

Why California Must Study the Altamont Pass Alternative In Its High-speed Rail EIR

The final planning documents filed by the California High Speed Rail Commission (HSRC) in 1996 stated that "Of the three northern mountain pass options . . . **the Commission recommends the Altamont Pass** for linking the Central Valley to the greater San Francisco Bay Area." HSRC found that "Public opinion primarily favors the Altamont Pass. Most cities and counties in the Northern San Joaquin Valley have passed resolutions favoring the Altamont Pass."

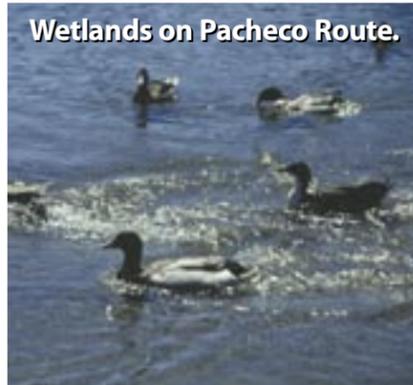
Now, as the High Speed Rail Authority (HSRA) prepares to file its environmental documents for the massive high-speed rail project, **the Altamont route is not even being studied.** Altamont is the best route for environmental, transportation, and cost reasons and must be included in the EIR/EIS:

Altamont Has Fewer Impacts

"Overall, the Pacheco Pass option would have more negative environmental impacts as compared to Altamont Pass option."

- The Pacheco and Diablo routes now being favored by the Commission are predominantly undeveloped and cross the largest roadless wilderness area in the Coastal Range and the second largest state park in California. Damage from building high speed rail through this contiguous wilderness area will be severe and essentially unmitigable.
- The Pacheco/Hamilton routes would impact a biologically rich habitat with unique, intact California landscape of oak woodlands, sycamore valleys, stream-fed canyons and pine topped ridges. Both routes would affect species such as bobcats, mountain lions, the San Joaquin kit fox, tule elk, pronghorn, golden eagles, wintering bald eagles, red-tail hawks, burrowing owls, the California tiger salamander, red-legged frog, western pond turtle, rainbow trout, foothill yellow-legged frog, and bay checkerspot butterfly.

Wetlands on Pacheco Route.



Rail in this wilderness would cause needless harm.

- By contrast, Altamont, route of Interstate 580 and 680, is one of the busiest transportation corridors in the Bay Area. CEQA requires that high-volume transportation corridors be given preference over those with lower volume and population.
- The Pacheco/Hamilton routes would promote new sprawl by opening up transportation patterns where none currently exist, including a new Pacheco Route station on rural land near Santa Nella, about 7 miles from Los Banos and 1.5 miles east of Interstate 5. Construction of this station is likely to spawn a new suburb with unacceptable air quality impacts for the Central Valley.



Los Banos station, an invitation to sprawl.

- HSRC has found that Pacheco has the "Highest potential for water resource impacts." "There are substantially more water crossings associated with [the Pacheco] alignment including 20 small streams between the San Joaquin River and Los Banos."
- HSRC also found that visual impacts are much greater for the Pacheco alignment than for Altamont.

Altamont Has Lower Costs

The High Speed Rail Commission estimated that the Altamont route would cost significantly less to build, saving between \$720 million and \$2 billion.

- Altamont has fewer miles of track, therefore substantially lower capital, maintenance and operating costs for the entire life of the high speed rail project.
- Pacheco/Hamilton require many more miles of tunnel construction, and therefore massive increased capital costs, than Altamont. According to HSRC, "Since it is shorter and has fewer tunnels, the Altamont Pass is less costly than the Pacheco Pass."
- Pacheco/Hamilton have longer grades and more altitude gain than Altamont. This means slower trains, more fuel consumption, and rougher operating conditions. Put another way, "The Pacheco Pass is . . . 37-45 percent higher [than Altamont] on a per mile basis."
- Altamont would allow MTC / HSRA to work together to build a railroad bridge at Dumbarton, minimizing the overall cost and impact of the already-planned bridge.

Altamont Serves More Travel

"The . . . alignment . . . which incorporates the Altamont Pass would generate the highest ridership and revenue for a Los Angeles – Bay Area System." – California High Speed Rail Commission

- Altamont is about 50 minutes quicker from Sacramento to San Francisco than the Pacheco routes, thus speeding commutes along the Interstate 80 and Interstate 580/680 corridors. The Pacheco route would actually take longer than current Capitol Corridor or ACE trains and therefore would produce negligible congestion relief on Interstates 80, 580 and 680.
- Altamont allows San Francisco trains to reach dedicated high-speed track much sooner after leaving San Francisco, providing the less-than-3-hour Los Angeles travel time required by the bonding legisla-



Altamont is the most travelled route.

tion. This is of key importance to the success of high speed rail since Peninsula ridership is double that of San Jose. Dedicated San Jose trainsets would provide equally frequent service to San Jose, with only 10 minutes more travel time to San Jose.

- The Altamont route links more cities, reducing more automobile trips and improving air quality. Altamont would serve numerous San Joaquin Valley and Tri-Valley cities in the initial stage of development including: Merced, Turlock, Modesto, Manteca, Tracy, Livermore, Pleasanton, Dublin, San Ramon and Fremont.
- The Altamont route directly serves nearly one million people residing in these ten cities. By contrast, the Pacheco alignment serves Los Banos, Gilroy and Morgan Hill with combined populations of only 100,000 people.
- Altamont's direct connections to existing public transit systems, including BART at Livermore and Fremont, will reduce station costs and increase ridership. **Altamont ridership would exceed that of the other alignments,** because it runs closer to the center of population of the Bay Area, and can provide superior service for an additional three million people in the East Bay, Stockton and Sacramento who would benefit from faster travel times.

Connect the dots.



City lights from space.

Trains and Passengers get a Smoother Grade via Altamont Pass





TRAC

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TRAC, active since 1984, is a non-profit consumer lobby
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get from high speed rail?

Relief for congested and
polluted travel corridors

Palo Alto Fremont Livermore ALTAMONT
Tracy

Needless destruction of the
Bay Area's last wilderness

DIABLO

Or sprawl at new stops
built for speculators

Gilroy
PACHECO Hollister Santa Nella
Los Banos