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**COMMENTS ON DRAFT FINAL REPORT – SANTA BARBARA COMMUTER
RAIL STUDY – JULY 7, 2005**

Original Document prepared by Wilbur Smith Associates.

SUMMARY:

- Ridership estimate is conservative, based on peak hour only service and a less focused geographic spread, the Metrolink model. Coastal Rail Now proposes an all day combined schedule using trains and buses that will have a much larger impact.
- Costs are at the highest end of estimates, and do not take into account the possible use of used equipment and of some existing track facilities. Nor does the study point out the fact that many of the line capacity enhancements would be shared with other users and that the costs should be shared also.
- While Camarillo may appear to represent a suitable location for the southern terminus based on traffic projections, it is in fact far from satisfactory especially if an early start to the service is desired. Oxnard is better. The facilities are mostly in place, there is less conflict with existing freight and passenger trains, and the same markets can be reasonably well served. Camarillo may be added later after sidings have been added east of Oxnard.

INTRODUCTION

I would guess that many people in Santa Barbara and even Ventura Counties were disappointed by this study. Among the public in general and rail advocates in particular is a desire to understand the feasibility of a rail commuter service in the near future, i.e. as soon as it can be implemented, not a hypothetical exercise with the base line year of 2030. One cannot blame the consultants in general terms for their answers to what many would perceive to be the wrong question.

I believe though that the analysis of the report is flawed in some key areas. My comments are aimed specifically at the choice of the Ventura County terminus, and in general the estimated costs and their allocation to this project. I also have a comment about the ridership estimates, which do not take into account the possible synergy between commuter rail trains, Amtrak trains and Vista Buses.

Ridership Estimates For Commuter Service

The traditional peak hour only commuter rail service is always limited in its appeal. In a strongly service oriented economy like the Santa Barbara south coast a large number of commuters work irregular hours, are part-timers or work shifts based on the needs of health care, hotels, etc. The study failed to look in depth at the boost to ridership resulting from offering a daylong service using a combination of existing Amtrak trains, enhanced Vista Express Coaches and the proposed new trains. Each of these services is or will be in some degree subsidized by the public, and the public deserves to have the best use of resources. It should be possible for a commuter to buy a single pass, which entitles him or her to use either of these services plus transit connections at each end of the journey. THE COORDINATION OF PUBLICLY PROVIDED SERVICES IS VITAL TO THE SUCCESS OF THE PUBLIC TRANSIT ALTERNATIVE FOR 101 IN MOTION.

Ventura County Terminus

With regard to the choice of Camarillo as the eastern terminus, I have two serious objections. Adding 3 trains in the morning and three in the evening to the nine mile line segment between Oxnard and Camarillo will preempt all of the capacity available, and only works if both the Santa Barbara and Los Angeles Metrolinks and Amtrak trains are precisely on time. There is no margin for error. Indeed the proposed schedule includes 4 “meets” between Oxnard and Camarillo with insufficient time allowed. In addition there are more freight movements east of Oxnard than west because of the service to Oxnard yard. In the morning Union Pacific would lose the track time that they have to move a freight train eastbound, and would probably have to hold trains west of Oxnard until after 8.00am. In the evening, between Ventura and Camarillo from about 4.45pm to 8.30pm there would be 3 Metrolinks, 3 Santa Barbara commuters, and 3 Amtraks including the Coast Starlight. I doubt that UP would accede to this without further infrastructure investments not mentioned in the study, nor should Amtrak or Metrolink as this density of trains would make an already fragile service even more unreliable.

The rail line takes a southerly dogleg between Camarillo and Ventura to serve Oxnard. Including the station stop at Oxnard the schedule calls for 25 minutes running time. I believe that many Camarillo commuters, if driving from home, will find it quicker and more convenient to drive to Ventura, assuming availability of parking at the fairgrounds.

My choice for the Ventura County terminus is Oxnard. Not only is there an existing station with a number of feeder bus services in place, but also there are options available for train storage and maintenance without major capital expenditure that the study did not explore. The Ventura County Railway, whose yard is located immediately south of the Oxnard passenger station, is very interested in providing storage (as of time of writing) and other services using existing tracks. A service from Oxnard could be in place much sooner and I believe would be more acceptable to Union Pacific. Camarillo or Moorpark could be added later after additional sidings have been added east of Oxnard.

Cost of the Project

Absent discussion with Union Pacific any attempt to estimate either the capital cost or the operating cost will be a shot in the dark. My issue is with the methodology and philosophy of the consultants. While I understand that there may be times where only the most expensive option is available, e.g. the acquisition of *new* rolling stock, there is no mention of the possibility that used locomotives, railcars, track components etc. may be available. Secondly, these tracks are shared with Metrolink and Amtrak in addition to Union Pacific freight operations. There is a real need for track capacity enhancements to improve the reliability and efficiency of those operations, as well as to provide some redundant capacity for emergencies, regardless of whether the commuter operation is ever introduced. I have therefore outlined a couple of alternative capital cost scenarios that take these options into account, and that divide some of the capacity costs with the other users.

Comparison with Table 15, page 14 of the study.

TOTAL ESTIMATED CAPITAL COSTS				
Cost Item	Study	Alt 1	Alt 2	Alt 3
Rolling Stock	\$37.6M	\$32.7M	\$23.79M	\$9M
Carpinteria Parking	\$3.2M	0	0	0
Oxnard Station	\$11.4M	\$5.7M	\$5.7M	\$5.7M
Santa Barbara Stn	\$1.75M	\$1.15M	\$1.15M	\$1.15M
Goleta Station	\$1.75M	\$1.15M	\$1.15M	\$1.15M
Goleta Layover	\$4.26M	\$1.2M	\$1.2M	\$1.2M
Camarillo Layover	\$4.26M	0	0	0
Oxnard Layover	0	\$0.5M	\$0.5M	\$0.5M
Summerland Siding	\$5.96M	\$2.98M	\$2.98M	\$2.98M
Oxnard Siding	\$9.16M	\$4.58M	\$4.58M	\$4.58M
TOTALS	\$79.34M	\$49.96m	\$41.05M	\$26.26M

Alternative 1.

New rolling stock with 10% provision for spares as part of Metrolink fleet rather than spare locos and cars.

No parking improvements at Carpinteria. (If commuters use the service they'll be the first ones to arrive in the morning and will take the spaces available. It's not cost effective to spend \$3.2 million for parking for short haul riders.)

Oxnard station improvements, 50% share. (This is in any event a vastly inflated sum. It should be possible to do without the overcrossing, or construct something cheaper cantilevered off the 3rd street overpass.)

Santa Barbara and Goleta improvements, 66% share. No parking needed for this service. Goleta Layover, simplified. Trains will not require full service after a single one-hour trip. No lighting required. Single switch to access facility.

Camarillo layover. Eliminated.

Oxnard layover. \$0.5, uses existing track.

Summerland Siding. 50%.

Oxnard Siding. 50%.

Alternative 2.

As above, but with used locomotives. 6 used and refurbished locomotives. This is entirely subject to availability but there is equipment on the market at the time of writing. \$3 million. Remember that the service envisions only about 15 hours per week utilization, whereas new locomotives are built to run 24/7 with minimal downtime.

Alternative 3. As above but with used locomotives and railcars. There are "gallery" commuter cars available at the time of writing at minimal cost plus refurbishment and transportation from other commuter agencies. These could certainly be used for say 5 years, although Metrolink may not want to be involved with maintenance. Nevertheless this is an option worthy of study. Say 12 cars at \$500,000 each.

Other Points to Consider:

It is very hard at any time to forecast freight traffic volumes on a rail line. Variables such as the level of economic activity, the strength of competition, advances in technology and the capacity of alternative rail routes have a strong influence on the number of freight trains run. The Coast Line is no exception. Much of the freight traffic is in lumber and other building materials from the Pacific Northwest to Southern California. The housing industry is notoriously cyclical. Competition exists from BNSF Railway, trucks, and ocean going barges from the Columbia River to Southern California Ports. If rail traffic declines overall Union Pacific may chose to route this traffic via the Central Valley line. This has happened in the past, when Southern Pacific eliminated all through freight traffic between 1987 and 1990. On line originated traffic has been in decline for many years, with only the Conoco-Phillips refinery at Callender shipping a large, regular volume.

Nevertheless, regardless of recent and current traffic patterns, this line is one of only two north-south connections in the state of California. An earthquake at Tehachapi in 1952 severed one of these links, forcing as much traffic as could be handled onto the Coast Line. In those days there were more active sidings, as well as an army of train crews, train order clerks and other operations personnel. I would argue that it is in the economic interests of the State of California to have some redundant capacity to handle emergency diversions as well as business growth.

When rail advocates lobbied for the extension of the successful San Diegan Amtrak trains to Santa Barbara in the 1980s the need for upgrades to signaling and dispatching, and the addition of more power operated sidings, was acknowledged by all the agencies concerned. There have already been many studies to determine what work needs to be done. Since the original two San Diegan trains, now known as the Pacific Surfliners and expanded to 5 turns north of Los Angeles, various agencies, the Coast Rail Coordinating Council, Caltrans Division of Rail, and the LOS SAN JPA have identified markets for expanded passenger service on the Coast Line, including an additional day schedule between Los Angeles and San Francisco, and an added round trip San Diego to Goleta. These trains will require additional sidings between Ventura and Santa Barbara regardless of whether a commuter service is introduced in that corridor.

We do not need any more studies to verify the same facts. What we do need is leadership from Caltrans to negotiate an investment and access agreement with Union Pacific to provide the state with an efficient and high capacity freight and passenger corridor between Oakland and Los Angeles via the Coast Line. The result of this approach should be a win-win deal whereby Union Pacific freights can transit the line faster, (not at higher speed but by being delayed less often), using fewer train crews and less fuel. At the same time public agencies such as Metrolink and Amtrak should have greater access to the line to the extent that capacity and freight needs allow. This will benefit all communities along the route, especially Santa Barbara. In addition to providing capacity for local commuter trains, the Pacific Surfliner service will be faster and less prone to delays, while a new day service to San Francisco will provide more travel options to the Bay Area, Salinas and Monterrey, and San Luis Obispo.

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