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Memorandum

TO: Planning Committee DATE: October 5, 2007

FR: Deputy Executive Director, Policy W. I. 1121

RE: California High Speed Rail Authority (CHSRA) Bay Area to Central Valley Draft Program Environmental Impact Report/Statement: Transmit Comments, *MTC Resolution 3829*

Background

The Regional Rail Plan, adopted by the Commission on September 26, 2007, assesses how proposed CHSRA high-speed rail alignments could be integrated into recommended regional rail improvements as stipulated by Regional Measure 2. The Commission was not required to choose a particular high-speed rail alignment in adopting the Regional Rail Plan. The Planning Committee recommended that the Commission act separately on the high-speed rail alignment issue at its meeting in October to allow additional time for public comment and review.

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The CHSRA, with the Federal Railroad Administration, has prepared a program-level draft EIR/EIS that further examines the San Francisco Bay Area to Central Valley region. This EIR/EIS generally describes the environmental impacts of a proposed HSR system within this broad corridor including two pass alignments: Altamont Pass in eastern Alameda County and Pacheco Pass in southern Santa Clara County. The draft program EIR/EIS was made available to the public in accordance with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) and the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) for a 70-day comment period. A series of public hearings were held across the Bay Area and Central Valley during August 2007 and September 2007.

MTC staff, as directed by this committee, requested and was granted an extension of the comment period for the Bay Area to Central Valley HSR DEIR/DEIS by 30-days, changing the close of comment date to October 26, 2007. This request was intended to afford the public and the Commission with additional time to consider the high-speed rail planning analysis and make an informed recommendation about high-speed rail alignment options for the Bay Area.

The California High Speed Rail Authority (CHSRA) and its predecessor, the California High Speed-Rail Commission, have been assessing the feasibility of a statewide high-speed rail (HSR) system for more than 10 years. While MTC has not formally endorsed a California HSR system, it has previously taken a position on an alignment between the Central Valley and the Bay Area.

Past MTC Bay Area High-Speed Rail Alignment Actions

The Commission has assessed the Bay Area high-speed alignment issue twice in the past 10 years. In June 1999, the Commission acted to support the Pacheco Pass alignment as the preferred alignment for high-speed train entry into the Bay Area. According to MTC Resolution 3198, if a high-speed rail system is constructed in California, such a system should:

1. Enter the Bay Area via the Pacheco Pass in order to maximize ridership and farebox revenue, reduce travel times, improve distribution and connection opportunities within the region, and avoid the construction of a new bay crossing required by the Altamont Pass entry for San Francisco service.
2. Provide direct high-speed rail service to San Francisco, Oakland, and San Jose, and to as many of the region's commercial air carrier airports as possible.

3. If the Authority elects not to provide direct high-speed rail service to any of the three major cities, it should finance the improvement and operation of upgraded connecting rail service to such city or cities with a level of service as close to direct high-speed rail service as feasible.

MTC Resolution 3198 did not endorse the high-speed rail system nor any subsequent ballot measure financing its construction. The Commission reaffirmed its support for the Pacheco Pass alignment in May 2003 and directed staff to work with the CHSRA and Bay Area transit operators to develop an integrated package of projects to enhance connectivity between commuter and intercity rail operators and the proposed HSR system.

Regional Rail Plan

Regional Measure (RM) 2 stipulates that the Regional Rail Plan examine how the regional rail network could be integrated with a statewide high-speed train system between the Bay Area, Central Valley and Southern California. As such, the Regional Rail Plan evaluated eight alternative configurations for high-speed lines connecting the Bay Area with the Central Valley and Southern California via Pacheco Pass or Altamont Pass. Opportunities to operate regional "overlay" services across high-speed rail lines were also identified.

Furthermore, the Regional Rail Plan was to provide additional information to help the CHSRA reduce the number of alternatives that would be evaluated as part of any follow-on environmental assessment of future high-speed rail system access to the Bay Area. RM2 did not specify that the Regional Rail Plan endorse HSR or make a specific San Francisco Bay Area to Central Valley alignment recommendation. The selection of a preferred alignment for the Bay Area remains the responsibility of the CHSRA pursuant to Section 185032 of the Public Utilities Code.

High-Speed Rail Ridership Estimation Methodology

A statewide model was developed by consultants to MTC and the CHSRA specifically for development of ridership and revenue estimates for the statewide high-speed rail system. The high-speed rail travel demand forecast model integrated the existing travel demand models in other metropolitan areas, including the Bay Area, in order to better capture intraregional trips in those areas. The CHSRA authority used this model to forecast year 2030 statewide, interregional and intraregional high-speed rail trips for the various Bay Area HSR alignments included in its Bay Area to Central Valley HSR DEIR/DEIS.

In addition, the Regional Rail Plan team developed a separate forecast for regional high-speed rail travel demand using both the MTC regional travel model and the CHSRA high-speed rail model. The reason for this is that the regional rail plan was financially unconstrained and included several BART and intercity rail service upgrades not assumed in the Bay Area regional rail networks used for the Bay Area to Central Valley HSR DEIR/DEIS. The CHSRA preferred to use a financially constrained regional network (MTC's Transportation 2030 financially unconstrained element) to take a more conservative approach to develop "investment grade" forecasts. For this reason, there are two sets of high-speed rail forecasts for different market segments among the proposed Bay Area high-speed rail alignments in the attached Powerpoint (Attachment A). However, the results of these two forecasts for individual market segments are broadly consistent with each other.

Several members of the public who testified at the Commission meeting last month raised (or referred to) various criticisms of our modeling methodology. We have tried to summarize those criticisms - as well as our responses – in Attachment B. In short, we continue to stand by the results of our analysis.

High-Speed Rail Questions

There has been a substantial amount of new information that has been developed by the Regional Rail Plan and the CHSRA draft EIR/EIS that staff believes warrants the Commission to take a formal position on the need for a statewide HSR system and to reassess its position focusing exclusively on a south alignment entry via the Pacheco Pass. To help frame the high-speed rail discussion, staff proposes the following three questions for the Committee's discussion.

1. Should the Bay Area support building a statewide high-speed rail system?
2. Which high-speed rail alignment is preferred and why?

3. How can high-speed rail be implemented in Northern California and the Bay Area?

Attached for your review is a PowerPoint presentation that responds to each of the above three questions (see Attachment A).

Recommendation
Staff recommends that this Committee refer Resolution No. 3829 to the Commission that contains the following comments on the Bay Area to Central Valley DEIS/SEIR, and that the Executive Director or his designee be authorized to transmit these comments to the CHSRA:

1. Support building a statewide high-speed rail system – HSR has the potential to reduce local and statewide vehicle congestion, and divert air passenger demand away from congested airports.
2. Re-confirm support for the Pacheco alignment as the main HSR express line between Northern and Southern California due to several of the reasons stated in Resolution No. 3198:
   - has the highest statewide ridership demand, and best serves HSR's key market - Northern California to Southern California, connecting the two most congested regions in the state
   - provides direct service to all three major cities - San Francisco, San Jose and Oakland
   - avoids construction of a new bay crossing or tube required by the Altamont Pass entry for San Francisco service
3. Recommend a new Pacheco alignment variant as shown in slide #6 of the attached Powerpoint presentation. This variant provides a superior operating plan compared to the previous Commission adopted Pacheco alignment with all three cities on a single line, is about $2 billion less than the previous alignment, avoids duplication with BART/Capitol Corridor/ACE, avoids risk of negotiating with UPRR for East Bay rail right of way needs and avoids construction within the I-880 freeway in Santa Clara County.
4. Endorse the Altamont route as better suited to serve interregional and local travel between the Bay Area and the Northern San Joaquin Valley. At the same time the Pacheco pass alignment is being built, the CHSRA should upgrade interregional services between Peninsula – Tri Valley – Sacramento & San Joaquin Valley. As a first step, ACE service can be improved by adding tracks and improving signaling to provide higher speed and more reliable service that would connect with a future BART station in Livermore (Greenville Road or Isabel/Stanley based on further BART analyses); these improvements would need to be compatible with future HSR. An electrified regional train capable of higher speeds, with additional grade separations that would improve road circulation, would replace longer-term, ACE service; the trains would also be compatible with lightweight equipment operating in the Dumbarton corridor.
5. Request that the CHSRA also evaluate an alternative in the Altamont corridor that terminates HSR at a proposed BART Livermore station where HSR passengers could be dispersed to Bay Area locations throughout the BART system, together with improved ACE service to Santa Clara County.
6. Request that CHSRA consider seeking additional HSR bond funds dedicated to upgrading the Altamont corridor for regional service.

Therese W. McMillan

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Attachment A

HSR Powerpoint Presentation

Attachment B

High-Speed Rail (HSR) Travel Demand Forecasting Comments/Responses

Comment: Modeling work not complete. More time needed to review forecasts

Response: The travel demand forecasts prepared for the Regional Rail Plan study are based on two complementary computerized analysis systems: MTC's regional model system, used for forecasting intra-Bay Area travel and a newly upgraded statewide model system to forecast interregional travel.

The CHSRA, in cooperation with MTC, spent a considerable amount of time and money developing an innovative statewide model to specifically support evaluation of HSR alternatives. The model's objectives were to develop a new ridership forecasting model that served several purposes: 1) evaluate HSR on a statewide basis; 2) evaluate potential HSR alignments into an out of the Bay Area; and 3) provide for other statewide planning purposes, particularly those involving interregional travel.

The model took over two years to develop and was peer reviewed at key milestones by a number of state MPO practitioners and national academics. A Bay Area/California High-Speed Rail Ridership and Revenue Forecasting Study: Final Report was released for public review in July 2007 followed by a Ridership and Revenue Forecasts: Draft Report in August 2007.

Comment: Ridership data and underlying data for the study is not available

Response: The two reports mentioned above contain extensive information on how the statewide model was developed and the various outcomes among HSR alternatives evaluated. There are numerous other modeling development documents and alternative service definitions included on the CHSRA web page (see: http://www.cahighspeedrail.ca.gov/ridership/).

Comment: Model parameters and assumptions need to be clearly explained

Response: The two CHSRA documents mentioned above provide this information. In addition, the draft Regional Rail Plan includes an explanation of how travel forecasts used in the study are derived (p.38) and a separate section on how the Regional Rail Plan ridership analysis considers the implementation of regional overlay services on the high-speed rail network (pp. 78-79)

Comment: HSR analysis was not detailed enough – only looked at corridorwide ridership

Response: The ridership numbers were developed using the CHSRA "interregional model" that identifies travel into and through the Bay region. The HSR regional ridership was extracted from the model by identifying travel within and between five regional sub-markets served by HSR. Staff and its consultants believe that this was a reasonable approach given that we were assessing regional and interregional HSR travel on

corridorwide basis. The results, when comparing CHSRA forecasts with its more conservative base network to the regional rail plan's more robust regional network, are broadly consistent with each other.

Comment: Pacheco Route's Regional Ridership are overstated – they exceed Altamont

Response: Regional trips (shown as "Northern California Regional Trips" in Table 8.3.6-1 on p. 93 of the Regional Rail Plan) on Altamont alignment are actually forecasted to be 26%-36% higher than the Pacheco alignment. The CHSRA forecasts indicate that Northern CA to Southern CA trips would be 18% higher with the Pacheco alignment. Since the NoCal/SoCal trips are a much larger market, the combined NoCal Regional trips plus NoCal/SoCal trips are about 2%-4% larger using the Pacheco alignment – virtually a wash.