



Memorandum

**TO: BUILDING BETTER
TRANSPORTATION COMMITTEE**

FROM: James R. Helmer

**SUBJECT: MTC REGIONAL RAIL PLAN
AND HIGH SPEED RAIL UPDATE**

DATE: 02-23-06

Approved

Date

BACKGROUND

The Metropolitan Transportation Commission (MTC), the California High-Speed Rail Authority (CHSRA), BART, and Caltrain, along with a coalition of rail passenger and freight operators, are currently preparing a comprehensive Regional Rail Plan for the Bay Area. The Regional Rail Plan will examine ways to incorporate passenger trains into existing rail systems, improve connections to other trains and transit, expand the regional rapid transit network, increase rail capacity and coordinate rail investment around transit-friendly communities and businesses. The plan will also include a detailed analysis of potential high-speed rail routes between the Bay Area and the Central Valley for the Rail Authority's environmental review of the proposed rail lines.

At the Building Better Transportation Committee meeting, City staff and MTC consultants will provide the Committee with a presentation on the scope and status of the Regional Rail Plan.

ANALYSIS

Staff from MTC, BART, Caltrain and the California High-Speed Rail Authority serve as the Project Management Team for the Regional Rail Plan. A steering committee consisting of regional rail passenger operators, including the Santa Clara Valley Transportation Authority (VTA), freight railroad operators, and county congestion management agencies will provide direction during the plan development. The steering committee will be responsible for coordinating review and comment on the plan prior to its submission to MTC for approval.

MTC, BART, Caltrain, and California High-Speed Rail Authority have enlisted the community's help in developing the Regional Rail Plan for the Bay Area. The Project Management Team has hosted a series of public workshops, one of which was hosted by the City of San José at City Hall in November 2005. The purpose of these workshops was to ask Bay Area residents and neighboring communities to share their long-range vision for rail, help identify evaluation criteria to assess proposed rail ideas, and identify issues and concerns that should be considered in the Bay Area to Central Valley High-Speed Train Program Environmental Impact

Report/Environmental Impact Statement (EIR/EIS) to be prepared by the California High-Speed Rail Authority. In addition, these workshops are intended to serve as "scoping" meetings for, and contribute to the preparation of, the California High-Speed Rail Authority's Bay Area to Central Valley High-Speed Train Program EIR/EIS.

The Regional Rail Plan study effort will be divided into three phases:

- Phase 1 - Develop conceptual alternatives and screening criteria.
- Phase 2 - Rigorously screen the conceptual alternatives and identify the final study alternatives.
- Phase 3 - Perform detailed technical evaluations of the study alternatives and prepare a draft and final plan identifying railroad, rapid transit, and high-speed rail extensions and services for the near (5 to 10 years), intermediate (10 to 25 years) and long terms (beyond 25 years).

Specifically, the plan will examine ways to:

- Incorporate passenger trains into existing rail systems;
- Improve connections between passenger trains and other transit;
- Increase capacity for both passenger and freight rail systems;
- Develop strategies to preserve "rights-of-way" for future rail lines;
- Identify urban locations where passenger rail can stimulate redevelopment.

California High Speed Rail

The plan will also provide a detailed analysis of potential high-speed rail routes between the Bay Area and the Central Valley. The goal of this part of the study is to identify which of the alignment alternatives merit further evaluation in the CHSRA Bay Area to Central Valley High Speed Train Program Environmental Impact Report/Environmental Impact Statement (EIR/EIS). The City of San José has adopted and vigorously supported the Pacheco Pass alignment for high-speed rail into the Bay Area as the City's preferred alternative.

It should be noted that the Regional Rail Plan is not an environmental document and will not identify a preferred alignment alternative for High Speed Rail into the Bay Area. That responsibility remains with the CHSRA as part of its parallel environmental review process. What the Regional Rail Plan will do is provide three scenarios of how High Speed Rail can connect to the Bay Area and what the impacts of each scenario would be on the operation of current and future Regional Rail programs.

These project scenarios will include:

- 1) No Project Alternative
- 2) South Alignment Option (Pacheco Pass Alternative)
- 3) North Alignment Option (Altamont Pass Alternative)

As a member of the Regional Rail Steering Committee, the California High Speed Rail Authority (CHSRA) is managing their portion of the Regional Rail analysis in partnership with the other

Steering Committee members, (MTC, BART, Caltrain). CHSRA expects that the Regional Rail Plan will compliment their more detailed EIR/EIS and result in a more fully developed High Speed Rail program. It is noted that the Draft EIR/EIS for High Speed Rail will be released in November of 2006 and the final document, which will include a preferred alignment alternative for Bay Area High Speed Rail access, will be certified in September of 2007.

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Director of Transportation