commuter rail service up and running in practically no time, everyone will wait until after 2025 for the possibility that BART might still somehow be built. That is a stretch of at least 20 years, with no improvement in commuter service.

San Jose Mayor Gonzales said in his 2004 State of the City address, "Imagine San Jose, today, with BART." No matter how hard the entire population of Santa Clara Valley imagines, there is no BART to San Jose today nor will there be in the foreseeable future.

Largely due to Gonzales' leadership, VTA is now selling bonds to pay for \$170 million in preliminary engineering studies for the BART project. Santa Clara County taxpayers are incurring \$170 million in public debt toward a project that will not carry a single passenger for more than 20 years, if indeed it ever does. This is a very expensive fantasy and its unhealthy effects on real life are already plain to see. Santa Clara County has \$325 million promised for Caltrain improvements, including electrification, but they won't pass it on to Caltrain until almost 2020, because they have prioritized hundreds of millions of tax dollars in the immediate future to plan for BART, not to support existing transit.

While VTA's bus service is cut back, while light rail projects are delayed by a decade or more, and Caltrain and Altamont Commuter Express passengers face the possibility of schedule cutbacks, the contractors designing the BART extension continue to draw a steady income from the pockets of the people waiting for the buses and trains that are gone or running on longer headways.

In the words of San Jose Mayor Ron Gonzales, "We missed the train once - we can't miss it again!" VTA and Gonzales' reliance on imaginary transportation for the real, working citizens of Santa Clara Valley will leave them waiting at the curb for many years to come. The train they missed is the train they killed for BART.