

California Rail News

Sacramento, CA

November-December 2002

Gunn Hails Capitols Upgrade

ONE MILLION MORE ANNUAL RIDERS ON ROUTE SEEN BY 2008

Amtrak President David Gunn rode a combination of long haul trains and the Capitol Corridor to Oakland's Jack London Square station at the beginning of October to announce an \$88 million, 14-month project to improve Amtrak track and stations on the south end of the route. Calling the Capitol Corridor a model for the nation, he told local officials he's optimistic about Amtrak's prospects.

"It's one of the best kept secrets in the country, how much California has supported passenger rail. You're doing it right. It's an example that should be followed by the rest of the country," Gunn said.

The project will improve tracks on the neglected portion of the Capitol Corridor, between Oakland and San Jose, where there currently are only four round trips weekdays because of Union Pacific demands for siding augmentation. Funding will come from a combination of Alameda County sales tax revenues and Caltrans public transportation account funds.

Over the next 14 months, the hope is to increase the number of daily trains to seven and perhaps 11. Gene Skoropowski, Capitol Corridor Joint Powers Authority chief, says the improvement work will double the number of passengers, adding one million a year.

BART connectivity, currently limited to the Richmond joint station, will become more convenient, with new joint Amtrak-BART stations at Oakland Coliseum and Union City. The Union City station could become a key link for commuters heading from BART to Santa Clara on Capitol Corridor trains. A new station would also be built in Fremont. The Coliseum site is notable for its planned monorail which by 2008, would connect Amtrak to Oakland International Airport.

The Capitol Corridor, fastest growing Amtrak route in the U.S., provides needed proof for Gunn that if you provide more passenger trains, the public will ride in quantity. Amtrak has been hungry for positive news as the Acela scandal drained its finances and tried Congressional patience on Amtrak funding. Skoropowski, an old colleague of



President Gunn faces Bay news cameras at Oakland event to publicize new Capitol Corridor improvements. Photo: trainweb.com

Gunn's from Boston, has managed to obtain record-breaking ridership on a route that Caltrans officials once complained was unmarketable. With the projected increases in ridership, it would surpass the Pacific Surfliner corridor to become the strongest rail corridor west of Washington, D.C.

Gunn, asked about high speed rail proposals, has tended to downplay their immediate significance. To save Amtrak, Gunn said, "we need to achieve modest victories in new ... corridors," not try to mimic Japan and Europe with bullet trains. The Capitol Corridor projects fit in that category, making expanded use of existing rail equipment and tracks. Gunn has named former Amtrak-West CEO Gil Mallery to head up the corridor development effort nationwide.

With a looming gap between its needed \$1.2 billion annual funding and the \$700 million recommended by the U.S. House of Representatives, Gunn says he has to do practical things to get sidelined equipment running and stay focused on keeping the current system alive.

INSIDE

PAGE 3
GUNN FACES
BUDGET THREATS,
REORGANIZATION

PAGE 5
BUS FEEDER
REFORM BEGINS

PAGE 7
PASADENA LINE
FINALLY MAKES IT

TRAC
Train Riders
Association
of California

926 J Street, Suite 612
Sacramento, CA 95814

Address Correction Requested