



RailPAC

Rail Passenger Association
of California and Nevada

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Testimony to the Senate Transportation and Housing Committee
High Speed Rail Informational Hearing – 27th March, 2014

Chairman DeSaulnier and Honorable Senators:

My name is Paul Dyson – I am RailPAC President and Chair of the City of Burbank Transportation Commission, and a recently retired 45 year veteran of the railroad and logistics industry.

RailPAC is an all-volunteer 501c3 membership organization educating the public in the need for a more balanced transportation infrastructure since 1978. We have always advocated investment in modern passenger railroads, both in a dedicated high speed right of way for passenger trains linking the main centers of population in California, as well as continuous upgrades to regional rail and local transit. Our concept continues to be one of incremental improvements, done smartly, so that each investment acts as a building block laid on the foundation of existing facilities. This policy is equally applicable for new high speed rail segments as well as regional rail. It is clearly not possible for a complete 800 mile system to fall from the sky and be instantly in place, so we have to ensure that each segment constructed fulfills a real need in its own right as well as being a part of the whole.

This hearing asks three questions. What do we want to see as the end product? Does the 2014 Business Plan move us in the right direction? What alternatives might give the project better chances for success?

I will be brief in answering the first question, what does a world class passenger rail system look like? Our model is Switzerland, where the transit systems, regional and intercity railroads, even the steamers on the lakes, are coordinated to provide service from just about every bus stop or rail station to every other one in the country every thirty minutes, 18 hours a day, seven days a week. You'll see from the map that Switzerland is about the size of the densely populated areas of northern or southern California, but actually faces far greater topographical challenges. It is an affluent country with high levels of automobile ownership, and yet has very high public transit usage. And of course there is a growing network of European high speed trains which links Switzerland with the major centers of Europe. Thus we advocate two robust regional systems, north and south, with a High Speed link between the two.

We can accomplish the same level of service with carefully planned infrastructure investments, strong *central* direction that *requires* cooperation between agencies, and excellent information and ticketing systems that provide seamless journeys, regardless of the mode selected.



Next I'd like to comment on the draft 2014 Business Plan. This plan calls for initial service between Merced and Palmdale, and, when complete, an as yet undetermined location in the San Fernando Valley north of Los Angeles. We believe that this strategy is exactly wrong for a number of reasons. Passenger rail is all about moving large numbers of people. It is also about providing a transportation product for which people will be prepared to pay their hard earned dollars. The Authority proposes a service, that will be in place for a number of years, whereby passengers will travel by bus or regional train to and from Merced, take a High Speed Train to Palmdale, and a Metrolink train from Palmdale to Los Angeles or beyond. (p12 of Draft Business Plan). We do not really know how long this service will be in place as funds are not identified to build further south into the L.A. Basin.

L.A. County MTA studied the route between Palmdale and Los Angeles a couple of years ago and concluded that even with significant investment there is little that could be done to improve journey times along this line which was originally

completed in 1876. The line follows Soledad Canyon and is built cheaply to typical 19th century standards. As far as modern passenger transportation is concerned I regard it as obsolete. It would be faster to continue to take a bus from Bakersfield.



Existing Rail line south of Palmdale through Soledad Canyon Photo by Clark Bauman

Assuming funds are made available to build a new line south from Palmdale, to this proposed interim terminus, we still do not have service to Los Angeles Union Station, the hub of transit and regional rail and the second largest city in the USA. Where will this interim terminus be? We don't know yet although the Burbank Transportation Commission was told that a decision is imminent. But wherever it is there are no transit connections available to compare to those at Los Angeles Union Station, and clearly the majority of patrons will use either cars or special connecting buses.

Regardless of whatever projections of ridership and revenue might be found in the Business Plan, I ask you to apply the common sense test; would I spend my money on a bus – rail – bus journey say from Orange County to Sacramento, compared to the alternatives that are available? Some might, if they are so enthused about the new technology, but will the patronage be sufficient for the service to make a profit on operations? For that level of inconvenience and that slow a journey the fares will have to be pitched so low to attract passengers such

that an operating profit is out of the question.

What Alternatives does RailPAC propose?

We believe that the logical plan, the one most likely to be successful, is to start construction at Los Angeles Union Station, and build north. There are many very good reasons to adopt this strategy.

1. A rebuilt Los Angeles Union Station brings immediate benefits to eight of the most populous counties in the state. Converting the station from a stub end to through tracks has the same regional significance as the Transbay tube has to the BART system. It will bring improvements to the daily lives of thousands of Southern California commuters and intercity passengers.
2. Only Los Angeles in the south can generate sufficient numbers of passengers to allow for any prospect of a successful and profitable operation. Trying to initiate High Speed Rail interim service without one of the end points is like trying to open a shopping mall without an anchor tenant. You need a “big box” retailer to bring in the crowds. The Authority’s decision to delay service to Union Station until 2028 at the earliest is incomprehensible.
3. The section between Los Angeles and Bakersfield is the most expensive and technically challenging. We believe it is better to solve these problems first rather than “kick the can down the road” and build the easy parts first. Imagine the British and French building the approaches to the Channel Tunnel first before they knew whether the tunnel was feasible or affordable!
4. Construction at Los Angeles, under the High Speed Rail aegis, will provide a demonstration to the majority of Californians that the project is truly under way.
5. A grade separated right of way from Los Angeles to Saugus will eliminate dangerous grade crossings in the San Fernando Valley.
6. There is a gap in the existing state intercity service between the San Joaquin corridor at Bakersfield and the LOSSAN corridor in Los Angeles. Building this segment of new line first will allow through journeys, one seat rides, all the way from San Diego to Sacramento and the Bay Area. This will not be high speed rail but will reduce travel time, eliminate the bus connection, and enhance the travel experience.
7. Bridging the gap between Los Angeles and Bakersfield is truly a project which on its own represents independent utility, regardless of whether there is additional investment in High Speed Rail.

Mr. Chairman, there is certainly a lot more that could be discussed here but I am mindful of your time and those wishing to make further comments. I'll be delighted to answer any questions you may have.

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Problem: Trains can only enter and leave Union Station via the north. This is inefficient and congested.

Proposed Solution: Build new tracks to allow trains to run through Union Station via the south.

Amtrak
- Pacific Surfliner
- Coast Starlight

Metrolink
- Ventura Line
- Antelope Valley Line

Los Angeles Union Station

Amtrak
- Sunset Limited

Metrolink
- San Bernardino Line

Amtrak
- Pacific Surfliner
- Southwest Chief

Metrolink
- Orange County Line
- 91 Line

Metrolink
- Riverside Line

- Currently trains can only enter and leave Union Station via the 'Throat' - the set of tracks to the north.
- This is inefficient, slow and congested. For example Pacific Surfliner operators have to get out and move to the other end of the train prior to continuing the journey through Los Angeles.
- With the proposed new tracks, the Pacific Surfliner can go through Los Angeles without

reversing direction. Metrolink trains can also loop around.

- Reduces congestion and wait times. Improves circulation.
- Makes new Metrolink routes going through Los Angeles possible, such as a route between Orange County and the San Fernando Valley, without the need to change trains.