

Transportation Solutions Defense and Education Fund

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April 30, 2014
By E-Mail to
electrification
@caltrain.com

Tom Nolan, Chair
Peninsula Corridor Joint Powers Board
1250 San Carlos Ave.
P .O. Box 3006
San Carlos, CA 94070-1306

Re: Peninsula Corridor Electrification Project

Dear Chairman Nolan:

The Transportation Solutions Defense and Education Fund, TRANSDEF, is a Bay Area environmental non-profit advocating the regional planning of transportation, land use and air quality. We are transit advocates, and strongly support Caltrain and HSR. However, we have serious doubts about the soundness of Caltrain's current planning and are convinced that the current plans for HSR are economically infeasible and will not lead to a working system. We filed extensive comments yesterday on the DEIR for the Peninsula Corridor Electrification Project (Project). The comments below pertain not to the DEIR but to the conceptualization of the Project itself.

It is our understanding that Caltrain has sought to electrify its system for the past thirty years. Therefore, it is somewhat excusable that the agency jumped on the opportunity to partner with CHSRA to get its favorite project built. However, that decision to partner carried with it two inherent problems:

1. Caltrain has given up control over its destiny. Caltrain is now in limbo, waiting for the resolution of many issues beyond its control. It is unknowable whether CHSRA will be able to deliver the promised funds.
2. Caltrain would be giving up a significant and unknowable (within the scope of the current DEIR) amount of capacity for future growth.

It appears that thirty years of electrification expectations have so locked-in the thinking of management that the seriousness of these two problems was under-appreciated. Now that CHSRA is in trouble, however, the time has come for a re-appraisal.

TRANSDEF sincerely hopes the JPB will use the EIR process to comprehensively consider its options, rather than beat them down. The preparation of a fully costed and

ridership-modelled DEMU alternative (preferably including our proposed sub-alternative) would give the JPB a clear idea of what can be accomplished with the funds available, while seizing back control over its destiny.

The primary purpose of this letter is to convey TRANSDEF's thinking on the optimal HSR connection from the Central Valley to San Francisco, a matter which is outside the scope of the DEIR. We co-commissioned SETEC, a French HSR engineering consultancy, to design an Altamont Pass alignment to access the Bay Area. Their report is available at: http://transdef.org/HSR/Altamont_assets/Exhibit_C.pdf

Its points relevant here are:

- Good engineering practice is to mix HSR and other rail traffic to the minimum extent possible.
- Minimal mixing preserves flexibility, capacity and speed not only for HSR, but for the host rail property as well.
- Minimal mixing lowers the cost to maintain shared use tracks to HSR standards.
- The best way to accomplish minimal mixing is by accessing the West Bay via the Dumbarton Rail Bridge.
- The connection to San Francisco would share 30 miles less track, if HSR were connected to Caltrain at Redwood City.
- An even shorter shared track could be achieved if separate HSR tracks were built alongside Highway 101, connecting to Caltrain north of SFO.

Had JPB not been so eager to fulfill its thirty-year goal, these considerations might have been weighed in the decision to partner with CHSRA. Now that CHSRA is no longer the powerhouse it once was, it is time to look closely at these issues. We've properly put future growth and future capacity forward as issues for the EIR to address. An expression of interest by your Board would ensure that the study is actually done.

JPB might find that, as a result of the EIR, a DEMU alternative would deliver most of the Project benefits at a cost it can afford, while preserving Caltrain's independence, capacity to grow and support by its public. It would then be desirable to revisit JPB's support of the Pacheco HSR Alternative. Our appeal of CHSRA's refusal to study the SETEC alternative (see <http://transdef.org/HSR/Appeal.html>) will have oral argument next month, so the Pacheco/Altamont issue is by no means closed. TRANSDEF sincerely hopes that these comments will assist the JPB in making wise decisions.

Sincerely,

/s/ DAVID SCHONBRUNN

David Schonbrunn,
President