

CAL RAIL 2020 INSPIRES 100 IN SAN FRANCISCO

Highlights from San Francisco California Rail 2020 Sessions compiled by Lauren Hilliard.

On Saturday, November 6, 2004, train advocates came together at the Canterbury Hotel in San Francisco, California to examine how to establish better rail connections linking its northern and southern regions in the future. "California Rail 2020," a conference sponsored by Train Riders Association of California (TRAC) and the California Rail Foundation, featured a dozen speakers who presented the current state of progress on upgrading existing rail corridors and detailed plans for the future.

The non-profit's Executive Director, Alan Miller, opened the Conference by expressing his desire for TRAC to be more of a pro-active organization versus one which only responds to insufficient projects and poor government backing. Being pro-active would include seeking out friendly legislators and capital for rail projects statewide. The projects presented at this conference are a few examples of good rail systems in the State that rail advocates can pro-actively support by writing members of Congress and encouraging increased ridership.

CalTrain's Baby Bullet Project: An Extreme Makeover

Chuck Harvey, Chief Operating Officer for CalTrain, spoke on the popular new Baby Bullet service between San Francisco and San Jose. He addressed ridership, the six-month review period process that will make suggestions for improvement and expansion of the service, operation challenges and flexibility from the operations perspective.

In 1992, CalTrain assumed control of stations and rails with 15,000 daily riders. They have since had a peak ridership at 35,609 in the year 2001 and continue to strive toward higher revenue with faster, more efficient trains.

The main objective for the Baby Bullet is to offer a mode of transport competitive with the automobile along this route. Harvey noted that ways to achieve this include increasing the speed of the line, maximizing investments in infrastructure, and doubling weekend service.

In addition to these goals, CalTrain has built passing tracks, remodeled stations, improved access and structures, and made train control enhancements. CalTrain has also saved money by replacing conductor/onboard ticket sales with automated Proof-of-Payment fare collection machines. Improved marketing and the redesigning of the timetables for the Baby Bullet has also improved CalTrain's public image.

After two years of service interruption because of upgrade construction on weekends, CalTrain has regained its previous weekend ridership. Now revenues are up and CalTrain has record on-time performance. Parking revenues are up as well, with high demand at key stops. Mr. Harvey detailed efforts to obtain parking for commuters by sharing underutilized lots owned by other operators.



Coast Route Service Plans

Pete Rodgers, from the Central California Coast Rail Council and San Luis Obispo Council of Governments, addressed the status of a revived "Daylight" train between Los Angeles and San Francisco, efforts to revive a "Lark/Spirit of California" overnight coast rail service, Surfliner service expansion to San Luis Obispo, and improved buses on the San Luis Obispo - Bay Area route.

The San Luis Obispo Council of Governments is the Region's Metropolitan Planning Organization, with one-eighth of the agency's resources dedicated to rail services. One of the agency's endeavors is revival of the Coast Daylight, projected to cost \$12 million and generate \$7 million in revenue. While this service still needs more equipment, a railroad ownership agreement, and additional funding, plans for this 21-stop train are in progress.

This train would leave San Francisco at 7:20 a.m. and arrive in Los Angeles at 7:00 p.m., with extended service to San Diego arriving at 10:00 p.m. It would then leave Los Angeles at 7:50 a.m. and arrive in San Francisco at 7:20 p.m. The study estimated 216,200 passengers per year.

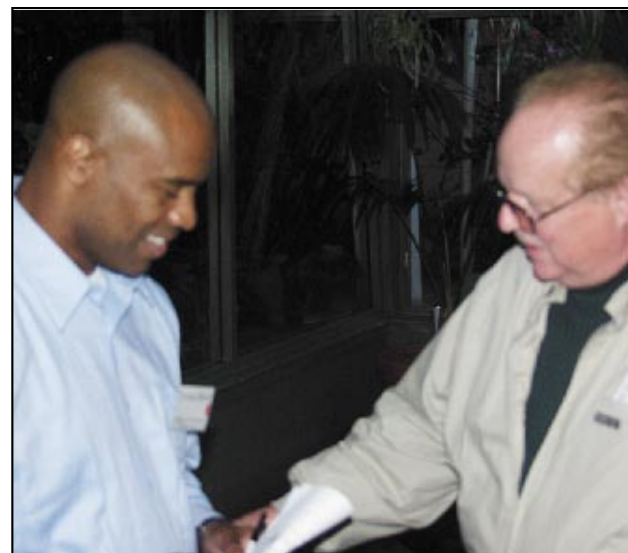
Rogers announced the November 17 start of a second Pacific Surfliner service Los Angeles to San Luis Obispo, noting that it has a San Francisco bus that could eventually become a train. A comparison with the Coast Starlight times is available at the SLOCOG website: www.slocog.org/reports/coastdaylight-plan.pdf

In response to a question regarding bus connections to San Simeon for the new train, Rogers noted that free same-day local bus service is available by showing the Amtrak ticket.

Rogers noted that 47% of the train delays are caused by interference with other Amtrak or commuter trains. Other reasons for delay include freight interference, signaling issues, speed restrictions, routing, mechanical problems, and passenger-related delays.



CR 2020's banquet in greenhouse dining area at the Canterbury featured a presentation by Tyrone Bland of Amtrak, below with Board Member Neil Bjornsen (right).



The November Election and Amtrak's Funding Crisis

At the lunch session, Tyrone Bland, Amtrak's Director of Government Affairs-West, spoke during lunch on the state of Amtrak, long-distance routes serving California, the California Rail Program, and working with Amtrak's CEO David Gunn.

He also addressed the challenges of representing the five western states on a federal level due to difficulties with obtaining government funding. Last year Amtrak requested \$1.85 billion for capital and operational costs, and received approximately half of that from Congress.

This year Amtrak is working with the political reality that Congress is only willing to offer Amtrak a maximum amount of \$1.2 billion, and President Bush is only willing to offer a maximum amount of \$900 million. As a result, David Gunn has asked the Amtrak board to request funds from the federal government in the amount of \$1.5 billion - a still insufficient, but more politically feasible quantity.

While Amtrak has reached record revenue and ridership numbers in 2004, the company is still facing the possibility of shutdown with the President's proposed funds of \$900 million. The requested \$1.2 billion from Congress would only be enough to keep trains running, with little to repair aging track and cars.

Mr. Bland said he wanted to give us good news, but the picture was anything but rosy. Funding prospects are bleak, but citizen letters and calls to Congress really are effective.

Chuck Harvey (left) of CalTrain gave an update on Baby Bullet progress. At right, Board Members Jim Mills (left) and Gerry Cauthen share lunch.

At the end of his talk, we were saddened to learn that Mr. Bland had just submitted his letter of resignation, to return to a consulting practice in Sacramento. Tyrone is a true believer and has been a great asset to Amtrak.

Planning the Future San Francisco Transbay Terminal

Maria Ayerdi, Executive Director of the Transbay Terminal Joint Powers Authority gave a presentation on the vision for the new San Francisco Transbay Terminal / CalTrain Downtown Extension / Redevelopment Plan, mandated by the passage of Measure H. She portrayed what it will be like to travel into and through San Francisco in the coming decades via the safe, clean, and efficient Transbay Terminal, which will be located at 1st and Mission Streets.

This massive inter-modal project will serve as the "Grand Central Station" to San Francisco and will bring more jobs, improve the surrounding area, prepare the way for high-speed trains, and act as a great example of a "Transit-Oriented Development." Included in the Terminal's plans are regional transit systems like MUNI, CalTrain, Greyhound, Amtrak, BART, and AC Transit - entering the station on different levels of the building for greater convenience. Additionally, plans are included for 3,400 new housing units (1,200 affordable), retail shops, and a large hotel outside the terminal.

The 40 acre Terminal is projected to have 28 million passengers a year, with a station completion date of 2013 and redevelopment completion date of 2024. The Transbay Terminal Joint Powers Authority will be advocating to help pass funding initiatives, one of which is included in the November 2006 Bond Measure for the State's High-Speed Rail project from Los Angeles to San Francisco.

More information about the SF Transbay Terminal Project can be found at: www.transbayproject.org

High-Speed Rail Panel

Melissa Hippard, Director, Loma Prieta Chapter of the Sierra Club

Dan McNamara, Board Member, TRAC
Richard Tolmach, President, TRAC
Stuart Flashman, TRAC Legal Counsel
Michael Kiesling, Board Member, TRAC
Adrian Brandt, Board Member, TRAC

Melissa Hippard's Loma Prieta Chapter has been the lead group within the Sierra Club to confront the High-Speed Rail Authority over environmental issues. Because of corridor alignment and environmental concerns, the public review period for the California High-Speed Train Draft Environmental Impact Report/Statement (EIR/EIS) was extended from April to August of 2004. Hippard organized members of the organization to create a 100-page formal response to the EIR/EIS, specifically asking the Authority to eliminate the corridor alignment through Henry Coe State Park and consider further analysis of the



Altamont Pass Option in the Final EIR/EIS.

The Sierra Club believes that with the most environmentally-friendly corridor option, a statewide high-speed rail network in conjunction with "smart growth" and "transit-oriented developments" is an excellent idea. Hippard also noted that the Governor is resistant to the idea of any big infrastructure project, and that a coalition of businesses and environmental groups will be needed to support the November 2006 bond measure.

Other members on the panel stressed the importance of doing further analysis for the Altamont Pass in the Final EIR/EIS. TRAC board members also noted that while a statewide high-speed rail network is necessary, the project should utilize the best possible corridor alignment options and that building a system without examining all the viable routes could cause great financial harm to California.

Innovation on Altamont Commuter Express

Jonathan Garzoli and Brian Schmidt, Administrative and Operations Directors for the Altamont Commuter Express (ACE), spoke on running California's only conventional rail system operated completely outside of the Amtrak structure. They also explored possibilities for ACE service including Modesto, Sacramento, a connection to BART, and service over a restored Dumbarton rail bridge.

ACE was the first commuter rail service in the country to provide free Wi-Fi Internet. They have partnered with the University of Phoenix, which supplies the wireless technology in exchange for a specialty "study car" for the students. ACE's goal is to have an instructor onboard to assist students in this car.

A "Buddy Referral Program" has been instigated, attracting 30 new people per month. This program gives commuters 50% off a monthly ticket when they refer a friend. Online ticketing, including printing of tickets at home or business, is unique to commuter rail and eliminates the need for onboard ticket collecting. The food and beverage vendor for the train pays passengers to operate the

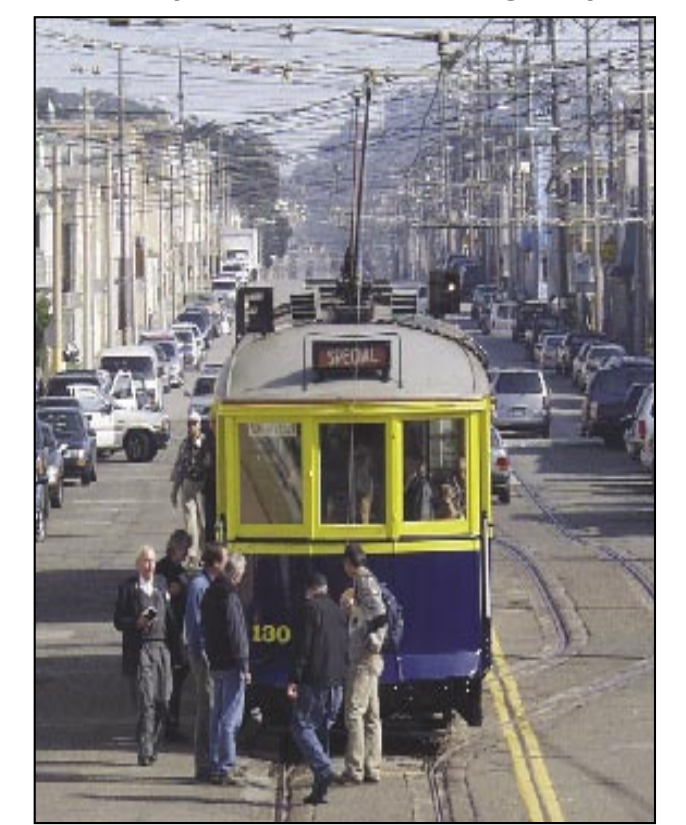
Board Members Bill McGeehan and Rich Tolmach talk trains on Taraval Street.

onboard service, while ACE allows these passengers to ride free.

Future plans for ACE include expansion into the Central Valley. Because there is no existing commuter rail line along the 99 corridor, ACE plans on creating a Central Valley Express route from Modesto to Sacramento that would take approximately 1 1/2 hours. New rail stations would include Ripon, Galt, Elk Grove, and 65th Street Sacramento.



Refreshments and frequent photo stops made for a pleasant time on Sunday's MUNI tour. Iron Monster in resplendent blue and yellow at the Great Highway.



NEXT YEAR'S CONFERENCE IS AT THE BURBANK AIRPORT HILTON OCTOBER 15 PLEASE MARK YOUR CALENDARS!