



State reveals detailed high-speed train plans from San Francisco to San Jose

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Love it or hate it, the California high-speed train will bolt through each neighborhood along the Caltrain tracks on either 20-foot-high rail bridges, alongside the current railroad or underground, according to state plans revealed Wednesday.

The California High-Speed Rail Authority released the much-anticipated "alternatives analysis," far and away the most detailed view yet of how the massive project will forever transform the region from San Francisco to San Jose. The highly controversial \$40 billion bullet train will whisk passengers at speeds as much as 125 mph along the Caltrain corridor and travel to Los Angeles, with service expected to begin late next decade.

The authority proposed three track alignment options: raised tracks on either open aerial structures similar to freeway overpasses or on filled-in berms, typically about 20 feet above street level; adding two tracks next to the existing Caltrain railroad; or underground tracks through either an enclosed tunnel or open trench. At no point will the tracks cross street intersections.

The rail authority will not select the actual track alignment until early 2011, and construction will start in late 2012. The configurations proposed Wednesday will give planners, city officials and residents options to study — and debate — for the

next 1½ years.

In most cases, the railroad would feature four side-by-side tracks, with two for electrified Caltrains and a pair for the bullet trains. The expansion may result in taking of homes and businesses through eminent domain, although Dominic Spaethling, high-speed train project manager, said officials may consider stacking tracks, two-by-two, in especially tight areas such as Millbrae, San Mateo and Redwood City.

The rail line possibly could rise and fall throughout the region depending on the needs of cities, although state engineering manager Tim Cobb said it would not resemble a rollercoaster. He said planners hope to keep the elevation as consistent as possible, noting they can only raise every 100 feet of track by one foot.

Spaethling said the authority does not yet favor any of the particular alignments and will spend the rest of the year studying the three options based on factors such as feasibility, neighborhood effect and land use. Many cities favor the underground tracks but fear they will be too expensive.

Among the highlights of the report, the state said it is now considering Mountain View, in addition to Palo Alto and Redwood City, as host for the region's fourth high-speed rail station. Stops already have been cemented in San Francisco, San Jose and Millbrae, but a fourth mid-Peninsula station may be added.

Also, for several cities that hoped the train would be "out of sight, out of mind," the authority said it would study tunneling or trenching in communities such as Burlingame, Palo Alto, Menlo Park and Atherton.

Two of those cities, Menlo Park and Atherton, went

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as far as to sue the rail authority last summer, and Palo Alto filed a legal brief in support of the lawsuit earlier this year. A Sacramento judge is expected to issue a disposition next week in the lawsuit that Atherton and Menlo Park filed last year, with the support of Palo Alto, against the rail authority.

"We're pleased that the authority is taking our comments seriously and that they're going to look at all options seriously," said Palo Alto Councilwoman Yoriko Kishimoto, who helped start a five-city consortium to ensure that cities had a voice in the train planning process.

Other cities in which below-ground tunneling or trenching will be studied include San Francisco, Millbrae, northern San Mateo, southern San Carlos, northern Redwood City, Mountain View, northern Sunnyvale, Santa Clara and San Jose.

Some cities received only one proposal and will not have their track elevations altered. Instead, planners likely will just add two tracks to the sides of their existing stretch of railroad. These sections include the railroad stretches between the Bayshore and South San Francisco Caltrain stations, most of San Bruno, from southern San Mateo to northern San Carlos, and from southern Sunnyvale to northern Santa Clara.

Conversely, the authority said it absolutely will need to build elevated rail bridges or send its trains underground in northern San Mateo and near the Redwood City and San Jose Diridon Caltrain stations. The trains will need to run underground in most of northeastern San Francisco, as well.

Meanwhile, the proposal for raised rail bridges has scared some cities into thinking trains would split their communities in two, and some in Palo Alto have compared it to a local "Berlin Wall." The authority will study raised structures in several

cities south of South San Francisco.

Finally, the authority released six proposals for the start and stop points for the Bay Area portion of the rail line. The authority said the San Jose stop would either be at the Diridon Station or directly next to it, and it proposed four areas for the San Francisco stations at or just south of the Transbay Terminal.

Spaethling said in many areas the authority will also study whether to raise or lower roadways to accommodate high-speed trains traveling over or beneath them.

The proposals put to rest any hopes residents had that the tracks would travel along an alternative path, such as Interstate 280 or Highway 101.

The authority started accepting public comment on the topic at a meeting in San Carlos on Wednesday night, and it will host open houses Oct. 9 in Sunnyvale and Oct. 13 in San Francisco. Residents and government agencies also can submit comments to the authority during the next 30 to 45 days.

Mike Rosenberg covers San Mateo, Burlingame, Belmont and transportation issues. Reach him at 650-348-4324.

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