

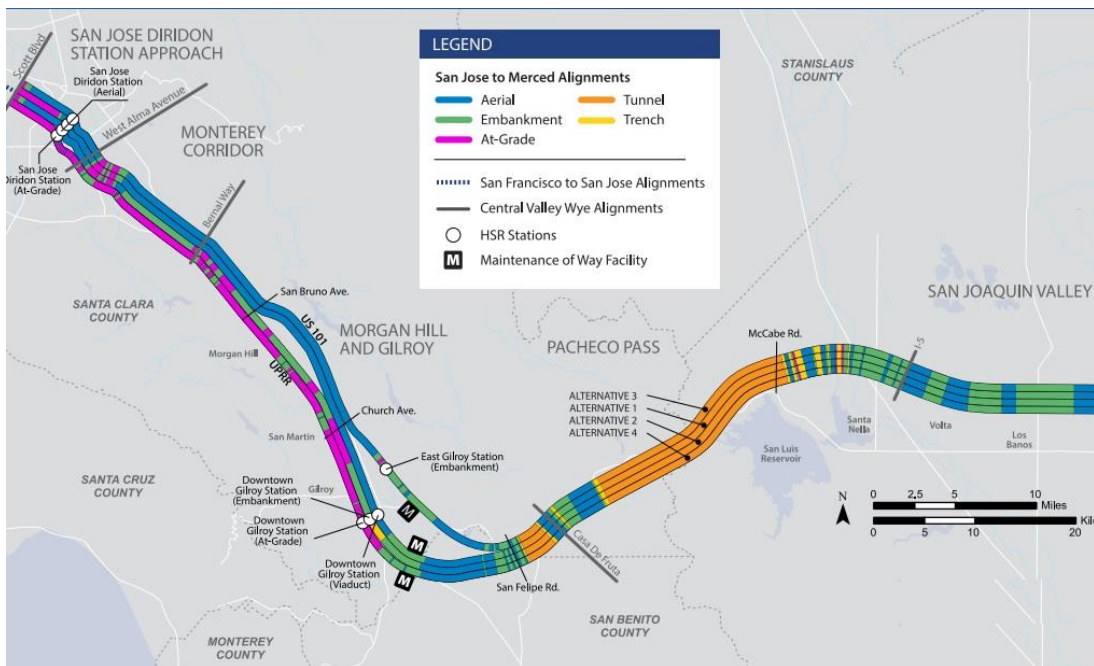
California High-Speed Rail Authority
Northern California Regional Office
via email, sent Aug. 18, 2019

re: San Jose to Merced Project Section State's Preferred Alternative

Dear HSR Team,

I attended Thursday's Public Meeting on High Speed Rail (HSR) at the San José City Hall. Having heard the presentations and viewed the charts, I would like to share my comments and recommendations.

I recommend that you at HSR use the "preferred" Alternative 4 for the entire reach south and east of Bernal Way, but that you **use Alternative 1 north and west of Bernal**.

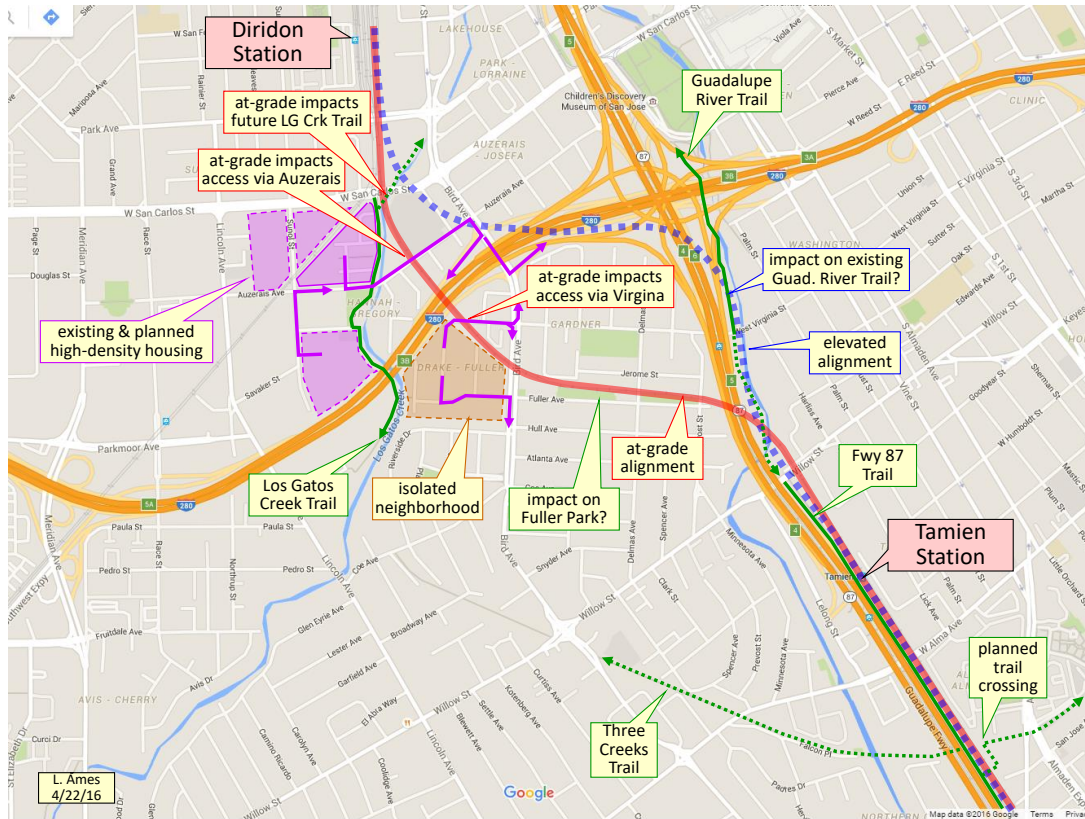


Specific points:

- As I and many others have been saying for years, it is critical for the Greater Gardner and North Willow Glen neighborhoods in San Jose that you select an "elevated" approach from the Tamien Station to the San José/Diridon Station rather than the "at-grade" alignment of Alternative 4. As shown in red in the diagram below, the at-grade alignment would have the daily rush of trains run right through a well-established community, one that is already feeling the impacts of Freeways 280 and 87 and the noise of the recently-expanded nearby airport. The at-grade rail alignment would also impact traffic access to a number of neighborhoods. Adding the needed 3rd set of tracks would probably require taking land from Fuller Park. And the alignment itself, given its close sequence of curves are straight sections, would give passengers an uncomfortably jerky ride. The elevated alternative (shown in dotted blue) stays mainly within the confines of the freeway sound walls: the only private parcels impacted are a few mainly old or empty

commercial lots by Bird Ave. on the north side of the freeway. And being elevated over Bird and within the freeway right-of-way elsewhere avoids traffic impacts to the neighborhoods.

- The elevated alignment makes for a better experience for the traveler, as the tracks can be laid out in smooth curves for a smoother ride. Also, rather than just seeing the unkempt backsides of residential lots, passengers arriving from the south will be treated with a grand view of the downtown San José skyline. There's also the opportunity to build an iconic bridge over I-280.



- Of the several elevated options you're considering, I recommended Alternative 1 because it is the one alignment that, north of Diridon, quickly descends back to grade, thereby minimizing impacts to the nearby Newhall district, whereas Alternatives 2 and 3 remain elevated all the way out to the city limits. Note: when at the meeting I was shown the detailed layouts for Alternative 1, I saw that the plans showed a number of property "takes" just north of Diridon. When I asked about that, the answer was that the plans had been designed back when the rules were for HSR to be separated from the CalTrain tracks. Now that the plan is to have a "blended system", I urge the team to reevaluate those plans under the new "design rules": perhaps the "takes" can be reduced to make a better and more cost-efficient plan.
- In the section around Bernal Road, it is important to be sensitive to the habitat. Coyote Valley in the vicinity of Tulare Hill has been shown to be a critical wildlife corridor between the Santa Cruz Mountains and the Diablo Range. Alternative 1 has this stretch elevated. If you opt to have the tracks at-grade or on an embankment, it'll be critical to provide a number of generously wide wildlife crossings to avoid isolating the wildlife populations in the mountains.
- I'm glad you are recommending the "in-town" alignment for Gilroy. Building a station out at the edge of town would only encourage sprawling development.

And some other considerations:

- The detailed plans for Diridon Station showed tracks with overhead walkways to the platforms, both for HSR and also CalTrain. Please be aware that CalTrain has “bike cars” that are much appreciated and well-used, and so any changes to the platform access routes need to be scaled to accommodate the anticipated number of bicyclists. The plan showed that bicyclists would need to take an elevator up to reach the crosswalk and another elevator down to the platform: make sure those elevators are large enough and fast enough to handle the projected demand.
- As shown in my diagram, the HSR alignment will cross a number of existing and planned bike paths, shown in green. Note that these trails allow your customers to reach the station without adding to the area’s traffic congestion: they should be accommodated and encouraged.
- The Diridon Station is a wonderful old building that is listed on the National Register of Historic Resources: treat it with the appropriate care! It is quite feasible to add capacity to the facility in a manner that respects its historic integrity, by adding new structures to the sides or beneath it, and by shifting facilities (e.g., restrooms, storage) to the new additions.

Finally, I’m very pleased that CalTrain is electrifying its service! And I support the “blended” HSR/CalTrain concept. However, I am worried by the possibility of a “two-step” process that leads to the wrong outcome: don’t just electrify the existing tracks now from SF down to Tamien, and then, when HSR comes to town, say “oh, it’s cheapest, fastest, and easiest to just blend in and use the existing electrified tracks.” We need a firm commitment from you to build the elevated alignment from the Tamien to Diridon: the question is only whether to do it early as part of the CalTrain electrification or later when HSR is blended into the network. (If the rumored train switching/storage facility is going to be built by Curtner Ave. south of Tamien, I’d recommend the elevated tracks be built at that time to avoid impacting the neighborhoods with all the trains shunted down to await the peak commute times.)

We in the community have been working with High Speed Rail for literally over a decade now, advocating for an elevated alignment between the Tamien and Diridon Stations that doesn’t destroy a well-established neighborhood; and, for many years, the elevated alignment has been HSR’s “Preferred Alternative”. It is thus disheartening to find that HSR is now once again recommending the original crude “at-grade” alternative, and to see that all our work and all the community involvement appears to have been ignored. Your Preferred Alternative #4 is fine for all the stretch south and east of Bernal Way, but please select the elevated Alternative #1 in the San José / Diridon area.

Thank you.

~Dr. Lawrence Ames,
longtime environmental-, community-, and trail advocate.

cc: City of San José: Mayor Liccardo and Councilmembers Peralez (D3) and Davis (D6),
Diridon Station Area Advisory Group (SAAG) and Diridon Integrated Station Concept (DISC)
State Senator Jim Beall
Friends of CalTrain, Cmte for Green Foothills, SPUR
Community: J. Urban, H. Darnell, J. Dresden, D. Arant, E. Rast, J. Leyba, D6NLG