

# STEEL WHEELS

PASSENGER RAIL IN CALIFORNIA AND THE WEST

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**MAGAZINE OF THE WESTERN PASSENGER TRAIN COALITION**  
**RAILPAC • ALL ABOARD ARIZONA • PASSENGER RAIL KANSAS • NEW MEXICO RA • MINNARP**  
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*Photo: Metrolink in San Clemente by Mark MacDougal*

## SW 2Q23 Contents

*From the Editors Desk*  
*Presidents Commentary*  
*The San Clemente (ongoing) Disaster*  
*State Rail Plan Special Pull-out Section*  
*Arizona News*  
*Opinion Page*  
*From the Rear Platform*

## In the Next Issue

*Further Delay to Link US*  
*Ticketing Systems*  
*Timetable Methodology*  
*Amtrak Board Appointments*  
*and more...*



**2nd QUARTER 2023**

PUBLICATION OF THE



**RAIL PASSENGER ASSOCIATION OF CALIFORNIA & NEVADA**

# From the Editor's Desk

By Paul Dyson - RailPAC Editor



First, I must apologize for the very late arrival of this edition. A month somehow disappeared while I was dealing with some personal affairs, plus family visits and other distractions and suddenly I am way behind. In addition, I set an ambitious goal to make use of Steel Wheels to publish our version of the California State Rail Plan, which is circulating in draft as I write. The idea is to address the main subject headings in a

page or two to outline RailPAC's policy. At the same time, we will expand on the outline with a full analysis on our website. It turned out to be a more complex undertaking than I expected but I hope you, our readers, will find it valuable. Full credit is due to RailPAC President Steve Roberts for formulating and organizing the various bits of policy that have evolved over nearly forty five years of RailPAC's existence. Our goals of improved mobility and value for money are still in the forefront, together with our concern for the environment.

One thing that has to be said about the State Rail Plan is that it is honest in reporting what has been accomplished since the last plan. The answer, at least in hardware terms, is almost nothing. The biggest frustration is not what is in the plan, but what is delivered and how long that takes. The Coachella Valley service is a perfect case in point. The Riverside County Transportation Commission website concedes that the project was first mooted in 1991 and will likely not be "delivered" until...."to be determined"! This on an existing right of way which is already a passenger route and half of the stations already in existence. Is it really this hard? During this time the population of the Coachella Valley has increased about 50% to an estimated half million and is forecast to double again by 2066. The passenger count at Palm Springs airport has grown from 1.2 million in 2000 to almost 3 million in 2022. If the market is there, and these numbers surely demonstrate

that it is, then why has so little been accomplished to bring rail service? The answer has to be a lack of political will in Riverside County.

I've just watched the Brightline presentation to the USHSRA conference earlier this month, on You Tube, and if you want to see something to cheer you up after the previous paragraph then this should do the trick. These are people that lay track, build stations, buy trains and sell tickets. Now I don't want to seem as if I'm here to beat the drum for one company, and they certainly have a long way to go before they are a profitable operation, but they are, in Florida at least, *delivering*. I am disappointed that they have applied for a federal grant, in so far as they promoted themselves earlier as being 100% privately financed, but it's hard to find a company anywhere that doesn't receive at least some government largesse in one form or another. So good luck to them, and in any event the majority of the money will be spent in California. We could use the help!

I wrote briefly last year about my appointment as Commissioner to the Burbank Airport Authority for the City of Burbank and promised to follow up with some observations. The appointment only lasted until May 31<sup>st</sup> of this year which was the remainder of the term that I filled. The City Council decided not to renew my appointment, in favor of a former Mayor. So I am now free to write about such topics as the enormous public subsidies for every aspect of the airline industry, as well as the indifference of the airport management to passenger rail, and hostility to the High Speed Rail project. Note that 70% of the passenger business at Burbank is Southwest Airlines, so it is fair to say that they have considerable *influence*. And 65% of the passengers travel to and from northern California, so High Speed rail is seen as a threat. Is that why the Airport sued the High Speed Rail Authority, or is it just that the CHSRA failed to communicate, as Executive Director Miller alleges? We'll be digging into this some more, you can be assured.

pdyson@railpac.org

**WANTED: Photographers for Steel Wheels**

*If you have a collection of hi-res jpeg photos, especially of passenger trains in California, or enjoy taking them, contact the Editor,*

**WE NEED YOU!**

**pdyson@railpac.org.**

The advertisement features a black and white photograph of a vintage SLR camera. A film strip is shown emerging from the camera, with several frames visible. One frame shows a train, and another shows a landscape. The text is overlaid on the image.

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**Thank you for your continued support for RailPAC and passenger rail.**





## President's Commentary

By Steve Roberts – RailPAC President

### Special Edition

This Special Edition of Steel Wheels explores the commuter rail issues as well as other policy issues that will challenge RailPAC's goal of achieving a first-class rail network in California.

Fiscal Cliff is a term that is top of mind for everyone in the transit and commuter rail industry. It is the point during the next year or so when the Federal pandemic relief funding (Cares Act) appropriated to the transit and commuter rail agencies, is exhausted. This is especially a problem for commuter rail operators in California who have been far more impacted by the transition of their white-collar daily commuters to work-at-home employees than carriers in any other state. With modest local funding sources (because pre-pandemic ticket revenue was relatively high vs. costs) commuter carriers are "burning cash." The solution is straight forth; reimagine the network to serve new markets.

It means transitioning from commuter to Regional Rail. A key step is revamping schedules focusing less on rush hour peaks, to those offering more uniform service throughout the day, into the night, and on weekends so as to accommodate essential workers and others who have varying travel schedules. The new schedules will also accommodate flexible (both time and day) hybrid work patterns. These revised schedules will also be a better fit for the special event and other leisure travelers, increasing ridership in that market. Personal safety and security, especially on connecting transit trips, is also a barrier to capturing non-traditional work trips and leisure trips many of which are during evening hours. It is an issue that needs to be addressed if rail ridership is to be rebuilt.

Also aiding this transition by streamlining connections and improving service integration, is the California Integrated Travel Project (Cal-ITP) being developed by CalSTA. Cal-ITP does this with a platform to give the customer one source for journey planning across multiple operators. Payment is "tap to pay" across multiple payment types. Its automated pricing flexibility links all legs of a journey and customer usage to generate rider discounts.

### The big question is how to accomplish this with funding running down?

Adding to the challenge is California's stock market/stock

option driven state revenue stream. Given this foundation the state budget goes from a huge surplus to a revenue shortfall irrespective of the underlying fundamentals of the state's economy. The next state fiscal year (beginning July 1st, 2023) will be a period of one of those shortfalls.

The legislature (Assembly and Senate) has come to an agreement on a fiscal package for transportation that restores \$2 Billion in transportation capital funding and allows it to be spent on either capital or operating expenses. It also allows \$1.1 Billion in Cap & Trade funds earmarked for Zero Emission Buses to be spent on operating expenses. The downside of spending capital funds for operations is that the agency is forgoing the future benefits of that capital investment and forgoing leveraging Federal funds for larger more impactful capital investments.

The Governor still has to agree to this package and has until July 1st to do so. The current thought is that he will agree to the financial terms but insist on oversight and accountability provisions, especially for the Bay Area Rapid Transit District.

At the Federal level, the recent agreement between the White House and the House of Representatives on the debt ceiling and FY24/25 Budget brings some stability to the political process. However, while it locked in "topline" budget totals (defense and domestic) how this "topline" is distributed between each program is still to be determined by the Appropriations Committees. Specific program appropriations can be adjusted up or down as long as they remain below the agreed "topline" budget numbers. For example, new funding for long-distance rail cars could be traded for improved local airport navigational aids, etc. Food service on intercity trains could once again be at risk as well as funding for any new routes. So don't sit on the sidelines, especially if your representative is on the House Appropriations Committee!



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# The San Clemente Disaster

by Paul Dyson and Steve Roberts

As of mid-June there has been no Surfliner service for a total of 221 days. Billions of dollars of investment in LOSSAN, especially the heaviest trafficked section between Los Angeles and San Diego, are at risk as public agencies dither and leadership is nowhere to be found. To make matters worse the City of San Clemente has been delaying essential stop gap repairs to the cliff in the forlorn hope of saving the Casa Romantica Cultural Center, the building at the top of the slide. Almost certainly the lack of attention to drainage is the cause of the problem. Meanwhile the five owners of parts of the line between Los Angeles and San Diego, and the three public agencies that run passenger trains thereon, plus the federal Railroad Administration and the Caltrans Division of Rail, are like deer in the headlights. Steve Roberts hit the nail on the head:

*"In many ways this is like a newly found medical condition; first there is denial/why me reaction, then there is the strategy of maybe it will heal itself, wait and watch, second opinion and finding a less invasive cure, etc., then finally there is the realization you have to undertake the major, risky treatment. The agencies involved are probably in the early stages of the second phase. One of RailPAC's roles is to move them to the final reaction phase as soon as possible by reminding them there is no "miracle cure".*

## Some Near-Term Actions To Focus On:

1. Make sure the long-term portion of the current study (second opinion) is funded;
2. Commitment by Caltrans at the highest level (perhaps an MOU) for use of the I-5 right-of-way for the tunnel;
  - Gets the local Caltrans District on-board with full cooperation
  - MOU provides direction to the local District to focus on solutions not the problems
3. Explore with the legislature a categorical exclusion for this project;



San Clemente Beach - photo: Craig Walker

4. In conjunction with the long-term study begin some minimal cost pre-construction activities;
  - Collection of all the information the Caltrans District has about the I-5 ROW Laguna Niguel to Basilone Road (just south of San Clemente)
  - Mapping
  - Utility location
  - At a high-level, more clearly define properties in the transition locations.
5. Some initial test borings."

Back in the 90's there was a clamor for more local control of this corridor. Sacramento was "dictating" what should happen and the locals didn't like it. In reality Caltrans Division of Rail experts were using their expertise and realistically assessing what could be successfully operated given the resources available. Intercity trains do not stop at every mile post! Today's emergency shut down of service has shown the weakness of local control. We have too many train operators and too many owners of right of way for one short corridor. We believe that Governor Newsom should appoint an emergency manager from the industry with power to order repairs and reestablish service as soon as possible. If we can manage without trains for this long, there will be those asking whether we need them at all!





# RAILPAC CALIFORNIA PASSENGER RAIL PLAN 2023

Swiss Intercity 125mph  
double deck electric train -  
photo: Georg Trub

**SPECIAL  
PULL OUT  
SECTION!**



The Rail Passenger Association of California, a non-profit, volunteer group of advocates, has campaigned since 1978 for improved mobility for the people of California, with a focus on passenger rail. The official California State Rail Plan (draft) is 72 pages long and predominantly deals with passenger rail. The purpose of this document is twofold. First, we wish to provide a handy summary of our goals for passenger rail and the investments needed to achieve them. Second, we want to draw attention to the woefully slow progress that California has made in the last two decades in actually delivering service and infrastructure. We support most of the contents of the State Plan. But the same projects appear in one plan after another with no progress on implementation. This is a call to action to all interested parties that care about the environment, climate change and mobility for all.

## Index

- A2 LOSSAN Corridor
- A4 Northern California Region
- A6 The Coast Line, Los Angeles - San Jose
- A7 High Speed Rail and San Joaquin Corridor
- A8 Southern California Region
- A9 Coachella Valley Service
- A10 Long Distance trains serving California
- A11 Rolling Stock and Electrification
- A12 Governance and Statewide Initiatives

About RailPAC: The RailPassenger Association of California is an all volunteer 501c3 non-profit advocacy group. Since 1979 we have campaigne for better mobility as Californians focused on the potential of passenger rail. For more information contact: [info@railpac.org](mailto:info@railpac.org)





## LOSSAN



*Much of the LOSSAN route is subject to coastal erosion. Surfliner train at Summerland, CA. Photo: Matt Batryn Rodriguez*

The Los Angeles San Diego San Luis Obispo Rail Corridor is the busiest in the State and second busiest in the nation. However, total passenger ridership from the three services (Amtrak Surfliner, Coaster and Metrolink) is only a few thousand per day and is way below the potential that the population could support. Since RailPAC and other groups successfully campaigned for the expansion of service in the 1980s progress has been painfully slow. While the number of trains has increased, infrastructure improvements lag behind resulting in poor punctuality and reliability. Journey times have not improved since the 1960s. Now, the line's very existence is in jeopardy from coastal erosion.

RailPAC is calling for a major investment program to upgrade the



line to provide a service appropriate for the population and importance of the coastal region.

### Construction:

- Carry out defensive works to protect vulnerable coastal areas.
- Move forward and complete as a priority, LinkUS Phase A (Los Angeles Union Station Through Tracks).
- Start construction, Leesdale siding.
- Move to construction Del Mar Bypass Tunnel.
- Reconstruct Carpinteria Station as a double track, center platform facility.
- Rebuild and upgrade Ortega spur track as a short passenger train siding.

### Planning/Funding:

- Move with urgency in identifying recommended option, environmental planning, funding strategy and 30% design for the San Juan Capistrano/ San Clemente Bypass Tunnel
- Develop funding strategy to accelerate LINKUS Phase B
- Complete environmental study 4th track Redondo Jct. – Fullerton
- Begin planning process for Miramar bypass tunnel
- In conjunction with CAHSR planning, initiate

planning for the overhead electrification Chatsworth – San Diego (either full or segment overhead electrification (See HSR Policy Section).

### Service:

- Better integrate Pacific Surfliner service with Metrolink and Coaster. Evaluate fare/promotion opportunities as a result of the Integrated Ticketing Project to provide more flexibility for the rider. Also evaluate opportunities where additional Metrolink/ Coaster service can act as feeder or replacement service to certain stations enabling the Surfliners to provide limited stop service Los Angeles – San Diego. Consider operating some San Diego – LA 500 series trains to Palmdale/Lancaster providing a one seat ride from the western high-desert to Orange County and San Diego
- Additional local service Ventura County to Santa Barbara County (See “Coast Policy Section”).

### Environment and Sustainability:

- Electrify Burbank – San Diego with overhead catenary for regional and intercity trains.
- Operate through High-Speed trains Sacramento/ San Francisco – San Diego, and Brightline Las Vegas – San Diego.

**Objective:** An intercity and local passenger train service that is comparable to the London-Birmingham route in the UK

	LOS ANGELES - SAN DIEGO	LONDON - BIRMINGHAM
<i>Population (millions)</i>	Los Angeles: 3.7 Los Angeles metro area: 15 San Diego: 1.3 San Diego metro area: 3	London 8 London metro area: 13 Birmingham: 1 Birmingham metro area 2.3
<i>Population (size by rank in the nation)</i>	Los Angeles: 2nd San Diego: 8th	London: 1 <sup>st</sup> Birmingham: 2nd
<i>International airports?</i>	Los Angeles: Yes San Diego: Yes	London: Yes Birmingham: Yes
<i>Rail connection to airport</i>	Los Angeles: No San Diego: No	London: Yes Birmingham: Yes
<i>Distance</i>	128 miles	112 miles
<i>Tracks</i>	Triple , double, single	Quad, double
<i>Percentage of route that is single track</i>	20%	0%
<i>Year railroad built</i>	1888	1838
<i>Year electrified</i>	Not electrified	1968
<i>Train average speed</i>	46 mph	82 mph
<i>Intercity train frequency</i>	Hourly	3 per hour. More in peak periods
<i>Fastest Direct Rail Journey Time</i>	2 hours, 50 minutes	1 hour, 36 minutes
<i>Regional train frequency</i>	No through service	4 per hour. More in peak periods
<i>Secondary route</i>	None	Chiltern Railways via Banbury
<i>Secondary route frequency</i>	None	2 trains per hour
<i>Secondary route speed</i>	None	60 mph
<i>Train operator</i>	Amtrak Metrolink Coaster	Virgin Trains London Northwestern Chiltern Railways
<i>On time performance</i>	Amtrak: 80%	Virgin Trains: 87% LNW 88% Chiltern Railways: 95%
<i>Round trip fare</i>	Standard: \$45	Standard: \$245 Off-peak: \$73 (Specials as low as \$7.50)



## Northern Region

### Objective:

Build a northern California rail network, with the busiest sections electrified, in coordination with local and regional transit services to provide door to door mobility. The twin cores of the system would be an expanded and improved Capitol Corridor from Sparks NV to Salinas CA, and the ACE/San Joaquin network San Jose – Bakersfield and Natomas (eventually Chico) to Merced and San Jose.



*ACE crossing the Altamont - photo: Arne Brown*

### Construction:

#### Capitol Corridor

- Santa Clara Siding
- Albrae siding extension to Mowry (Newark)
- Third main track Sacramento to Roseville
- South Bay Connect, Oakland - Newark rerouting of freight trains via Niles subdivision and passenger trains via the Coast subdivision.
- New station at Ardenwood on the Coast Subdivision

#### Altamont Commuter Express (ACE)/San Joaquins

- Stockton Flyover eliminating UP/BNSF level crossing in Stockton
- New relocated Madera Station (will eventually serve as HSR station for Madera)
- Complete Valley Rail capacity upgrades (ACE and San Joaquins) on both UP and BNSF between Merced, Stockton. Sacramento and Natomas.
- Complete Valley Link between Dublin/Pleasanton and Lathrop connecting San Joaquin Valley to BART

### SMART/Caltrain

- SMART extension to Windsor
- Complete Caltrain electrification

### Planning/Funding

#### Capitol Corridor:

- New double track viaduct over the Alviso wetlands.
- Track, siding and signal upgrades Salinas to Gilroy
- Double track on the Coast Subdivision South Elmhurst (Oakland) to Newark
- Electrify Sacramento – San Jose

#### ACE/San Joaquins

- Merced Intermodal Track Connection linking the BNSF San Joaquin route to the downtown Merced HSR station
- ACE tunnel bypassing Niles Canyon
- Electrify ACE/San Joaquins Natomas – Stockton, electrify ACE Lathrop – Newark

### Capitol Corridor/ACE/San Joaquins



- Develop plans for new interchange station in Sacramento where the Roseville Line (Capitol Corridor) crosses the Natomas Line (ACE/San Joaquins)

### SMART/Caltrain

- In conjunction with CAHSRA acquire UP right-of-way Gilroy – San Jose and construct a double track electrified rail line
- Extend Caltrain to Salesforce Transit Center
- Extend SMART to Larkspur ferry terminal
- Extend SMART to Healdsburg

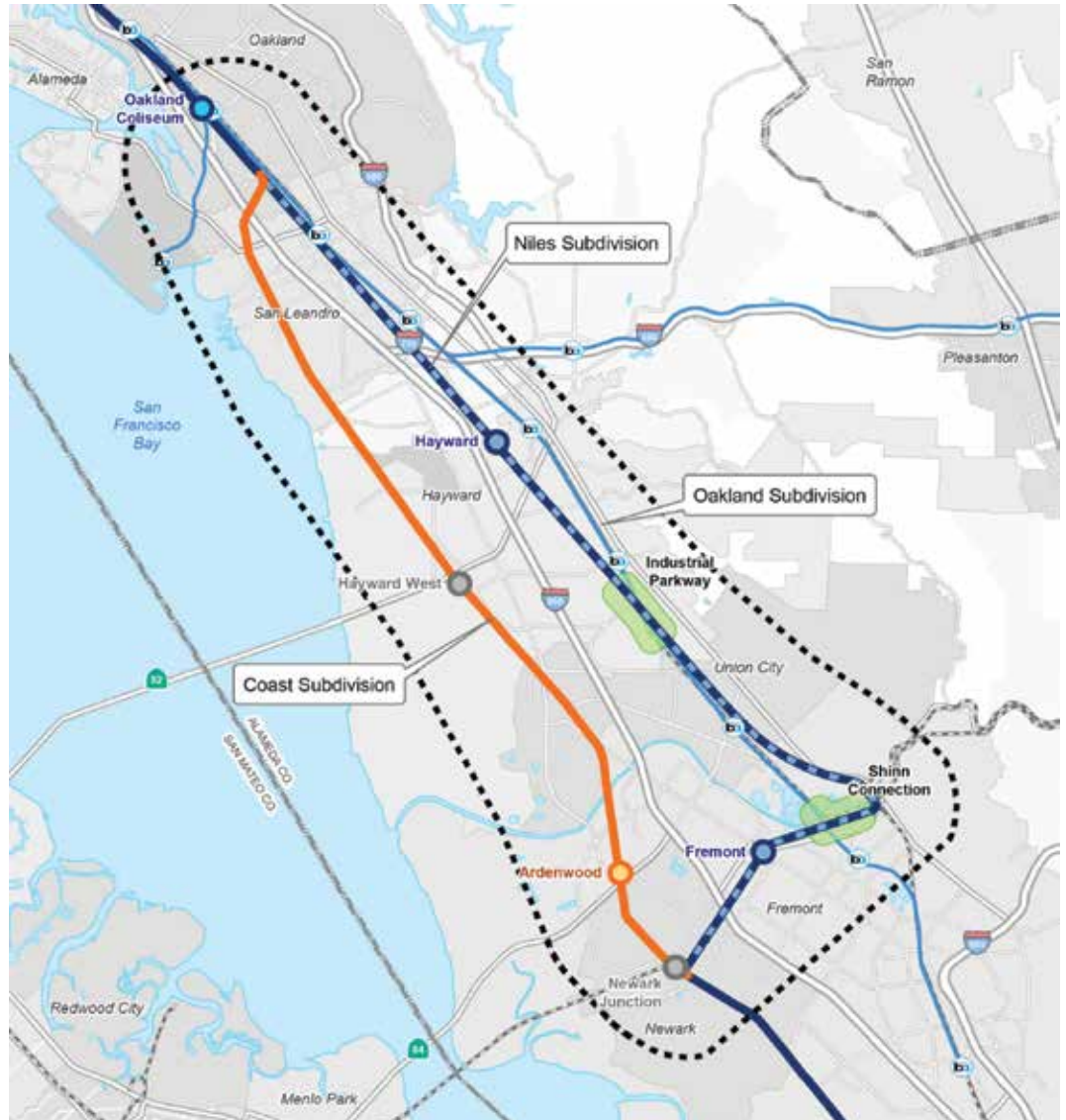
### Equipment:

- Integrate new Venture cars into San Joaquin service
- Test hydrogen emu's between Merced and Natomas and between Stockton and Dublin-Pleasanton
- Develop new Northern California network equipment requirements. Bi-level cars for local service and dual-mode single level cars for through HSR service, post high-speed rail extension to San Francisco.

### Service:

- Maintain the availability of food service, offering a wide variety of products, on the San Joaquins and Capitol Corridor trains
- Extend ACE service from Merced to Sacramento and San Jose
- Extend ACE/San Joaquin service from Merced to Sacramento/Natomas
- Additional San Joaquin frequencies between Merced and Sacramento/Natomas
- Begin HSR operations Merced to Bakersfield, integrate ACE and San Joaquin networks into HSR trunk line
- Extend San Joaquin Service from Merced to Union City

- Extend the Capitol Corridor from Roseville to Reno/Sparks, NV.



Capitol Corridor at Alviso, CA  
- photo: Mark McDoudall



## Coast Line - Los Angeles - San Jose

### Objective:

- Develop this underused right of way to benefit tourism, local mobility and commerce. The northern and southern connections into San Jose and Los Angeles are already publicly owned and the owner of the center section of the line, Union Pacific, has very little freight business other than between Oxnard and Los Angeles.



*Coast Starlight at Elkhorn Slough - photo: Chris Mohs*

### Action:

- State purchase from Union Pacific the remainder of the line not in public ownership from Burbank Junction to Lick (south of San Jose).
- Union Pacific to retain overhead trackage rights but relinquish local freight service.
- Encourage operation of additional freight including intermodal with independent freight operators.

### Construction:

- Signal and siding rehabilitation and upgrades Santa Margarita to Salinas
- Additional sidings at strategic points to permit additional passenger trains
- Adjusting curve rail superelevation for passenger train speeds rather than freight train speeds
- Enhance track maintenance to allow higher speeds facilitated by Positive Train Control (90 mph along key segments rather than 79 mph)

- Straightening of key sections for higher speeds as outlined in plans dating back to the 1960s
- Strengthening of defenses against flooding and coastal erosion.

### Service:

- Southern extension of Capitol Corridor from San Luis Obispo to San Jose.
- Overnight service based on recent European models, possibly combined with express freight. Local service Ventura – Santa Barbara per 101 in Motion plan.



## High Speed Rail and the San Joaquin Service

### Objective:

- Make improvements to the existing San Joaquin corridor service and then integrate it into the High Speed Rail first segment. Expedite construction of the rest of the High Speed Rail system.

### San Joaquin Service:

#### Immediate tasks

- Restore and expand Thruway bus connections.
- Add Business class service to all trains.
- Retain café car food and beverage service.
- Longer term: Replace “Venture” rolling stock with Bi-Level cars.

### High Speed rail Construction and Integration with San Joaquin service:

- Phase I Construction: Complete Merced – Bakersfield segment as a double-track overhead electrified High-Speed Rail corridor using dedicated high-speed trainsets.
- Phase I Service: Begin HSR high-frequency demonstration service linked with a cross platform transfer at Merced to the San Joaquins and ACE trains. Expand Thruway bus routes with greater frequencies.
- Phase II Planning: Concurrently begin pre-construction activities (mapping, geotechnical boring, utility identification and 70% design) for the Gilroy to Carlucci Rd and Bakersfield to Palmdale segments. Given that most of the planned rail line is double track; explore the cost/feasibility/timeline impacts of initially



*San Joaquin train approaches Bakersfield, CA - Mark MacDougal*

constructing only one tunnel for each of the longest tunnels of the Phase II extensions.

- Coordinate with Caltrain and the Union Pacific on the purchase of the San Jose to Gilroy HSR/ Caltrain right-of-way. Begin pre-construction activities to build an overhead electrified double track rail line.
- Phase II Construction: Begin concurrent construction of the San Jose/San Francisco and Palmdale segments.
- Phase II Service: With the original HSR trainsets shifted to the San Francisco to Palmdale route explore the acquisition of dual mode high-speed trainsets. This will enable one-seat auto competitive service between Sacramento and Los Angeles.
- Southern California Planning/Service: Coordinate with Brightline and the High Desert Corridor JPA to move to pre-construction and construction of the High Desert Corridor between Victorville and Palmdale. Completion of this segment will allow Brightline to operate Merced to Las Vegas service and CAHSR to operate fully electrified trains from San Francisco to Rancho Cucamonga. Support efforts to electrify the San Bernardino Metrolink line to LA Union Station.



## Southern California Region Metrolink/Coaster

### Objective:

To create Swiss-style clockface regional rail service with local transit connections to provide door to door mobility throughout the region. It should be noted that the whole country of Switzerland would fit between Palm Springs and Santa Barbara, and has a system that provides door to door transit with bus connections at 30 minute intervals for most of the country.

### Construction

- Place 3rd main track, Redondo Jct. to Fullerton, in service as soon as practical.
- Begin construction on Fullerton Jct. realignment.
- Move forward and complete as a priority, LinkUS Phase A (Los Angeles Union Station Through Tracks)
- Relocate Northridge Station and construct as a center platform double track station.
- Realign CP Maple (Olive Subdivision Jct.) for faster speeds.
- Replace CA 1 overcrossing in Dana Point and extend Serra Siding
- Complete double track Brighton – Roxford.
- Complete Irvine train maintenance facility.
- Complete double track Raymer – Bernson.
- Continue to move forward in constructing double track on Metrolink's San Bernardino Line.
- Move to construction, Del Mar Bypass Tunnel.
- Complete double track projects not associated with bypass tunnels in San Diego County.

### Planning/Funding:

- Move with urgency in identifying the recommended option, environmental planning, funding strategy and 30% design for the San Juan Capistrano/ San Clemente Bypass Tunnel. As part of planning effort, evaluate the option of retaining local service on a stub branch to beach stations in lieu of a costly underground station within the San Clemente tunnel.
- Develop funding strategy to accelerate LINKUS Phase B.
- Complete environmental study 4th track Redondo Jct. – Fullerton
- Begin planning process for Miramar bypass tunnel In conjunction with CAHSR initiate planning for overhead electrification Chatsworth – San Diego (either full or segment overhead electrification (See HSR Policy Section).

- Begin planning process for overhead electrification Via Princesa – Burbank – LAUS – Laguna Niguel. Begin planning process for overhead electrification San Bernardino – LAUS.

### Service

- The goal is thirty minute clockface schedules on the core electrified lines.
- Conduct a review of schedules on other lines to determine the optimum service given the current demand patterns with a special focus of the need and viability of peak services on these lines.
- Better integrate Pacific Surfliner service with Metrolink and Coaster. Evaluate fare/promotion opportunities as a result of the Integrated Ticketing. Project to provide more flexibility for the rider.
- Also evaluate opportunities where additional Metrolink/Coaster service can act as feeder or replacement service to certain stations enabling the Surfliners to provide limited stop service Los Angeles – San Diego. Add Santa Barbara County, local service Oxnard – Santa Barbara.
- Establish a pool agreement between NCTD and SCRRA for through commuter rail service San Diego – Lancaster and San Diego – San Bernardino.

### Long-Term

- Utilize the overhead electrification on the San Bernardino Line to operate Brightline trains from Las Vegas to serve Los Angeles Union Station directly by operating on the San Bernardino Line from Rancho Cucamonga.
- Utilizing CAHSRA's Palmdale – Burbank tunnel, operate Metrolink regional rail service from Lancaster to Orange County



*Metrolink Loco at LAUS -  
photo: Charles Freericks*



## Coachella Valley

### Objective:

Provide intercity service to one of California's fastest growing regions..

### Construction

- Third main track Colton - Coachella, and stations at Palm Springs, Indio, and Coachella..



### Service

- Intercity service with limited stops in the LA Basin, café car and business class. Five daily round trips minimum between Los Angeles and Coachella. Add daily service to the Sunset Limited.
- Connect in Los Angeles with Coast route and local Metrolink services.

### Planning

- Plan on extending some services to Calexico (Mexican border).
- Integrate with planning for Los Angeles - Phoenix – Tucson corridor. Coordinate with Arizona and Riverside County to form a Sunset Route Interstate Compact to obtain federal funds.
- This proposed service has been in the State Rail plan for over 20 years. Existing planning calls for 2 round trips daily, which is ludicrous given so much capital investment in track and stations. If the public is to invest in a major upgrade to private property, i.e. the third main track in the Union Pacific right of way, then we should expect the right to operate multiple frequencies.



*Coachella Valley's only train, the thrice weekly Sunset Limited en route to New Orleans starts the climb east from the Los Angeles Basin. A third main track would be required from here to Coachella - photo: Charles Freericks*

## Long Distance Trains (National Network)

### Overview:

Amtrak's long-distance routes provide convenient and in places the only available public transportation for many Californians. Most passengers on the long-distance trains are not traveling between major endpoint cities. They are traveling between small and medium size cities, small cities and large cities often connecting at major hub cities to other trains. Many of these city pairs are within California which means travel within the state, while many travellers bring visitors from other states, and many more are visitors from overseas. One train of note is the Coast Starlight which serves dozens California cities the length of California. It also enhances two California corridors, Los Angeles – San Luis Obispo and Salinas – Sacramento and is a placeholder for two other corridors San Luis Obispo – San Jose and Sacramento - Chico.

### Service:

- It is critical that Federal funding be maintained to retain the service currently operating.
- Full dining car service should be available to all passengers.
- Business class should be introduced on all trains
- Amtrak should utilize space on baggage cars to add revenue from packages and small freight shipments.

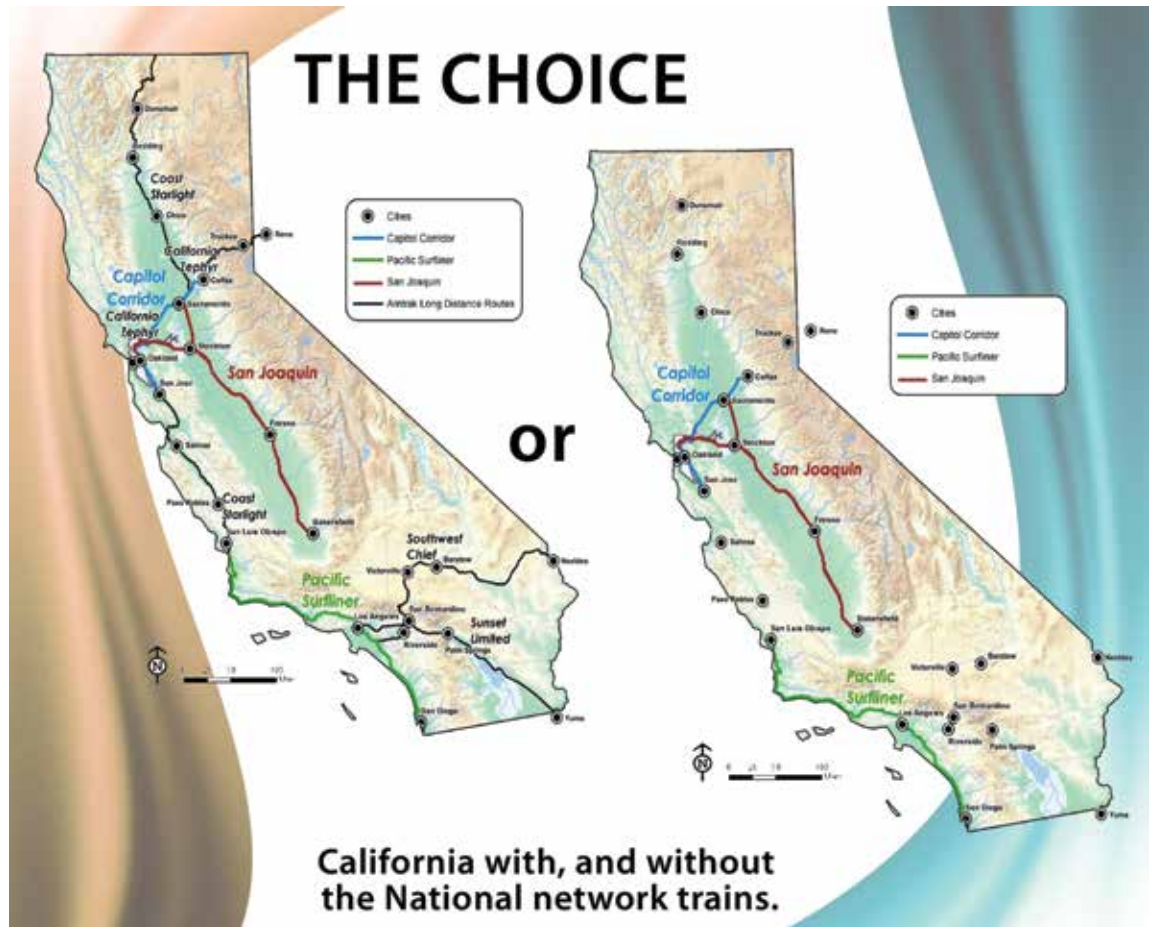
### Long Term Objective:

- Add second frequency over part or all of existing routes, where possible providing daytime service where the existing train stops during night hours.
  - Enhance service on key long-distance routes by adding state sponsored frequencies to segments along these routes. As traffic grows with these additional frequencies explore with Amtrak adding additional capacity to the long-distance train to accommodate increased shorter distance travel.
- Examples of such route segments are:

- Coast Starlight; San Luis Obispo – San Jose
- Coast Starlight; Sacramento – Chico
- California Zephyr; Sacramento – Reno/Sparks
- Sunset Ltd; Los Angeles – Indio and Los Angeles – Phoenix/Tucson

### Rolling Stock:

- There is an urgent need for equipment renewal; California needs to support the current national initiative to replace Amtrak's long-distance fleet.
- Amtrak needs to return cars to service and clear the backlog of repairs so that they can increase the number of revenue seats and sleeper berths on each train.
- Interstate Passenger Rail Compact/Construction: Coordinate with State of Arizona, Sun Valley communities and Riverside County in linking Phoenix/ Tucson and Southern California by forming a Sunset Route Interstate Rail Compact. A key goal is the reroute of the Sunset Limited via Phoenix using Federal Infrastructure funds to rehabilitate the rail line between Wellton and Phoenix.





## Electrification and Rolling Stock

### The Transition from Diesel Traction.

**Ultimate goal:** Efficient Overhead Electrification, World standard.

- **Issues - Hydrogen:**  
Hydrogen is far less efficient than overhead catenary and even batteries; 39%, 90% and 77% respectively. This means to power trains by hydrogen requires about two and half times more electrical generating capacity than if the train was powered directly, via overhead catenary, from the stationary power source. Also, there are concerns regarding the source of hydrogen (grey or green) and doubts that hydrogen will have the capability to provide sufficient power and range for intercity and longer distance regional services.
- **Issues – Batteries:** Efficiency, range, weight, recharge time and the grid improvements required for the single point recharging facility (at stations)
- **Issues – Overhead electrification:** primarily cost and lineside opposition

One option to explore is the overhead electrification of key route segments such as key stations and along high power demand sections (grades) and sections to extend range. This would be combined with dual mode rolling stock with a modest number of batteries, frequently recharged enroute, and batteries not taxed by high power demand segments. This option could deliver the best balance of cost, reliability, range and performance while minimizing lineside issues.

### Priority electrification routes:

- **Metrolink**  
Chatsworth – San Diego (electrification facilitates the new long tunnels required along the Coast)



*Double deck Stadler local emu arrives Winterthur, Switzerland-  
photo: Georg Trub*

Via Princessa – Burbank  
Los Angeles – San Bernardino (would enable Brightline trains from Las Vegas to serve Los Angeles Union Station directly)

- **Capitol Corridor**  
Sacramento - San Jose
- **ACE/San Joaquins**  
Natomas – Stockton
- **ACE**  
Lathrop - Newark

### Rolling Stock:

There is an urgent need to start planning for a replacement of the California Cars. The largest order possible will drive car builder interest and pricing. To generate the largest order possible a standard design for a double deck car for both intercity and regional, either loco hauled or multiple unit, is required.

A double deck car design delivers maximum efficiency and is recommended because of 154 stations in California, only SMART has high level platforms. High level boarding is unaffordable and not necessary.

## Governance and Statewide Planning and Initiatives

### Governance

Multiple crises demand a strong central guiding hand. The combined existential threats of a transformation in the demand for business and work travel, together with multiple infrastructure failures on the busiest passenger rail route, resulting in line closure for prolonged periods, have found the current governance structure inadequate to meet the challenges.

County level governance has been found to be inadequate and too parochial to successfully maintain and expand regional and interregional systems. The existing Joint use of Powers Authorities (“JPA”) do not have the expertise nor the funds to handle the major projects that are needed to maintain and grow service. Southern California is particularly badly served by the current arrangement. To have three separate entities offering passenger rail service in the Los Angeles – San Diego section of the LOSSAN corridor makes no sense whatever, nor does the separate procurement of rolling stock, ticketing systems, dispatching and other facilities and systems. In the north there is overlap between and lack of integration of Caltrain, ACE, San Joaquin and Capitol Corridor services.

### RailPAC recommends a radical makeover of the existing arrangements.

- Strengthen Caltrans’s role in central direction of planning and development..
- Caltrans would pursue a standard rolling stock design compatible with today’s platforms.
- Likewise Caltrans would manage the transition from diesel traction to zero emission..
- Caltrans would continue to lead the initiative to establish a statewide all-agency ticketing system for public transportation.
- Explore establishing two broader regional rail boards, north and south, to own and manage the mainline rights of way currently owned by the counties and to acquire additional ROWs when appropriate. These boards could also to operate all mainline train service with the exception of the Amtrak long-distance trains, and to manage coordination with local transit and other modes, including High Speed Rail. .
- Provide adequate funds for the rail boards.. (stray periods) through dedicated regional and state funding.

- Southern Board boundaries would be at San Luis Obispo (inclusive) and Bakersfield (exclusive)..
- In view of the now realized short-comings of the current JPA governance and post-pandemic changes in passenger demand, explore alternative governance structures, responsibilities and boundaries.
- Abolish the existing LOSSAN, Capitol Corridor, San Joaquin, Altamont, and Metrolink JPAs and replace with citizen’s advisory boards..

### Legislature:

- Extend Cap & Trade from 2030 through 2040; retain current transportation allocations..
- Environmental metrics should be reevaluated. As a result of the public and economic benefits generated and because a continuous right-of-way is critical to their operations, railroads have been given eminent domain powers and exempted from local laws. The California Environmental Quality Act should be modified to reflect the environmental benefits (more efficient land use and energy efficiency) of increased rail transportation. Currently the views of lineside stakeholders are over weighted while the community benefits to regional and statewide stakeholders are under weighted in the environmental analysis. .
- Alternatively, the legislature could categorically exempt key rail network projects built within the current right-of-way. The operation of additional energy efficient trains on an existing right-of-way should not be considered a negative impact. Also given the issues RailPAC sees in implementing hydrogen and battery ZEV power, constructing overhead catenary should also not be considered a negative impact.

### Other Statewide Initiatives:

- Reestablish the Division of Rail within Caltrans as the focal point for leadership, expertise and institutional knowledge for rail within Caltrans.
- The completion and implementation of the Integrated Ticketing Project..
- Public ownership of the Coast Line between Burbank Jct. to Lick (South of San Jose).
- Continue to work with Brightline and other private operators of rail service (e.g. Coast Overnight) to facilitate the implementation of these services.



# Arizona News

*Todd Liebman – President – All Aboard Arizona*

This has been an incredibly positive time for progress on rail passenger service in Arizona. Let's run through the list. The Sun Corridor between Tucson-Phoenix-Buckeye is unique in that existing tracks go to all the right places. I am very pleased to report that the State of Arizona has submitted the required application to the Federal Railroad Administration to have the corridor included in the Corridor Identification Program.

In addition, the State of Arizona's adopted budget provides initial funding for the corridor. This is tremendous progress. The Sun Corridor is identified by Amtrak as a corridor they wish to develop as part of Amtrak ConnectsUs which envisions at least three round trips daily between Tucson and Buckeye with one frequency continuing on to Yuma, the Coachella Valley and Los Angeles.

Equally exciting is Amtrak's application under the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act to restore the Sunset Limited to daily

service and to return the Sunset Limited to Phoenix. What this means in reality is that we are getting close to achieving many long-term goals of All Aboard Arizona. Imagine regular frequencies between Tucson-Phoenix and Buckeye along with two daily trains each way between Tucson and Los Angeles.

This will restore the Welton Line west of Phoenix to service and link all of southern Arizona with daily passenger service; in fact double daily once the corridor is up and running. There has not been daily passenger service in southern Arizona since 1969 and not double daily since the Golden State and Sunset were combined.

This is huge! Keep up the advocacy and educating our elected representatives about the benefits of rail. We have the Big Mo! Let's keep it rolling.



### All Aboard Arizona's 2023 Fall Summit

More Details will be available in the third quarter edition of **Steel Wheels.**

Also, go to [allaboardarizona.org](http://allaboardarizona.org) for updates and registration.



All Aboard Arizona and Railpac Members **MARK YOUR CALENDAR!**

## All Aboard Arizona's 2023 Fall Summit

Saturday November 4th at the  
Double Tree Suites by Hilton in Phoenix

**Speakers will be speaking on:**

- The Sun Corridor
- Daily Sunset Service Through Phoenix
- Amtrak's Long-Distance Service Study



### It's Okay Not To Be A RailFan... Evan Stair, Passenger Rail Oklahoma

We have all met them, those who wear rail industry knowledge on their lapel 'or tee shirt' with an inflated sense of ego. This knowledge is important, but it does not impress in the halls of government or Main Street. It can backfire and make the railfan appear to be socially-clumsy, if not moronic.

Walk up to a random individual and ask if they know where the closest Amtrak stop is located. I have encountered those who live in a town or city with a stop and they don't know. They are not 'idiots', rather they simply do not give transportation a second thought beyond automobiles, airlines, and freight trains.

This is a fundamental axiom of passenger rail advocacy. Know your audience.

### Russ Jackson writes:

Since 1983 there has not been overnight train service between Los Angeles and San Francisco, only well-patronized Ambuses. The state-supported under-promoted Spirit of California ended back then, and of course the SP's legendary luxury Lark was gone before that. Thirty years ago RailPAC's Dr. Adrian Herzog proposed the California Zephyr be extended overnight from Oakland to Los Angeles as a "hotel on steel wheels," which had much Amtrak West support but not at Amtrak HQ in DC. Now a private operator, "Dreamstar Lines, Inc." from Newport Beach says it is working on a new train to do that nightly trip, and it could begin as early as the summer of 2024. There are no details about cars or services yet, but apparently there will be some food and beverage service which is necessary for attracting regular/repeat business.

Congratulations to Senator John Tester (D-MT) for blocking the six Biden nominees to the Amtrak Board. Five of the six are from the Northeast Corridor, and beside being "unfair" to the rest of the country that was illegal, violating what the Amtrak Board must consist of by law. Senator Jerry Moran (R-KS) said he would only support the nominee from Illinois, and the Senate Transportation Committee Republican members wrote: "It's hard to believe that there are no qualified individuals from outside the Northeast Corridor that could be found to add fresh perspectives to Amtrak's Board of Directors and, most importantly, bring it into compliance with federal law."

### From Andy Selden, MinnARP, on the subject of Amtrak's recent application for federal grants for the long distance trains:

1. No timeline(s). Without that, this is so much vaporwear, not a serious business plan.
2. No mention of FRA's ongoing inter-regional route study. Shouldn't that shape the next wave of one-time free federal capital for inter-regional routes?
3. No mention of the fact that for every dollar dangled for the national system, about ten are going to the black hole in the NEC. Given the output and capitalization ratios of the two, not to mention potential returns on invested capital, shouldn't that ratio be reversed?
4. No prioritization is given. Are we to believe that \$750 million will pay for the whole wishlist? \$750 million would buy about 125 new cars and no new power. Past route studies, which to be fair even FRA thinks are bunk, claimed that more than this \$750 million would be necessary to restore ONE western inter-regional route to a single daily R/T.







# From the Rear Platform

By Paul Dyson, Editor

## Artificial Intelligence

A recent story in *Modern Railways* (UK) set me thinking. Writer Ian Walmsley,

a former British Railways person like myself, proposes using the railway industry as a testing ground for artificial intelligence ("AI"). Here's a few quotes:

"All politicians have only one objective – to be in power. Railways take so long to achieve anything a five-year term of government will only result in a list of things which were not achieved."

Translating Ian's British examples of really bad management decisions that AI would do better into American experience we have the Acela replacement, (trains designed for immaculately engineered track, which the NEC is not), procrastination of funding for High Speed Rail construction, making it more expensive, the failure to maintain the long distance train fleet or to order new trains, vending machines instead of café cars and so on. AI would also replace the duplication of agencies and management, (how many people and organizations does it take to run a couple of dozen trains on LOSSAN?)

"The real key to AI is that it learns, and if it learns it can change its mind based on experience, something existing management really struggles with."

AI "would have financial constraints. It would recognize this and produce business cases to solve the issue, running more trains to generate more revenue."

"I would be much happier with 'this is what we need to do but we can't afford it' than pseudo-science pretending batteries or hydrogen are the best answer."

Of course, things could soon get out of control as AI's tentacles spread. AI could change the timetable in real time so a late running train would have its schedule instantly republished so that it arrived on time. Indeed, AI will produce its own on time statistics and you can be sure they will be perfect every time. Perhaps it's not such a good idea after all.

## Antelope Valley and LOSSAN

I had heard previously that Division of Rail has considered running some Surfliners through to Newhall or Santa Clarita and connect with the Bakersfield buses there. The argument

was that it avoids the buses having to negotiate Los Angeles traffic. Unfortunately, unless you are a through traveler on that Surfliner, this idea adds another transfer to your journey, with no saving in travel time. Furthermore, there are no amenities at either of the Santa Clarita stations, and the temperature range is much greater than in Los Angeles. This smacks of an operating driven idea with insufficient regard for the customer, and I would opine that most passengers would rather stay on the bus than make another transfer.

This does not imply that RailPAC opposes intercity service to Santa Clarita and beyond. Indeed, given the reduction in commuter ridership, the length of ride, and the mature status of the cities of Palmdale, Lancaster and Santa Clarita I would argue for the transfer of the Antelope Valley service north of Sylmar to intercity and leave Metrolink to operate Sylmar-Laguna Niguel local stations service. At the LOSSAN Board meeting June 19<sup>th</sup> both Metro appointed members called for service on the Antelope Valley line. Coincidence, or is there a campaign afoot? Of course, the State legislation that brought LOSSAN includes only the Coast line and none of the inland routes. So is it time to rethink the governance of passenger rail in Southern California? If you've been reading this magazine over the years you will already know that RailPAC says a resounding YES, it is time, and given the travails of Metrolink, Coaster and Surfliner, now is absolutely the time to do it.

## Drainage

In a letter to *Modern Railways* (UK) about a recent landslide which closed an important mainline a retired engineer states:

"Civil engineers know that water is their worst enemy, so why wasn't Network Rail paying more attention to the drainage system already in place at Hook? Earthworks failures cost whole orders of magnitude more to fix, and then there's the disruption (to service) to put up with. Slope stability monitoring is all very well, except that the damage has been done once movement is detected." For Hook, Hampshire, England, read San Clemente California, and no doubt other locations. I am reliably informed that managers on the ground had asked for funds for preventive maintenance but have been repeatedly ignored. Our ambitions for a bypass track are years away and we have to live with the 19<sup>th</sup> century railroad for the time being. Let's make sure we institute *preventive* maintenance until the new line is built.

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