

# WHEEL CLICKS

Pacific Railroad Society Inc.

JANUARY 2012

## THE PRS DEPOT IN MINIATURE by DAVID HOUSH

The Pacific Railroad Museum printing needs have been most ably handled of late by Quality Instant Printing, located right in the middle of downtown San Dimas – just a short walk when we need its services. I noticed in late November that two QIP employees were working on a model project for their firm’s holiday window display. Little did I realize at the time that they were creating a model of our own depot and its surroundings.

Employees Lori Wood and Stuart Matsudo are the folks responsible for this endeavor. They tell me that they came over and took photographs, which they then used to create this fine model and layout. We thank them for this creative effort.

The photographs are on back page.

## MUSEUM NEWS by DAVID HOUSH, Museum Curator

November was a busy month at the Pacific Railroad Museum. **Tom Geer** has been instrumental in relocating one of our storage units to a more convenient location. **Bob Washburn** is cataloging a set of Ralph Melching photos. **Marlene Osborn** continues to enter Dan Dalke’s book collection into the computer, and the books are either placed in the library or surplus for sale to the public. **Pete Balch** has been transferring our VHS collection to more reliable DVDs. **Russ Davies** and **Jim Baker** have been working on a program for our Christmas Party, and **Larry Aandahl** has been the one organizing this extravaganza.

Of late, I have been reorganizing and upgrading our Museum displays. I have long realized that our dining car china collection was a bit incomplete. Yes, the B&O china looks nice, but we had nothing representing Santa Fe, Fred Harvey restaurants, or the Harvey girls. And the last I checked, we are in a former Santa Fe depot! So I am working to rectify this deficiency among other things. But as you may realize, authentic railroad-stamped china is rare and expensive. So if any members have pieces they would be willing to donate to the Museum for display, your contribution would be appreciated. Contact me if you want to help us in this regard. We are also in need of additional SP china.

Our visitor count is up significantly since a newspaper article about us appeared over the past weeks in several area newspapers. We were just short of 200 visitors for the month of November, the record high since I have been around.

Finally, I have just had a quantity of brochures printed using **Andy Novak’s** latest design. The result is a sharp-looking professional brochure which will enhance the image of our society. Here’s wishing you a rewarding New Year!

## U.S. STAUNCH IN BACKING BULLET TRAIN

The Obama administration vowed on December 15 at a House committee meeting in Washington that it would not back down from its support of California’s bullet train support

despite attacks from critics who alleged it is tainted by political corruption. “We are not going to flinch on that support,” said Joseph Szabo, chief of the Federal Railroad Administration.

Szabo said that his agency had committed itself to provide \$3.3 billion for a construction start next year in the Central Valley and that federal law prevents any change of mind about where to begin building the first segment of the state’s high-speed rail system. “The worst thing we could do is make obligations to folks and start to renege on our word,” Szabo told the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee.

Szabo was grilled repeatedly about why the project was starting in the least populated region the route traverses. Szabo said it was the state’s application that determined where the money would be spent. But that characterization of the decision-making process was sharply disputed by Rep. Devin Nunes (R-Tulare), whose district would be served by the rail line. Nunes led a charge of Republican criticism of the effort and claims that it would create tens of thousands of jobs.

“It is clear that high-speed rail is not about jobs,” Nunes said. “It is about corruption, public deception, and bureaucratic experimentation. Nunes said the federal rail agency made a \$700-million grant for the Central Valley construction segment on the eve of the 2010 election to benefit a local congressman. The comment appeared to be aimed at Rep. Jim Costa (D-Fresno).

Roelof van Ark, the rail authority’s chief executive, defended the decision to start in the Central Valley, saying high-speed rail systems around the world conventionally start construction in the center of their lines rather than at the end points. He cited the need to have a long section of rail to test the equipment before trains could run. “There is no where else in the country you could do this,” he said.

Szabo’s insistence that the federal government will not back down from its funding plan for the project was also a target of lawmakers. Rep. Jeff Denham (R-Atwater) repeatedly questioned whether the federal rail agency would allow California to spend the \$3.3 billion in grants if the state’s own funding under the \$9.9-billion bond measure stopped. Denham is among a group of House Republicans trying to put a freeze on any federal spending and even to claw back existing grants. At the same time, legal questions are growing about whether the rail project conforms to the requirements of the 2008 voter-approved bond measure.

In a separate action, the Bakersfield City Council adopted a resolution on the 14th opposing the entire high-speed rail project. The city joins a growing number of municipalities and agencies across the state that have expressed opposition or concerns about the project.

[Info. from *Los Angeles Times*]



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**JANUARY 2012 VOLUME 75, NO. 10**

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Published monthly by **PACIFIC RAILROAD SOCIETY, INC.** The Society is a California chartered, nonprofit organization of those who share an interest in railroad operations, travel and history. Address and telephone are the same as for Pacific Railroad Museum.

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**PACIFIC RAILROAD MUSEUM** is operated by Pacific Railroad Society at 210 W. Bonita Ave., San Dimas, CA 91773. Telephone: (909) 394-0616. Museum e-mail: PRSTrainman@aol.com Open Saturdays: 10 a.m.-4 p.m.; Mondays: 12-5 p.m.; Wednesdays: 1-5 p.m.

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### PRS NEWS — ARRIVALS & DEPARTURES

Jan. 2, 9, 16 PRM open, Mondays, 12:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.  
 23, 30 210 W. Bonita Ave., San Dimas.  
 Jan. 4, 11, PRM open Wednesdays, 12:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.  
 18, 25 210 W. Bonita Ave., San Dimas.  
 Jan. 6 PRS Board Meeting, 7:30 p.m. Valencia Room,  
 Friday Joslyn Center., 210 N. Chapel Ave, Alhambra.  
 Jan. 7, 14, PRM open Saturdays, 10:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.  
 21, 28 210 W. Bonita Ave., San Dimas.  
 Jan. 13 PRS Membership Meeting, 7:00 p.m., Alhambra  
 Friday Rm., Joslyn Ctr., 210 N. Chapel Ave., Alhambra.

### PROGRAMS

by **RUSS DAVIES**

January 13: **Another great DVD from Tom Grose. "High Speed Trains" we'll ride at speeds up to 150 MPH on the fastest trains in North America! Be there, and bring digital briefs!**

### MEMBERSHIP REPORT

by **VIRGINIA GRUPP**

At the Board Meeting on December 2, 2011, there were no

late renewals, while new members voted in then and their numbers were: Michael Nell, 441; Scott Mayer, 442; Leslie Mayer, 443.

### CORRECTIONS and ADDITIONS

Dec.-Page 1, Col. 1, Paragraph 4. The society was founded by Marti Ann's father, uncle, and four other men in 1936.

Per Director Ken Ruben, effective December 18, 2011: The Big Jump Coffee Shop (formerly Denny's and Nibblers) is now a 24/7 operation until further notice. This is the restaurant to the east of Union Station and the Metro Office Building (Gateway Plaza).

### AAR DECEMBER STORED FREIGHT CARS REPORT

by **CHARLES VARNES**

The Association of American Railroads reported that as of December 1, 2011, 263,912 freight cars were in storage, an increase of 2,217 from November 1 and equal to 17.3 percent of the North American fleet, excluding cars without a load since before 2005.

For the first 11 months of 2011 the number of freight cars stored (and the percentage of the fleet) was: January, 316,271 (20.8); February, 318,773 (20.9); March, 306,316 (20.2); April, 283,649 (18.7); May, 276,228 (18.2); June, 279,083 (18.4); July, 276,236 (18.2); August, 276,943 (18.2); September, 271,404 (17.8); October, 260,317 (17.1); November, 261,695 (17.2).

In July 2009, 1.603 million cars were in the fleet, including cars without a load since before 2005. From July 2009 through November 2011, 56,579 new cars were installed, while 124,823 cars were scrapped or otherwise removed, yielding a net reduction of 68,244 cars in the North American fleet.

527,060 cars were in storage on July 1, 2009 (including cars that haven't moved since before 2005). By December 1, 2011, that was down to 276,278, for a reduction of 250,782. Subtracting the 124,823 cars scrapped or otherwise removed yields 125,959 cars returned to service.

[Info. from AAR Rail Time Indicators]

### PASSENGER TRAIN UPDATES by **CHARLES VARNES** **AMTRAK**

Free Wi-On Launched On California Trains

Amtrak and its California passenger rail partners on November 28 launched free Wi-Fi service on all three state-supported routes. The launch coincided with "Cyber Monday," the busiest Internet holiday shopping day of the year, allowing passengers onboard to shop online.

Using any laptop computer or Wi-Fi enabled device, passengers traveling on the *Capitol Corridor* (Auburn-Sacramento-Emeryville/SF-Oakland-San Jose), *San Joaquin* (Sacramento-Oakland-Bakersfield), and *Pacific Surfliner* (San Diego-LA-Santa Barbara-San Luis Obispo) trains now can connect to the Internet through AmtrakConnectSM for general Web surfing and using e-mail. Passengers also can use the Wi-Fi service to access corporate networks through most standard Virtual Private Networks (VPN), turning train trips into productive work time.

California state passenger rail agencies funded the implementation of Wi-Fi by reinvesting cost savings from prior completed

rail projects, further improving the attractiveness of this green travel mode.

In Amtrak's fiscal year 2011, more than 5.5 million passengers rode the three California state-supported trains, up about 7.5 percent over the previous year. California ridership represents nearly 20 percent of all Amtrak passengers. Wi-Fi service has been the most requested amenity by passengers using these trains and experience on other WiFi-enabled intercity routes indicates that more people are enticed to travel on WiFi-enabled trains.

While Wi-Fi service has long been a priority for Amtrak, the biggest obstacle to providing Internet connectivity on trains is the limited bandwidth available through third-party cellular data networks along many routes, which provides the backhaul connection for on-board Wi-Fi. Amtrak is continuing to explore ways to expand that coverage through talks with cellular companies. Importantly, the AmtrakConnect technology is designed in a way that enables it to take advantage of technology improvements such as faster 4G speeds, as they become available along the routes.

As a result of the launch of Wi-Fi on the California state-supported routes, trains that carry nearly 75 percent of all Amtrak passengers across the country now have Wi-Fi connections. Wi-Fi service is already available on high-speed *Acela Express* trains and 12 other East Coast routes as well as on the *Amtrak Cascades* service in the Pacific Northwest.

**Trains and Stations Offering Amtrak Connect Wi-Fi Trains**

*Acela Express, Adirondack\*, Amtrak Cascades, Capitol Corridor, Carolinian, Coast Starlight* - available for Sleeping Car passengers in the *Pacific Parlour Car* only, *Downeaster, Empire Service, Ethan Allen Express, Keystone, Maple Leaf\*, New Haven - Springfield Shuttle, Northeast Regional, Pacific Surfliner, Palmetto\*, Pennsylvanian\*, San Joaquin, Vermonter.*

\* Wi-Fi is available in select cars on these trains. Look for the hot spot sticker on the window for verification.

**Stations**

Baltimore, MD - Penn Station, Boston, MA - South Station - available inside *ClubAcela* only, Lorton, VA, New York, NY - Penn Station - available in the gate areas and inside *ClubAcela*, Philadelphia, PA - 30th Street Station - available in the gate areas and inside *ClubAcela*, Providence, RI, Sanford, FL, Washington, DC - Union Station - available in the gate areas and inside *ClubAcela*, Westwood, MA - Route 128, Wilmington, DE - Wilmington Station.

**Thanksgiving Holiday Ridership**

Amtrak reported a new ridership record for the Thanksgiving 2011 holiday travel week, an estimated 720,000 passengers.

Comparing Thanksgiving 2011 to Thanksgiving 2010, there was an estimated 2.2 percent increase in ridership nationwide. The previous Thanksgiving ridership record was set in 2010 with 704,446 passengers. This year's Thanksgiving holiday travel week extended from Nov. 22 through Nov. 28.

In preparation for the anticipated heavy passenger volume, Amtrak operated every available passenger rail car in its fleet and scheduled extra trains to accommodate additional passengers in the Northeast and on the West Coast. The Amtrak equipment fleet was slightly larger this year due to rehabilitated and refurbished railcars and locomotive engines that were recently

restored to service.

**Historical On-Time Performance**

The November, 2011 historical on-time performance percentages for selected routes were:

Route	November 2011	October 2011	Last 12 months
Sunset Limited	73.1%	73.1%	73.9%
Texas Eagle	72.6%	72.6%	51.3%
Heartland Flyer	*	62.9%	*
Southwest Chief	75.0%	72.6%	69.3%
California Zephyr	25.0%	32.3%	33.5%
Empire Builder	57.1%	63.7%	43.9%
Coast Starlight	95.0%	82.3%	79.3%
City of New Orleans	78.3%	82.3%	78.9%
Pacific Surfliner	74.2%	77.5%	77.0%
San Joaquin	*	90.1%	*
Capitol Corridor	94.0%	93.6%	94.2%
Amtrak Cascades	*	82.7%	*
Illinois Service	36.3%	77.0%	27.6%
Michigan Services	36.3%	42.3%	27.6%
Hiawatha	*	91.0%	*
Missouri River Runner	95.8%	77.4%	84.5%
Acela Express	90.5%	87.9%	84.9%
Northeast Regional	84.2%	83.3%	80.8%

\* Not available at column deadline.

[Info. from Ken Ruben, Ed Von Nordeck]

**RAILCAR RECOMMENDED FOR HISTORIC LIST**

The National Historic Landmarks Committee is recommending that the McKeen Motor Car at the Nevada State Railroad Museum be listed as a national landmark. Nevada Historic Preservation Officer Ron James said if the nomination is accepted, it will be the first piece of railroad equipment to win a place on the list of National Historic Landmarks.

About 160 McKeen Motor Cars were built from 1905 to 1920. The motor car at the museum in Carson City was used on the Virginia & Truckee Railway. It was retired in 1945 and converted into a restaurant and then retail space.

[Info. from *Las Vegas Review-Journal* via Fletcher Swan]

**CALTRAIN NEWS**

by **MIKE GONDON**

In spite of the depressed economy, Caltrain ridership and revenue continue to improve. Total ridership for September was 1.2 million, an 11 percent increase over 2010. Total revenue was nearly \$5.0 million, a 24.6 percent increase over 2010. Ridership on Caltrain's connecting shuttles was up 22.2 percent from last year. The increase is part of an overall increase in the use of public transit that is being attributed to people trying to reduce their spending on gas, bridge tolls, and parking, among other things.

On Thanksgiving Day, November 24, Caltrain ran a special train from San Francisco to San Jose for participants in that city's annual Turkey Trot run/walk footrace. The Turkey Trot, which has 5k and 10k events, has been gaining popularity every year and this year featured around 20,000 participants. The special train left San Francisco at 6:07 a.m. and arrived in San Jose at 7:15 a.m., making only limited stops along the way. The race began at 7:50 a.m.

On New Year's Eve, Caltrain will run a number of special trains. One Special will be run for fans attending the Kraft Fight Hunger Bowl football game at AT&T Park in San Francisco. It will leave 15 minutes after the game ends. Later that evening, four special trains will be run for partygoers and celebrants attending the New Year's fireworks display in San Francisco. The trains will depart at 12:45, 1:15, 1:45, and 2:15 a.m. As is the case every year, Caltrain will offer free rides from 11:00 p.m., December 31, until 3:30 a.m., January 1.

One holiday tradition that once again wasn't celebrated this year is the Toys for Tots Holiday train. From 2001 through 2009, the decorated train ran down the Peninsula collecting toys for the United States Marine Corps Reserve's Toys for Tots program. Last year, the train was suspended due to budget constraints and that continued this year.

In place of the train, SamTrans and Caltrain hosted a toy drive at SamTrans headquarters in San Carlos on November 28, then hosted a Toy Drive booth at the Hometown Holidays event in downtown Redwood City on December 3. While certainly more economical than the Holiday train, these events seem like a poor substitution for what was probably Caltrain's most popular public relations vehicle.

On November 26, Saturday Baby Bullet train No. 801, loaded with 320 passengers, mostly Christmas shoppers on their way to San Francisco, fatally struck a trespasser at the California Avenue station in Palo Alto, an unscheduled stop. The death was the fourteenth of the year for Caltrain and disrupted train traffic for nearly three hours.

#### **LAS VEGAS MONORAIL NOT TO EXIT BANKRUPTCY**

Let the Las Vegas Monorail serve as a cautionary tale to all who see train-style transportation as a critical transit need – especially the backers of the planned DesertXpress line to Victorville, California. The lesson: Construction debt, which tends to keep projects from penciling out, won't simply go away. On November 18, a federal judge slapped down the monorail's plan to exit Chapter 11 bankruptcy because terms that took two years to negotiate merely prolong the route's death.

Since the monorail began service in 2004, it has carried just enough riders to cover operational costs. But the company never collected enough revenue to pay interest and principal on the tax-exempt bonds sold to finance the line. How slim is the monorail's margin? The reorganization plan reduced \$658 million in debt to \$40.4 million, and the 3.9-mile line still had no prayer of paying that back, let alone covering maintenance costs in the decade ahead.

"The monorail essentially asks the court to allow it to float along until it sinks, suggesting that when it ultimately sinks, the court need not concern itself with how creditors will make it onto the life raft – or even whether there will be a life raft available," U.S. Bankruptcy Court Judge Bruce Markell wrote. "The court declines this invitation."

The monorail's plan for survival boiled down to finding a new group of investors brave enough to finance an extension to McCarran International Airport, receiving a federal bailout, or both. Perhaps the monorail will live on under different ownership – and not a local government takeover. The company lacks the money to demolish the line. If it's ordered to cease opera-

tions, maybe a buyer would be willing to risk fractions of pennies on the dollar for the chance to run it. Without any debt, it might have a chance.

And that's the big reason why so many advocates of high-speed rail insist that the federal government get behind large-scale train projects across the country, either through taxpayer-backed loans or giveaways. Unfortunately, Washington never worries about getting paid back.

But just last week, Congress voted to kill \$8 billion President Obama had sought as a down payment on a nationwide high-speed rail network, largely because lawmakers realized such projects always cost far more than promised and quickly turn into money losers.

That hasn't yet held back the DesertXpress proposal, a \$6 billion, 200-mile, high-speed line that could start construction as soon as next year. Federal dollars have long been part of the project's financial plan, along with private money. The train has been compared to the monorail because of a route that appears to be limiting. At least taxpayers weren't forced to invest in the monorail. We'd prefer the DesertXpress were funded exclusively by private investors as well. Washington has too big a balance on its credit card as it is.

We hope the DesertXpress proves everyone wrong. If it doesn't, future rail champions will have another cautionary tale to consider – one that makes the monorail seem minuscule by comparison.

[Info. from *Las Vegas Review-Journal* via Fletcher Swan]

#### **BNSF'S RAILYARD EXPANSION DRAWS CRITICISM**

BNSF Railway Co.'s proposed near-dock intermodal railyard expansion – the Southern California Intermodal Gateway (SCIG) is supposed to eliminate truck traffic to Hobart Yard in Commerce. But the 710 Freeway expansion plans continue, and six years of community objections have largely been ignored in the draft environmental impact report which had public hearings on November 10 and 16.

'The joint ports' Clean Air Action Plan – in its infancy when the process formally began in 2006 – has dramatically changed the atmospherics, and BNSF accordingly helped pack the meeting with construction trades workers wearing t-shirts touting "Clean Air and "Less Traffic" along with jobs. But the atmospherics were sharply at odds with the underlying reality, and opponents continued to insist that on-dock alternatives would mean just as many jobs, with much less pollution for a severely health-impacted community of color.

First off, the project isn't as green as it purports to be. Peter Greenwald of the South Coast Air Quality Management District pointed out that the project would not meet the CAAP standard for newer, cleaner "Tier 4" locomotives, and would also "cause NO2 levels over a broad area that are substantially worse than the federal health standards."

Greenwald noted other fundamental flaws as well. For example, "This analysis does not disclose the impacts of the project because it does not compare future emissions with the project to future emissions without the project." The project also fails to require zero emissions vehicles as soon as possible, he noted, which should be possible within four years of opening.

And for all the talk of "less traffic," a wide range of critics

pointed out that there were still plans to widen the 710 freeway by four to eight lanes.

Then there's BNSF's jobs deception.

"We're not opposed to labor. We're not opposed to the project. We're opposed to the location of the project," said John Cross, vice president of the West Long Beach Neighborhood Association. It's the same message he's been repeating for years, along with hundreds of other neighborhood residents and activists, from schoolkids suffering astronomical rates of asthma to senior citizens suffering reduced lung functions and local politicians representing the area.

Long Beach Councilman James Johnson lead off the public comment period, saying, "This project before us essentially proposes to bring regional benefits to Southern California at the expense of local communities. We can and must do better than this. Under this proposal, there would be approximately an additional 5,500 truck trips every day, driving within a couple hundred feet of schools, parks and homes.

Natural Resources Defense Council senior attorney David Petit spend most of his three minutes debunking BNSF's t-shirt claims. "Good jobs? This thing gets built on-dock, there's going to be the same good jobs, if not more," he said. But in the end he returned to NRDC's environmental justice concerns.

"There is civil rights law here in California that prevents entities like the port from discriminating against communities of color. This has been put into play by this project, because there are alternatives to where BNSF wants to put it. Specifically, on-dock rail. It's doable, and that's where this project should go."

"I find the draft EIR disturbing on many fronts," USC public health expert Andrea Hricko said. An EIR and Health Risk Assessment about a rail yard with two million truck trips a year that is proposed within 1,000 feet of playgrounds, schools and daycare centers should pay close attention to the latest research findings on air pollution's health effects. But in the 4,000-plus pages, there is not one word of discussion about USC and UCLA studies demonstrating high pollution levels in close proximity to traffic, nor findings that children who live or go to school close to traffic pollution are more likely to suffer reduced lung function or increased asthma."

What's more, "The Health Risk Assessment also fails to discuss more than 40 studies showing that exposure to diesel exhaust is linked to lung cancer. Those studies were done on railroad workers and truck drivers – so they are certainly relevant to community diesel exposures near a rail yard – especially one located so close to homes and schools."

Hricko also questioned the accuracy of the Health Risk Assessment and air quality evaluation because they are both based on what she believes is an invalidated assumption repeated over and over again in the DEIR – BNSF's claims that it will eliminate all trucks heading up the I-710 Freeway to the BNSF Hobart Yard.

[Info. from *Random Lengths* via John L. Whitmeyer]

#### PORT RAIL YARD PLAN DEFICIENT

After almost ten years of planning, a lot of studies and negotiations, the Los Angeles Harbor Department has circulated its Draft Environmental Impact Report of more than 2000 pages for an expanded rail yard, the Southern California International

Gateway. This rail yard will receive trucks from the Port of Los Angeles and transfer them to BNSF railcars with hours of operation paralleling those of the port, which can run day and night seven days a week.

There has been long-term hope in the environmental community to move more cargo by rail rather than by truck. Rail transport is more environmentally efficient than trucking, emits less toxic and carbon pollution, and makes better use of the land. However, a lot depends on where and how the rail facilities are located. It comes down to who gets the benefits and who gets impacted. Residents on the west side of Long Beach have expressed deep concern over the additional noise, air pollution and night-time lighting that will come from the proposed rail yard expansion.

One of the cornerstones of insuring environmental justice is that no neighborhood picks up a disproportionate burden of new projects, even if the intent of the project offers regional environmental benefits. The DEIR suggests that "... the Reduced Project Alternative... is the Environmentally Superior Alternative... other than the No Project Alternative." Then it says that the "Proposed Project takes into consideration increased activity at the proposed site versus reduced activity on freeways and in the area of downtown rail yards. Consequently, the more an alternative moves goods to rail by loading trains on the docks, the more superior the alternative is.

The project also claims that SCIG will be the Nation's, and maybe North America's, greatest intermodal terminal and will be their "gold standard" of sustainability for all BNSF intermodal facilities, perhaps all terminals worldwide, with digitally automated gates, GPS monitored truck routes, wide-span electric cranes, ultra-low-emitting genset switchers, Hydrogen and CNG/LNG fueled yard tractors and hostler trucks, hooded exterior lighting systems, light-pole height lowered from 80ft to 60-40ft, reduced terminal's size for containers moved (compared to Hobart), buffers and soundwalls between the facility and surrounding communities, and other facilities to reduce impacts of anticipated utility rate increases.

The DEIR doesn't tell us that these measures have already been used for ports, terminals, and transfer facilities elsewhere in the world (e.g., Singapore, HongKong, Dubai, Rotterdam, etc.). The DEIR also fails to provide a "Traffic Management Alternative" (common to highway EIRs) that for decades Sealand/Maersk has used in HongKong and Salalah (Oman) reducing by half, truck movements for imports and empties.

Discussions of jobs in 2006-07 data do not really reflect the redistribution within the logistics industry and the reduction of time/container, and therefore trucking jobs. Over the long-term, various estimates give up to 14,000 new direct and undefined indirect jobs in Los Angeles or 22,000 new direct and indirect jobs in Southern California by 2036.

We should be concerned most for those who live nearest the proposed facility: Wilmington, Carson and Long Beach's west side. Comments on the DEIR will look to transfer 50-75% of all containers directly between rail and ships and to improve the San Pedro-Commerce corridor's environment.

[Info. from Tom Williams in *Southern Sierran*]

## URBAN RAIL TRANSIT by DICK FINLEY EXPO LINE PLAN

The Los Angeles City Council voted November 4th to join Santa Monica, Culver City and Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority in defending the second phase of the Expo Light Rail Line to Santa Monica in a lawsuit.

A group of Westside neighborhood groups sued the Exposition Authority to block the line. The suit claims an environmental impact report approved in early 2010 did not adequately measure the light rail line's traffic impacts at Overland Avenue and Westwood Boulevard. The council's unanimous vote gives the City Attorney's Office authority to file a legal brief supporting the environmental document.

The first phase of the Expo Line, from downtown Los Angeles to La Cienega Boulevard near Culver City, is expected to open in March 2012.

### MAYOR APPLAUDS EFFORT

Los Angeles Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa on November 9th cheered a Senate committee's approval of a bill that could help Los Angeles County accelerate a dozen local transportation projects, including a subway extension to Westwood and an extension of the Green Line to Los Angeles International Airport.

The Senate Environment and Public Works Committee approved a two-year, \$109 billion transportation bill that includes a significant boost in funding for a federal loan program that would help Villaraigosa build the 12 transit projects in 10 years instead of the scheduled 30 years.

The bill, which had bipartisan support in the committee, would increase funding from \$110 million to \$1 billion for federal loans and loan guarantees to significant transportation projects. The so-called Transportation Infrastructure Finance and Innovation Act, or TIFIA, funding is part of a section of the bill called America Fast Forward, a name Villaraigosa coined.

The bill would allow Villaraigosa, who chairs the MTA board, to use the money from a one-half percent sales tax increase approved by voters in 2008 to fund the expansion of rail, bike and pedestrian projects. The bill also would increase the share of the cost for transportation projects that the federal government can fund from 33 percent to 49 percent.

### CONSTRUCTION DISRUPTS BLUE LINE SERVICE

Major construction work near Staples Center meant service on the Blue Line was again replaced by a "bus bridge" in the downtown area on November 20 between Washington, San Pedro Street, Grand, Pico and 7th Street stations. Signs were to direct passengers to the special bus line, Route 801.

Metro contractors and crews put the finishing touches on the rail connection at Washington Boulevard and Flower Street, where the Expo Line branches off the existing Blue Line tracks in a complicated set of switches, curves and signals. The track connections have been in place for a year. The rail junction is in the middle of a busy intersection open to street traffic, which must be repaved. Metro officials said crews on the weekend were installing and turning on overhead electrical supply cables and testing switches.

A few blocks north, Metro is remodeling the entrance to the Pico Station, which frequently is overcrowded when events at a nearby arena end. Metro officials said the new entrances will improve passenger flow and safety during events at L.A. Live,

the Convention Center and Staples Center.  
[Above info. from *Daily Breeze*]

## BULLET TRAIN WOULD LOSE IN REVOTE

With the cost of the state's high-speed rail project rising dramatically, a new public opinion poll shows that a clear majority of California's registered voters would reject the proposal if given a second chance to vote on it today. Released December 6, the poll by Field Research Corp. in San Francisco found that 64 percent of those surveyed want another public vote on the \$98-billion project and that 59 percent of respondents would oppose it because of changes in its cost and completion date.

The estimated price tag for the 520-mile system between San Francisco and Los Angeles is now \$98 billion to \$117 billion – at least triple the initial projection of \$33 billion. Planners have extended the construction deadline from 2020 to 2033. "If there were a revote, its chances of passage given this poll are not very good," said Mark DiCamillo, director of the Field Poll.

Meanwhile in Washington, a barrage of sharp criticism was leveled at Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood, who appeared December 6 at a hearing by the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee on the Obama administration's high-speed rail program. At the congressional hearing, LaHood, the lone Republican on President Obama's Cabinet, lectured the committee that the U.S. population will grow by tens of millions in coming decades. "We need to do something or we will be crushed under the weight of our own expansion," he warned.

LaHood has urged Gov. Jerry Brown not to back down from the bullet train project. "We will not be dissuaded by naysayers," LaHood told the committee. The committee repeatedly raised concerns that California is more than \$85 billion short of the funding needed to complete the system.

The growing costs and declining support for the project have prompted calls for a revote. They include legislation proposed by state Sen. Doug LaMalfa (R-Richvale) that would give voters a chance to withdraw the previously approved funding. Many voters feel "they've really been had," LaMalfa said.

[Info. from *Los Angeles Times*]

## HIGH-SPEED RAIL FUNDING IS CUT

The U.S. Senate on November 17 approved legislation that eliminates future funding for high-speed rail projects, including the California bullet-train. The vote, coming after a similar vote in the House of Representatives, leaves the future of the ambitious state project to create a new rail system from Southern California to the Bay Area uncertain. The state has less than 15 percent of the funds needed for the \$98.5-billion project.

Gov. Jerry Brown said last week that he will launch the project next year despite the prospect of a federal funding cutoff, using only the money the state has in hand. The existing funds include \$3.3 billion from previous federal grants and as much as \$9 billion in state bond funds approved by voters in 2008.

The vote on November 17 appears to signal that unless the political makeup of Congress changes in coming elections, California may not get any additional funds for the project. The 70-30 vote included half a dozen appropriation measures for fiscal 2012.

[Info. from *Los Angeles Times*]

## BULLET TRAIN FUNDS IN GOP SIGHTS

California's proposed bullet train, the nation's largest public infrastructure project, has become the focus of an intense federal funding battle that could undermine its survival as Republican leaders in Congress attempt to claw back as much as \$3.3 billion in federal grants already approved for the start of construction next year.

The case against the bullet train is being led by a group of California Republicans, including Rep. Jeff Denham (R-Atwater) and Rep. Kevin McCarthy (R-Bakersfield), the House majority whip, who have argued the project is deeply flawed and has become unavoidable as the cost has spiraled to \$98.5 billion.

Denham, a subcommittee chairman on the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee, said he believes all of the project's grants can be rescinded by Congress and should be reallocated to highway construction in the Central Valley. Republican staffers are formulating plans to grab the bullet train money, which they said has not been spent nor put under contract.

"We can't afford it when we have a \$15-trillion debt that continues to grow and California is broke," Denham said. "The cost of it continues to balloon out of control with no private investors willing to put money into it."

The threat is serious enough that the Obama administration, which strongly backs high-speed rail development, is attempting to secure the money for the California project through a step known as "obligating." On November 22, the California High Speed Rail Authority said it has signed a cooperative agreement with the Federal Railroad Administration that "secures" through the obligation process remaining portions of the \$3.3 billion needed to start construction. That action covers \$928 million set aside for the project last year. The agreement shows that the state's funding to start construction "is identified, committed and we are moving forward," said Thomas J. Umberg, chairman of the rail authority.

Denham said he doubts that obligating money that hasn't actually been spent can stop Congress from recouping the funds. Any attempt to take back the federal money would face an uphill fight in the Democratic-controlled Senate. But the effort demonstrates the growing opposition to the California project by House Republicans, and weakening support across the board.

Denham once voted for the bullet train as a state senator but now says the program's worsening outlook makes it a "bait and switch." And last week, both houses of Congress voted to strip all high-speed rail funds from 2012 spending legislation. If California were to lose the money, it could put the project – the only remaining high-speed train proposal in the country – in jeopardy. State voters approved a \$9-billion bond for the project in 2008, based on a commitment that federal and private money would pay the balance.

Gov. Jerry Brown said he intends to ask the Legislature to provide approvals necessary to start construction next year. The state plans to start building an initial 130-mile segment of track from Chowchilla to Bakersfield next year with \$6 billion, including \$3.3 billion in federal money and \$2.7 from the bonds. The completed system, stretching from the Bay Area to Southern California, is supposed to begin operating in 2033.

Brown has said that a new business plan released this month by the California High Speed Rail Authority provides a sound

blueprint for moving forward with the project and issuing the state bonds. In Brown's view, the bullet train will lay a foundation for economic growth with a transportation system that can accommodate millions of Californians in future decades.

The bullet train has been largely exempt from congressional oversight. Next month, however, a federal spotlight will be turned on the project for the first time when the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee convenes an oversight hearing.

House Republicans see the bullet train as poorly planned and out of control. McCarthy has introduced legislation that would freeze federal funding for the project and subject it to a comprehensive federal audit. Even if the House were to rescind all or a portion of the California funding, the U.S. Senate would have to agree. Sen. Dianne Feinstein (D-Calif.) has been a resolute supporter of the project. One political strategy that has surfaced to entice votes from East Coast Senate Democrats is to propose reallocating the California funds to passenger rail projects in their states.

The upcoming House hearing will be chaired by Rep. John Mica (R-Fla.). Mica has often expressed support for the concept of high-speed rail, citing the East Coast as having the necessary population density and urban environment to support it. California officials say Mica supports high-speed rail, but he has never endorsed the state's project, and now appears to have joined the skeptics. In a statement, Mica did not rule out an effort to take back the California money, saying he "is reserving judgment."

But an aide on Mica's committee said, "Any money that would come back to Washington would be much better spent by bringing high-speed rail to the Northeast Corridor."  
[Info. by Ralph Vartabedian of *Los Angeles Times*]

## BULLET TRAIN'S FUNDING PLAN FAULTED

The funding plan for the California bullet train does not comply with key provisions of a ballot measure that voters approved to authorize the project and \$9 billion in state bonds to help finance it, according to a report released November 29th.

The study – by the Legislative Analyst's Office, which periodically the \$98-billion construction proposal – concluded that the most recent funding plan does not meet important requirements of Proposition 1A because high-speed trains cannot operate on the first stretch of track to be built next year in the Central Valley.

Stations, maintenance facilities and the electrical system needed to power high-speed trains are not included in the first phase, which is estimated to cost about \$6 billion. Authority officials want to run Amtrak's San Joaquin service on the line until the system can be expanded.

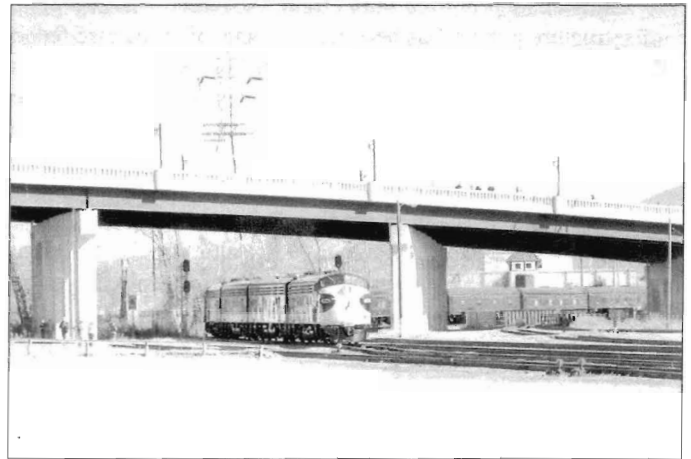
The report by the Legislative Analyst's Office is a review of the project's draft business and funding plans. Although researchers found that the business plan largely meets state requirements, they concluded that the funding proposals were highly speculative. Because the availability of funding to expand beyond the Central Valley section remains uncertain, analysts questioned whether operating conventional trains on the initial segment was worth the expense to build it.

[Info. from *Los Angeles Times*]



*The display was up and running on Saturday, December 3. I say running because a warbonnet-clad freight train runs around this model depot complex just as one passes the actual museum each weekday. Also included in the layout is our parking lot, the old horse trough/fountain, and the large tree now decorated for the season, which was lit on the night of the 3rd with great fanfare.*

Article and photos by David Housh



*Norfolk Southern Executive F 9-A 4270 leads an inspection train into the NS Asheville Yard on Nov. 12, after being turned. The train operated as a round trip from Knoxville, Kentucky, to Asheville, North Carolina.*

Photo by Charles Varnes



*NS track inspection car, Buena Vista, was at the rear of the train allowing guests excellent views of the line.*

Photo by Charles Varnes



*The NS Executive F 9s being fueled before the inspection train returned to Knoxville.*

Photo by Charles Varnes