

ACTION ELEMENT – RAIL

Background

Historically, rail service in Butte County has been almost exclusively used to transport goods (see Chapter 12). In 1995, BCAG completed the Northern Sacramento Valley Intercity Passenger Rail study to examine the feasibility of additional passenger rail service to the region. While the study concluded that passenger rail service for the region was not yet feasible, it did provide beneficial information concerning future passenger rail service data.

Existing Rail Service

The Coast Starlight, which runs between Seattle and Los Angeles, is currently the only direct passenger rail service in Butte County (Figure 11-1). Two trains, one each northbound and southbound, stop in Chico daily. The northbound train arrives at approximately 1:55 a.m. and the southbound at 3:50 a.m. Reservations are required for travel on the Coast Starlight.

Feeder bus connections for intercity rail service are available more widely in the Butte County region. The following table summarizes the bus service for Amtrak thru Butte County. The Amtrak station is at W. 5th and Orange Streets. Parking is free. Subsequent bus connections from these routes allow travel to Reno, Yosemite, Las Vegas, Monterey, and throughout the Los Angeles, San Diego, and San Francisco Bay urban areas. Advanced reservations are required on the San Joaquin rail and bus service but are not required on the Capitol Corridor rail service. Additional information on Amtrak and the Coast Starlight can be found at www.amtrak.com. The following represents the current Amtrak bus schedule and can be found at:

<https://amtraksanjoaquins.com/thruway-bus-2/route-3/>

San Joaquin Connecting Train Number (Southbound)	-	710	-	712	716	-	718
Thruway Number	3710	3810	3812	3712	3816	3716	3718
Days of Operation	Daily	Daily	Daily	Daily	Daily	Daily	Daily
Redding, CA - Transit Center (map)	-	-	-	6:05A	-	10:05A	-
Red Bluff, CA - Transit Center (map)	-	-	-	6:40A	-	10:40A	-
Chico, CA - Amtrak Station (map)	-	-	-	7:45A	11:45A	11:45A	3:35P

San Joaquin Connecting Train Number (Southbound)	-	710	-	712	716	-	718
Thruway Number	3710	3810	3812	3712	3816	3716	3718
Days of Operation	Daily	Daily	Daily	Daily	Daily	Daily	Daily
Oroville, CA - Park-N-Ride (map)	-	-	-	8:10A	-	12:10P	4:00P
Marysville, CA - Government Center (map)	-	-	-	8:45A	12:45P	12:45P	4:35P
Davis, CA - Amtrak Station (map)	-	6:35A	9:05A	-	1:10P	1:10P	-
Sacramento, CA - Amtrak Station (Arrival)	-	7:00A	9:40A	9:50A	1:45P	C1:50P	C5:50P
Sacramento, CA - Amtrak Station (Leaving)	N7:15A	7:15A	9:50A	10:05A	1:55P	N2:05P	6:05P
Elk Grove, CA Harbor Point & Renwick Avenue (map)	7:30A	-	-	10:20A	-	2:20P	6:20P
Lodi, CA - Amtrak Station (map)	-	-	-	-	2:35P	-	-
Stockton, CA - ACE Station (map)	-	8:05A	10:55A	-	3:00P	-	7:00P
Stockton, CA - Amtrak Station (map)	C8:15A	C8:15A	C11:05A	C11:05A	C3:10P	C3:10P	C7:10P
San Joaquin Connecting Train Number (Southbound)							

San Joaquin Connecting Train Number (Northbound)	711	-	713	-	715	-	717
Thruway Number	3711	3811	3713	3813	3715	3815	3819
Days of Operation	Daily	Daily	Daily	Daily	Daily	Daily	Daily
Redding, CA - Transit Center (map)	-	-	D5:35P	-	D9:35P	-	-
Red Bluff, CA - Transit Center (map)	-	-	D5:05P	-	D9:05P	-	-
Chico, CA - Amtrak Station (map)	D11:55A	-	D4:10P	-	D8:10P	-	-
Oroville, CA - Park-N-Ride (map)	D11:25A	D3:40P	-	-	D7:40P	-	-
Marysville, CA - Government Center (map)	D10:50A	-	D3:05P	-	D7:05P	-	-
Davis, CA - Amtrak Station (map)	-	D10:20A	-	D2:35P	-	D6:35P	D10:40P
Sacramento, CA - Amtrak Station (Leaving)	10:00A	10:00A	9:40A	2:15P	6:00P	6:00P	10:10P
Sacramento, CA - Amtrak Station (Arrival)	9:50A	9:50A	9:50A	2:00P	6:15P	6:15P	10:20P
State Capitol - 10th & N st. (map)	9:35A	-	1:50P	-	5:50P	-	10:00P
Elk Grove, CA Harbor Point & Renwick Avenue (map)	-	-	D1:35P	-	D5:35P	-	D9:45P
Lodi, CA - Amtrak Station (map)	-	9:10A	-	D1:20P	-	D5:20P	-
Stockton, CA - Amtrak (map)	-	-	-	D12:55P	-	D4:55P	8:55P
Stockton, CA - ACE Station (map)	8:45A	8:45A	12:45P	12:45P	4:45P	4:45P	8:45P
San Joaquin Connecting Train Number (Southbound)							

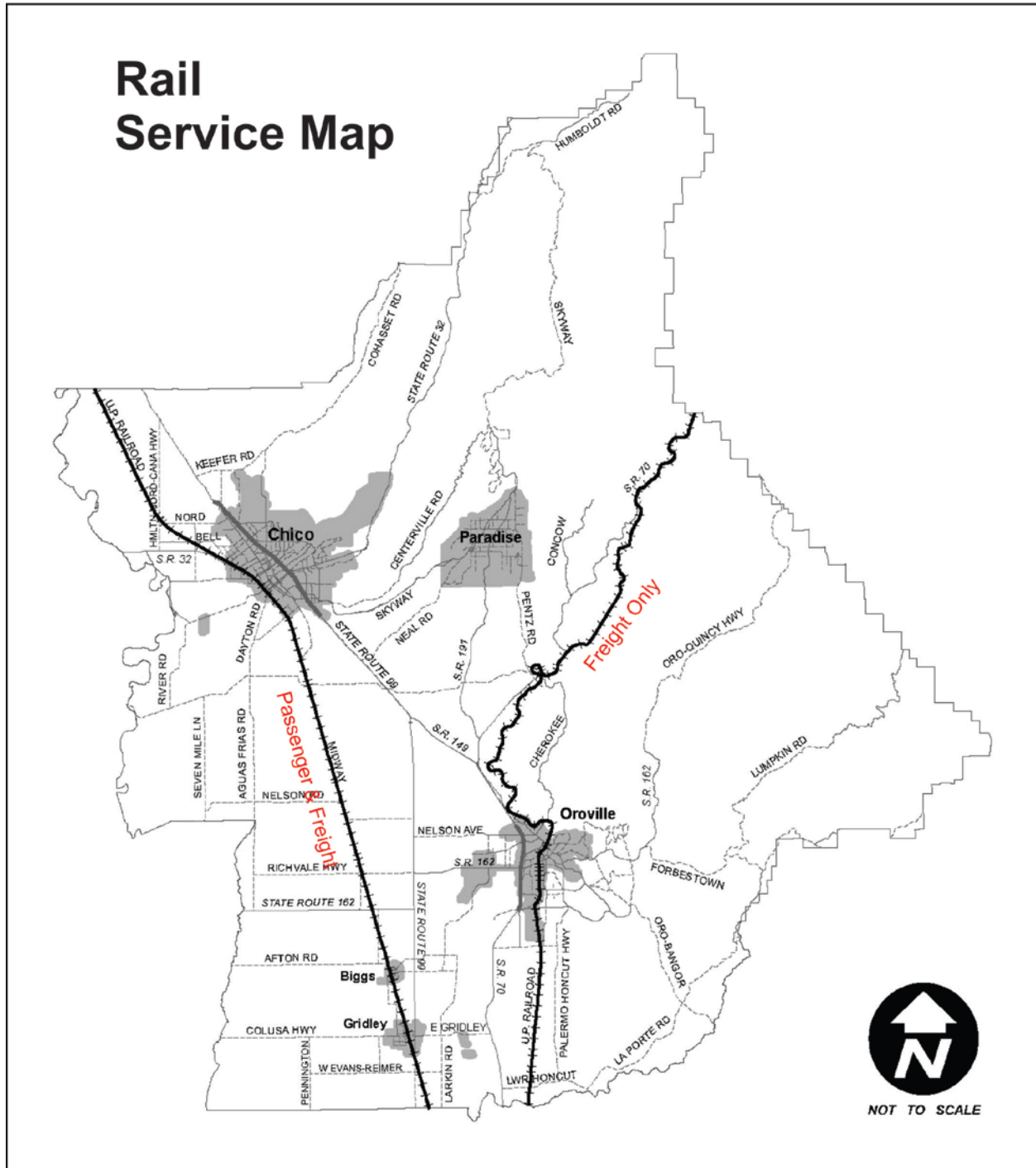
Rail Service Needs and Assessment

Intercity Rail

There are several factors that intensify the consideration of intercity rail for the Northern Sacramento Valley. First, increasing populations throughout the North Valley are taxing existing transportation systems. Second, the existing transportation systems for intercity travel are almost exclusively motorized travel for individual travelers, including carpools or buses. Third, existing intercity transportation corridors are congested, thus making intercity travel more difficult and have negative impacts on goods movement. Fourth, state and federal clean air regulations make it more and more difficult to increase roadway capacity. With the above factors making vehicular travel more difficult, alternatives must be explored.

Rail is an attractive method of travel to many. Aside from being cleaner, it is more relaxing than driving rural highways, contending with farm equipment common in the

Figure 11-1
Rail Service Map



valley, slow-moving trucks & recreational vehicles, and the dangers of fog and inclement weather.

The Coast Starlight is unsuitable to meet the needs of local passengers due to its infrequent and inconvenient night schedule, advanced requirement for reservations, and capacity constraints. The Coast Starlight's use of the Union Pacific tracks through Butte County demonstrates that the existing tracks can handle additional use such as passenger rail service. The key issue is whether or not sufficient ridership for intercity rail in the Northern Sacramento Valley could support the costs of the service.

During the 1994/95 fiscal year, BCAG studied the feasibility of extending intercity passenger rail service to the northern Sacramento Valley counties. ICF Kaiser of Oakland, California prepared the study, in cooperation with the counties of Sacramento, Sutter, Yuba, Butte, Placer, Tehama, and Shasta. BCAG served as the lead agency for development and coordination of the study.

The Northern Sacramento Valley Intercity Passenger Rail Study, as it was called, included two phases. The purpose of Phase I was to identify a base level rail service that could be implemented to provide intercity service, and to identify the potential ridership levels for this service. Based on the ridership forecasts, it was determined that intercity rail passenger service could not be supported currently or within the next ten-year horizon by the seven counties along the corridor. The primary reason was due to the lack of ridership necessary to recover the state required 55% operational costs through the farebox. As a result, BCAG postponed development of Phase II, which would have examined station locations, needed track improvements, financing, and institutional arrangements. While the Rail Study did not justify the need for intercity rail service now, BCAG staff will continue to participate in the rail planning process and monitor intercity rail service developments.

California State Rail Plan

The California State Rail Plan 2007/08 – 2017/18 prepared by Caltrans identifies potential new intercity rails services. The Sacramento to Redding corridor is one of three new routes that Caltrans is proposing in the state rail plan. Operation of intercity rail service from Sacramento to Redding would extend State-supported intercity rail service to a fast growing Northern California area not presently served by the State-supported intercity passenger rail network.

Connecting buses to the *San Joaquin* and *Capitol Corridor* trains currently serve the northern Sacramento Valley. Buses connect to four of the *San Joaquins* in Stockton, and one in Sacramento, and travel north through Sacramento, Marysville, Chico, and Redding. Five *Capitol Corridor* trains in Sacramento also have a bus connection to Redding. Additionally, the single daily round trip of the *Seattle-Los Angeles Coast Starlight* connects Redding and Chico with Sacramento, the Bay Area, and Los Angeles.

Caltrans' ten-year operating plan includes one daily round trip between Sacramento and Redding in 2015-16. This rail service would be supplemented by bus service that would

run over the same route as the train, but at other times of the day. Caltrans believes this extension is a good candidate for rail service because:

- Amtrak currently operates the *Coast Starlight* on this route, with existing stations at Sacramento, Chico, and Redding.
- The demographics of the route are positive: the northern Sacramento Valley has a rapidly growing population; Redding represents the urban hub for the northern part of the State; and California State University, Chico is a focus of activity and population.

While Caltrans planned the study in 2005, it was deferred due to the UP's decision not to consider operation of new passenger trains at the time.

North Valley Rail Vision

The *North Valley Rail Vision* is a planning concept being developed by the Butte County Association of Governments (BCAG) to establish daily passenger rail service to northern California, in addition to other complementary transportation services.

In cooperation with Caltrans and the San Joaquin Joint Powers Agency (SJJPA), BCAG would like to develop the *North Valley Rail Vision* through a series of studies to identify strategies and needed improvements for connecting Butte County to the state's passenger rail services, including high speed rail.

Implementation of the *North Valley Rail Vision* would happen through the following studies:

- 1) **BCAG Strategic Partnerships Transit Grant** – In 2020, BCAG has secured grant funding for \$243,457 under the Caltrans Strategic Partnerships Transit Program to study merging the daily Amtrak San Joaquin's thruway bus service with a proposed Chico to Sacramento daily commuter bus service. This study will look at the viability of merging these two services to provide daily commuter bus service between Chico and Sacramento, while also serving the San Joaquin thruway bus service. This study will also identify needed park-and-ride improvements and stops between Chico and Sacramento, with amenities including electric charging and connections with regional and local bike and pedestrian facilities. This study is anticipated to be completed in FY 2022/23;
- 2) **Extension of San Joaquin Passenger Rail Service to Oroville** – BCAG will work with the SJJPA to study the feasibility of extending the San Joaquin's daily passenger rail service from Natomas to Marysville and Oroville. This study would also look at needed rail depot improvements including electric charging and parking with connection to regional transit and commuter bus service for rail stations in Oroville and Marysville. This would be a future study undertaken by

BCAG after completion of the San Joaquin Thruway & Chico-to-Sacramento Commuter Bus study.

Development of the studies for *North Valley Rail Vision* will also be coordinated with the BCAG Transportation Advisory Committee, the BCAG Planning Directors Group and the sixteen counties comprising the North State Super Region, including the cities of Marysville/Yuba City and Yuba County.

The extension of daily passenger rail and associated services outlined in the *North Valley Rail Vision* improves geographic equity by providing connectivity not only to Butte County but the sixteen counties that comprise the *North State Super Region* (combined total population of 1,058,395), to future passenger rail, high speed rail and commuter bus services.

With Butte County and the City of Oroville serving as a northern terminus for the future extension of the San Joaquin passenger rail service, north state residents have improved access for commuting and travel to Sacramento, the Bay Area, the San Joaquin Valley and Reno. This connectivity also integrates the disadvantaged communities within the cities of Chico, Oroville and Maysville/Yuba City to other urban centers in the state.

Benefits of the North Valley Rail Vision

- Reduced GHGs
- Increased Multi-Modal Connectivity for Northstate Counties
- Reduced VMT and Expanded Ridership
- Improved Public Health
- Benefits Disadvantaged Communities in Butte & Yuba Counties
- Improves Safety for Evacuation Corridors

This effort would be longer term in which specific grant funds to study the viability would be necessary.

Grade Crossings

Another important issue concerning rail transportation in Butte County is the issue of grade crossing safety and convenience. Two cities that have problems with existing grade crossings are Gridley and Chico. Both Gridley and Chico straddle the Union Pacific railroad tracks and have at-grade crossings in several locations within their cities. Neither city has over or under-crossings. As a result of the passing trains, there are times of the day that these communities experience traffic problems where automobile traffic and emergency service vehicles are unable to access various parts of the city. Even longer delays are experienced when trains must make a stop in these cities. As a result, both the cities of Gridley and Chico have expressed a need to

improve some of the intersections by constructing over or under-crossings to remedy this problem.

Currently, both Gridley and Chico are exploring a funding program administered by the Public Utilities Commission and Caltrans for grade crossing projects. The City of Chico has identified a project for West 8th Avenue, which also intersects State Route 32, while the City of Gridley has identified an over-crossing for Little Street in Gridley.

RAIL ACTION PLAN – Planned Improvements

The following “planned improvements” have been identified in terms of goals and objectives for both the short-term and long-term rail improvements. Because no specific projects can be identified at this time, the following are identified to document Butte County’s advocacy for rail improvements.

Short Range

1. Seek funding through the Public Utilities Commission’s grade Crossing Program to partially fund construction of new grade crossing improvements in the cities of Gridley and Chico.
2. Provide rail-highway crossings and protective devices at various locations to minimize rail highway conflicts.
3. Continue to support intercity rail service through the Northern Sacramento Valley, as ridership and funding allows. (*BCAG, Jurisdictions, Caltrans, Amtrak*)
4. Encourage the expansion of service on the Coast Starlight route to include a daytime stop at Chico. (*BCAG, Jurisdictions, Caltrans, Amtrak*)
5. Monitor the High Speed Rail Commission’s development of High Speed Rail System in California as it relates to Butte County.
6. Continue communication with Caltrans and the San Joaquin Joint Powers Authority

Long Range

1. Continue to work toward implementing intercity passenger rail service through the Northern Sacramento Valley, or alternatives. (*BCAG, Jurisdictions, Caltrans*)
2. Provide ongoing operations and maintenance of the Coast Starlight route through Butte County. (*Caltrans, Amtrak*)
3. Continue to seek funding for construction of grade separation projects.
4. Continue monitoring other California rail activity.