

Agenda: September 20, 2007

To: Regional Transportation Commission/Transportation Policy Workshop

From: Luis Pavel Mendez, Deputy Director

RE: Bay Area to Central Valley High Speed Train (HST) Program Draft
Environmental Impact Report (EIR)/Environmental Impact Statement (EIS)

RECOMMENDATIONS

Staff recommends that the Regional Transportation Commission (RTC):

1. Support the southern alignment for the Bay Area to Central Valley High Speed Train Program Draft EIR/EIS; and
 2. Direct staff to send a letter to the California High Speed Rail Authority communicating that support.
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BACKGROUND

The California High Speed Rail Authority was established in 1996 and is charged with planning, designing, constructing and operating a state of the art high-speed train system. The proposed system stretches from San Francisco, Oakland and Sacramento in the north -- with service to the Central Valley -- to Los Angeles and San Diego in the south. With bullet trains operating at speeds up to 220 mph, the express travel time from downtown San Francisco to Los Angeles would be just under 2 ½ hours.

DISCUSSION

The High Speed Rail Authority recently completed a draft program EIR/EIS that examines the service between the San Francisco Bay Area and the Central Valley region. The purpose of the Bay Area HST is to provide a reliable high-speed electrified train system that links the major Bay Area cities to the Central Valley, Sacramento, and southern California and that delivers predictable and consistent travel times. The Bay Area to Central Valley HST Program Draft EIR/EIS was recently released and comments are due on September 28, 2007. This draft EIR/EIS addresses the characteristics and impacts of the routing alternatives (Attachment 1), including their associated capital and operating cost and ridership estimates. The information indicates that the southern and northern alignments are roughly comparable in costs, ridership and travel times. Within each route there are a number of sub-alternatives with various combinations of

destinations among San Jose, San Francisco, and Oakland. The deciding factors are likely to include markets served and connectivity to other systems.

The two major alignment options are the Altamont Pass (northern alignment) and Pacheco Pass (southern alignment) alignments. Both the Altamont Pass and Pacheco Pass alignments would provide service along the Highway 99 corridor but turn west to provide service to the San Francisco Bay Area at different locations.

The Altamont Pass Alignment would turn west north of Modesto and enter the San Francisco Bay Area along the Interstate 205 and 580 (Altamont Pass) corridor providing service to the city of Tracy and the area of Livermore/Pleasanton/Dublin. The service would split at Union City, cross the bay and split again in Redwood City to ensure service to Oakland, San Francisco and San Jose.

The Pacheco Pass alignment would turn west either south or north of Merced and enter the Bay Area from the south after going over the Pacheco Pass along the Highway 152 corridor providing service to Gilroy and Morgan Hill. The service would split in San Jose to ensure service to San Francisco and Oakland. The Pacheco Pass alignment offers service for Santa Cruz County residents at Gilroy and San Jose and service between San Jose and Los Angeles of just over two hours. It also offers the possibility for train service serving the Pajaro/Watsonville station to connect with high speed train service in Gilroy.

Due to the improved access for Santa Cruz residents offered by the Pacheco Pass alignment, staff recommends that the RTC support the Pacheco Pass alternative for the California high speed train and direct staff to communicate that support to the California High Speed Train Authority.

SUMMARY

The California High Speed Train Authority released a draft EIR/EIS for high speed train service between the San Francisco Bay Area and the Central Valley with two major alignment alternatives. Comments are due on September 28, 2007. Staff recommends support for the Pacheco Pass alignment alternative to provide better access for Santa Cruz County residents.

Attachment 1: Map of High Speed Train Alignment Alternatives between the San Francisco Bay Area and the Central Valley