

CalTrain discussion

Feb. 27, 2014, 11 AM

Peninsula Conservation Center, 3921 East Bayshore Road, Palo Alto

notes by L. Ames, 3/2/14

[These are my “notes from memory” – corrections and additions would be most welcome!]

attendees:

Lennie Roberts, lennie@greenfoothills.org

Alice Kaufman, alice@greenfoothills.org

Seamus Murphy, murphys@samtrans.com

Mark [I missed the last name but Lennie knows him], SamTrans

Larry Ames, larry@l-ames.com

I arrived ~5 min early to find Seamus and Mark already there.

We had an informal discussion, with them asking me about my background. I described my involvement with the Los Gatos Creek Trail for 30+ years, and that it wasn't my day-job but rather an unofficial volunteer effort.

At meeting, after introductions,

Seamus starts by describing the need for replacing the CalTrain bridge and the need for the third-bridge shoofly track, which would later become the tail track.

I discussed where I was coming from: I support CalTrain and their service to SF, I support their efforts to replace the old bridge, and I only want it to be done right.

I pushed them on the need for 3 tracks:

the main line thru SJ is only single-track down by Morgan Hill and also by Alviso: why can't they temporarily be single-track for a short distance at creek while they repair half the bridge?

Replies:

- * a lot more traffic at LG Creek than at edge of town: numerous commuter runs, Tamien to SF.
- * one track is owned by Union Pacific: nearly impossible to negotiate w/ them for shared use.
- * they really want 3 tracks south of Diridon for improved station perations.

They concede that they should expand the documentation on the justification for the 3rd track.

I sketch a diagram on the white-board:

I acknowledge that 3rd track can't be built on eastern side w/ existing San Carlos St. bridge:

the bridge is supported on walls that are parallel to the tracks next to them, but then are angled to be parallel to the creek by it, and so there's a large triangular-shaped structure just east of current tracks. To go east of current tracks, would have to loop so widely to get past triangular support-wall that it would do more damage to creek habitat than would be done by a western alignment.

Question: can CalTrain coordinate w/ SJ: rebuild San Carlos bridge first and then CalTrain?

Answer:

- * CalTrain bridge is getting pretty hazardous: they are worried about collapse or derailment.
- * there's no other tracks in SJ that could be used for detour.
- * SJ is years away from replacing San Carlos bridge: they haven't even identified the source of funding and have done no preliminary design work.

[I apologize for asking so many questions in a row, and am informed that the meeting was called to answer my questions, so I continue.]

I discussed the three tracks crossing Auzerais:

I understand need for 3rd track to cross during the construction phase when it is used as the shoofly bypass, but then I cite the EIR that says it is to be used as a “tail track” thereafter with no trains crossing Auzerais.

Q: can the 3rd track then be terminated shy of Auzerais?

A: yes. They now see what my concerns had been, and will adjust the plans accordingly. If the tracks were left in place, then the crossing barricades would have to be deployed even if they had no intent of having the train on the tail-track reach the street: traffic would be stopped regardless. By terminating the track (and installing one of those heavy-duty train bumper-stops, like they have at the end of the line at the SF station), then the crossing barricades would not have to be deployed when the tail-track is used. This will avoid disrupting traffic from the nearby existing and planned high-density housing projects.

I discussed the trail-crossing at the CalTrain bridge, and drew a diagram of a “bench” in the grading, adjacent to the northern bridge abutment, that would enable the future construction of the Los Gatos Creek Trail.

I point out how hundreds of trail users an hour currently use the trail in Campbell, and there might be even heavier use here, as it would provide a direct and convenient link between Willow Glen and the Diridion Station, Arena, and planned Stadium.

Seamus and Mark state that they have been working with SJ PRNS planners and SJ Trails (Yves Zsutty), and have worked out a mutually acceptable plan. I note that the current documents don’t show this, what with the rip-rap and limited clearance on the west bank, and they say that the drawings will be updated.

Q: I asked whether the tracks could be rerouted – shifted eastward – by Auzerais so as to avoid having to encroach upon Ross Tire and others.

A: they would have to rebuild a long stretch of track to make a shift; Union Pacific wouldn’t want to do it; it would cost much more than it would be worth.

I discussed mitigations for impact to riparian habitat, and they agreed that they need to do it, that it needs to be done nearby and not at the other end of the county, and that it needs to be described in better detail in the document.

Bottom line:

- * they continue to insist on western 3rd track; can’t wait for SJ to rebuild San Carlos St. bridge.
- * will terminate tail-track to avoid traffic impacts to Auzerais
- * are working w/ SJ’s PRNS and Trails to accommodate the Los Gatos Creek Trail.

~Larry Ames, 3/2/14