

# CAPITOL CHIEF FAULTS U.P. DIS

**By Eugene K. Skoropowski, AIA**

What has happened to the reliability of our Capitol Corridor train service? To borrow a line from The Kingston Trio's 1950's hit song Charlie on the MTA: "These are the times that try men's souls."

This Message is, without a doubt, the most difficult one I have had to write to you - our riders and our customers. A year ago, on-time Capitol Corridor performance was higher than it has ever been, and Union Pacific's dispatching performance was nearly 100%.

How far down have we dropped? From February 1, 2005 right up until February 3, 2006, it has been a downward spiral, with this past October, November and December being bad, and January being particularly horrific. Hundreds of you have written to me asking for an explanation, and asking when you can expect things to get better. I have stayed at the office late most nights so I can read your letters. I apologize to each and every one of you.

You have asked fair questions, and you deserve answers. While I do not have a 'crystal ball' to predict the future, I can tell you what we have done, what we are doing, and I will try to give you a timeline for recovery. First, the ongoing track improvement program (replacement of deteriorated wood ties by Union Pacific crews) between Oakland and San Jose should be completed February 14. I guess we can call that "a St. Valentine's Day present."

While we expected SOME disruption and delay, and we did put out an advance notice telling everyone about it, virtually every train that travels south of Oakland has been delayed, and not just by minutes, but sometimes by hours. Even trains that should NOT have been impacted at all by the trackwork, those that start or end their run in Oakland,

have been badly delayed as well.

Union Pacific Railroad (UPRR) owns the entire 170 miles over which we operate, with the exception of about 2 miles. UPRR dispatchers control Capitol Corridor trains. While Union Pacific's freight business has grown substantially in the last two years, this growth has had a negative impact on the reliability of your passenger service. UPRR's handling of Capitol Corridor trains is not simply a matter of 'convenience' or 'preferential priority' for passenger trains. Union Pacific has a contract to operate our passenger trains at 90% on-time or better. UPRR also has the opportunity to earn an incentive payment when Capitol Corridor trains achieve an on-time monthly average of 92% or better. Disappointingly, no incentive money has been earned by UPRR since January 2005. This is the one check we WANT to write.

When the State of California made its initial \$57 million investment into the then-Southern Pacific (SP, now UPRR) tracks between Oakland and Sacramento, on-time contractual provisions were included. Since then, the State through the CCJPA, has invested about another \$60 million in capacity and reliability improvements to UPRR property along the Oakland-San Jose and across Yolo Causeway.

These capital investments were made with the concurrence and support of UPRR, and each publicly funded project included a provision to accommodate additional growth of UPRR's freight business. The public now owns the right to operate 22 trains in each direction between Oakland and Sacramento. Only 16 of those slots are currently being utilized, and with the proposed Capitol Corridor train service increases in late August, 20 of the 22 publicly owned slots will be utilized.

UPRR has an obligation to the people of this state, who have paid for the improvements to UPRR's property and facilities, to

operate these passenger trains at least 90% on-time, as per their contract, and on the schedule to which UPRR previously agreed.

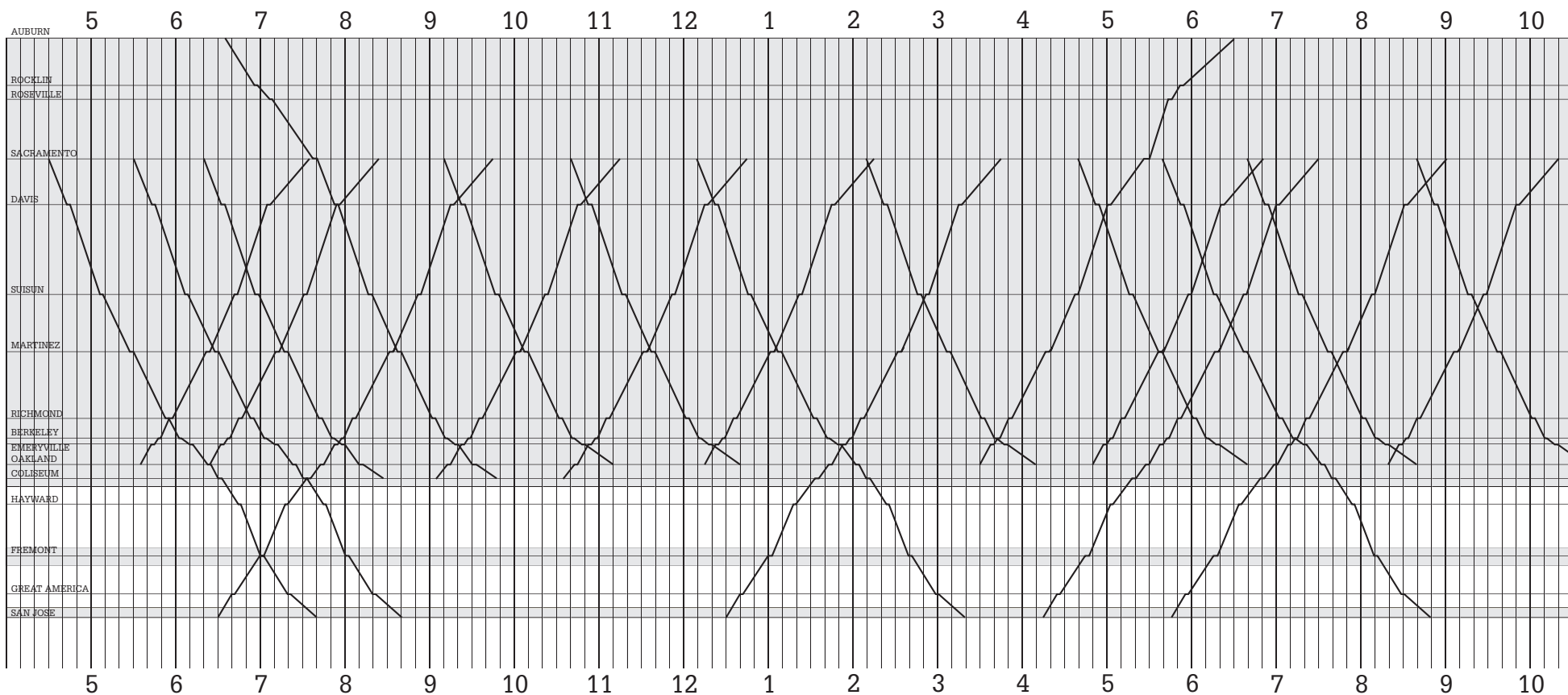
Two years ago, almost to the day, UPRR crews completed building a second track across Yolo Causeway, eliminating the last major single track congestion point between Oakland and Sacramento. Everyone benefited from this investment. The following April, we reduced travel time by 10 minutes between Oakland and Sacramento, thereby getting Capitol Corridor passenger trains out of the way of freight trains 240 more minutes per day than in the previous schedule. The CCJPA's top priority for funding is now the installation of a universal crossover at the west end of the Yolo Causeway, a project that was planned but not initially constructed due to limited state capital dollars available when the second track across the Causeway was being built.

What happened to UPRR's Capitol Corridor performance following the April 2004 schedule change? The service never ran so well. UPRR delivered our trains on time for eight consecutive months at 90% or better, to you, our customers. UPRR's dispatching performance was between 96% and 98% on time.

However, since February 2005, that top quality service performance has continually eroded, and is still in decline. During this entire time period, there was no change to the number of scheduled Capitol Corridor trains. Our train frequency is the same as it was in April 2003. January 2006 brought new havoc: rain, mudslides between Martinez and Pinole, and a BNSF track 'blitz' in the Central Valley that caused BNSF freights to be added to UPRR freights out of Oakland.

What have we done to try to improve the situation? We have continued regular meetings with UPRR through the Corridor

## Capitol Corridor Weekday Service (Gray Shading=Double Track)



### EDITOR'S NOTE

How does a double-track railroad with brand-new bidirectional CTC signalling get clogged enough to delay passenger trains on schedules which average only 43 mph?

As is evident in the string chart above, the service operated by the Capitol Corridor has been immaculately designed for clean meets to put minimal stress on the Union Pacific. Only one of 35 meets on the chart requires two Capitol Corridor trains to

meet on a siding. The additional flexibility of bidirectional CTC, allowing overtaking moves, was supposed to virtually eliminate freight-related delays.

March on-time results were about 80 percent, the first time since September that the trains had an even vaguely acceptable punctuality. Ridership growth ceased during winter, but this was partially caused by parking problems at the Sacramento Amtrak depot, a crisis also precipitated by Union Pacific Railroad decisions.

Railroad attitudes have a lot to do with whether the Capitol Corridor ridership grows in response to the next sets of service improvements. Four trips to be added in August use the largely-single-track Union Pacific line between Oakland and San Jose.

Passengers have reason to worry about the timekeeping. Unlike the existing Sacramento-Oakland segment, there is plenty of scope for the railroad to sabotage the new single-track service, without such obvious fingerprints.