



HIGH SPEED RAIL COMMITTEE

Regular Meeting
July 15, 2010

Council Member Price called the meeting to order at 8:36 a.m. in the Council Conference Room, 250 Hamilton Avenue, Palo Alto, California.

Present: Burt, Shepherd, Price

Absent: Klein

1. Oral Communications

Herb Borock spoke regarding Brown Act rules in relation to the category of "Other Business" on agendas. He said there was an item on an upcoming City Council meeting regarding two High Speed Rail contracts that the High Speed Rail Committee should review prior to Council, though the agenda did not indicate such a review would take place. Unless that item was under "Other Business." He said that was not an adequate agenda item according to the Brown Act, which requires a meaningful description of topics to be discussed.

Hinda Sack requested a dual conversation regarding the options of Caltrain with High Speed Rail and Caltrain without High Speed Rail. She said that if High Speed Rail does not materialize the discussion still needs to take place regarding Caltrain.

2. Discussion of Caltrain Electrification Status and Related Issues

Mark Simon, Caltrain Executive Officer for Public Affairs offered a general overview of the electrification project and its status. He said that Caltrain was in a partnership with three other transit agencies, which make up the Peninsula Corridor Joint Powers Board (JPB), these agencies are Samtrans, Valley Transportation Authority (VTA), and San Francisco Municipal Transportation Agency. The JPB has never been a permanent source of funding for Caltrain, and provides only about 40% of the funding. Another 44% comes from fares.

A permanent funding source would help provide the needed money. He spoke regarding the impacts of potential service cuts, and the JPB's policy to avoid further cuts to Samtrans, a policy that will affect Caltrain. He said they do anticipate further reductions. One method for improving Caltrain's fiscal issues would be through a permanent funding source, or a fare policy that generates better revenue. One method to consider is electrification, which would reduce the deficit by about half. The critical element would be increased ridership and running efficiencies. He said that the operating and capital budget issues have stalled the process. Capital project funding can come from sources such as High Speed Rail, which would use Caltrain's right-of-way, for a price. They had a Certified Environmental Impact Report (EIR), but the board still had to certify it.

Mayor Burt asked if part of the EIR certification would include bifurcating the two elements that would allow Palo Alto to address the impacts of the grade separation and eminent domain status on lateral streets.

Mr. Simon said the anticipated EIR did not include a grade separated railroad as it wouldn't be an operational improvement for the system. However, it is the number one safety upgrade that could be made. Trains may not travel faster than 79 miles per hour unless the tracks are grade separated. Grade separation will increase ridership because the trains can run faster, even if, as mentioned earlier, it would not be an operational improvement.

Mayor Burt asked for clarification regarding the difference between operational improvement and increased ridership.

Mr. Simon said he was referring to revenue per passenger.

Mayor Burt said that no grade separation was an alternative that would impact traffic. Since the original EIR was issued there had been traffic pattern changes, which have not been studied. The certification should allow Caltrain to move forward with capturing some of the pre-work funds, but there should be a second opportunity to capture the new traffic pattern information.

Council Member Price asked what the biggest challenges were for the next two to five years.

Mr. Simon said the most difficult hurdle would be money, whether or not the infrastructure changes could be funded. He said that since 1875 the schedules had not changed very much. Stops had been eliminated during the last economic downturn to create trains that travel from San Francisco to San Jose

with only four stops in less than one hour. He said those trains were very popular. The number of passengers is often used as a formula to determine success rate in the industry. Caltrain prefers to use the number of miles traveled. Caltrain averages 27 miles, which gets a lot of people off the road, and purchasing premium tickets. With fully built out electrification, they could go from San Francisco to San Jose in one hour and eight minutes, but with 14 stops instead of the current 4. He said this corridor could be the answer to the regions requirements regarding SB375 and AB 32 for housing density, eliminating trips, and transit travel.

Council Member Shepherd asked for information about a dual system. She said the corridor study was about an efficient way to move people up and down the corridor.

Mr. Simon said that since High Speed Rail first came asking for endorsement of the ballot measure, Caltrain has viewed this as an opportunity. The JPB owns the right-of-way and they hold it in trust for the members of the communities they serve. High Speed Rail wants to use the right-of-way, they will not be allowed to unless Caltrain approves their plan and its impacts on Caltrain. He said the key word is interoperability, they will share the tracks. It is their opinion that the best course would be to build it in phases. A third rail could be installed allowing them to run their trains with a passing track. He said that Caltrain would then get the improvements they were looking for.

Mayor Burt said there were areas where a four track system would be convenient and not impact the right-of-way. The High Speed Rail Authority agreed to evaluate a six train per hour system between Los Angeles and Anaheim. The projection for the Peninsula was driving the four track system. He said it was encouraging to hear Caltrain talk about three track systems. He said that the Peninsula Cities Consortium (PCC) and the City of Palo Alto have worked to have the language in the MOU changed to eliminate the four track system. He said that a four track system creates much greater conflict among the interests involved.

Mr. Simon said he thought the language prohibited four tracks. Caltrain was comfortable with the current compromise.

Mayor Burt confirmed that the Caltrain position was that a three rail system may be able to accommodate Caltrain, High Speed Rail, and freight.

Mr. Simon said that this was a moving target none of the plans were finalized.

Mayor Burt said he was hopeful that with a new Chief Executive Officer, High Speed Rail go back and look at everything. He was hoping they would review the Berkeley study with some detachment.

Mr. Simon reiterated that none of this was confirmed. He said there were many options. Caltrain was preparing their response to the alternatives analysis, one of their suggestions will be a phased implementation.

Council Member Price asked if Caltrain was already in discussions about interoperability.

Mr. Simon said that it was a term and condition of the project. He said the issue was there was competition for the money. They were trying to put themselves in the best position possible so that some of the early funds will be able to go to Caltrain.

Council Member Price asked for a copy of the letter Caltrain wrote as a response to the alternatives analysis. She asked if the model for electrification was the overhead wires.

Mr. Simon said it was.

Council Member Shepherd asked for information about what that would look like. She said that if High Speed Rail did not come to Palo Alto, this would be on the current right-of-way. She also asked what the power station in Green Meadow would look like and she said she thought CBOSS was not what High Speed Rail decided to use. She asked how compatible Caltrain's system will be with High Speed Rail.

Mr. Simon said the overhead wire system was intended to be unobtrusive. It would be no taller than the tallest trees on the right-of-way. He said he would have to review the EIR for specific information.

Council Member Shepherd asked for information on the operating system that had been chosen by High Speed Rail and how difficult it would be for Caltrain to use it.

Mr. Simon said there was no national standard at this time. In the absence of that, there was no reason to think High Speed Rail couldn't find a way to adjust to Caltrain's system. He said that there seemed to be a leaning toward CBOSS as a national standard.

Council Member Price asked for some examples of successful, attractive, electrified, fixed rail systems currently operating elsewhere in the country.

Mr. Simon said he would provide that information at a later date.

Mayor Burt said that the impacted cities had been presented a preferred scenario by High Speed Rail and that was the cause of much of their reaction. High Speed Rail's preferred scenario was an elevated, earthen or concrete berm.

Mr. Simon said that Caltrain is aware of the communities concerns.

Mayor Burt said that from the design side, they will hear some better alternatives. Many different alternatives existed because the CEQA analysis included everything. He said this was encouraging. He said the funding for these alternate designs was a shared issue if they were relying on it. At the PCC meeting, they stated that Caltrain will not be able to figure out its own future without electrification.

Mr. Simon agreed. He said the JPB does not consider itself in conflict with High Speed Rail. He said he was aware that some groups wanted Caltrain to consider what would happen if High Speed Rail never came. They were not at this time doing that.

Council Member Price said that Staff would contact him regarding the items he said he would get back to them.

Jack Ringham spoke regarding alternative options for electrification of Caltrain without High Speed Rail. He emphasized if High Speed Rail did not route down the Peninsula there were other alternatives to electrification, which would be more cost effective. He said that Caltrain should consider diesel powered operations systems. He said that it would cost more to convert the trains, but savings would be found in the lower cost for the system upgrades. He said that it didn't make sense for Caltrain to electrify without knowledge of future compatibility with High Speed Rail.

Mr. Simon said that Caltrain disagrees with the feasibility of diesel.

Tony Carrasco said he had three issues; 1) The EIR was obsolete regarding traffic, 2) money to electrify may be wasted if they chose a different alignment, and 3) he said that train stations being at different heights would not be compatible with interoperability.

Andy Chow said he supported systems that maximized interoperability. He said that electrification was the ideal option, regardless of High Speed Rail. He said another reason for electrifying would be that it is the only option for underground.

3. Discussion of Legislative Contract for 2010-2011.

Herb Borock said the contracts should be reviewed in detail by the Committee and the full Council. He expressed concern about following the Brown Act with this item. He said the Council Agenda description does provide information and should be used as a guide.

High Speed Rail Project Manager Rob Braulik spoke regarding the Draft CMR. Staff suggested the Committee consider entering into a new contract with Capitol Advocates, Inc. for a total contract amount of \$30,000 for High Speed Rail Legislative Advocacy Services. He said Staff also recommended approval of a contract with Hatch Mott and MacDonald in the amount of \$50,000 for on-call engineering services related to High Speed Rail. He stated the Hatch Mott MacDonald figure was an estimated figure subject to additional refinement.

Council Member Shepherd asked if there were any suggestions about using the CARRD group for assistance with legislation.

Mayor Burt said it would be a conflict with CARRD's mission. He asked how the Hatch Mott MacDonald contract fit within the existing High Speed Rail budget.

Deputy City Manager Steve Emslie said it fits within the planned budget.

Council Member Price said she was concerned that Capitol Advocates represents several different cities. She wanted to reexamine the amount and reduce the conflict.

Mr. Emslie said Staff would do additional review and bring back this matter at a future meeting.

Council Member Price said she wanted a clear understanding of the value added for these services. She also asked when the next meeting was scheduled. Mr. Emslie said the next meeting was scheduled on August 5, 2010.

Mayor Burt said the period for the legislative advocacy extension was six months, though it was originally anticipated to be one year.

Mr. Emslie said the change was because of the changing and dynamic nature of High Speed Rail.

Council Member Price said she would suggest they discuss this again prior to sending it to Council and that they schedule another meeting in July.

Council Member Shepherd agreed.

MOTION: Council Member Shepherd moved, seconded by Mayor Burt that the High Speed Rail Committee review the proposed contracts with Capitol Advocates, Inc., and Hatch Mott and MacDonald in greater detail at a meeting to be scheduled on July 29, 2010.

MOTION PASSED: 4-0

4. Legislative Update

Deputy City Manager Steve Emslie said that they had provided copies of the CARRD legislative update and the Committee could ask questions as they see fit.

5. Updates and Informational Items

None.

6. Future Meetings and Agendas

Council Member Price said the next meeting would be on July 29th, where they would discuss the Capitol Advocates, Inc and Hatch Mott and McDonald contracts in further detail. She asked what the planned topics for the August 5th meeting were.

Deputy City Manager Steve Emslie said Staff will present a report on HSR station criteria.

Council Member Price asked if Staff could report on some of the early EIR work. She requested a memo in advance.

Council Member Shepherd asked about the Staff meeting with the City of Menlo Park.

Mr. Emslie said the major issue was crossing San Francisquito Creek, which would have to be done via a tunnel and would likely separate the grade between Palo Alto and Menlo Park. He said the north end of Palo Alto and Menlo Park would be underground. He said there was no evidence of it being cap and cover yet.

Council Member Shepherd asked if Staff had met with the City of Mountain View.

Mr. Emslie said Staff had one meeting with City of Mountain View staff. The City of Mountain View indicated they were in the very preliminary stages of considering a potential station location in the City. No data was available to present and no decisions had been made.

Council Member Price asked for a written summary of those meetings.

ADJOURNMENT: Meeting adjourned at 10:05 a.m.