

August 31 Comment Deadline: Impacts of ACEforward Project Raise Concerns

August 24, 2017

The Ohlone Audubon has raised concerns about ACEforward impacts. The Alameda Creek Alliance and Niles for Environmentally Safe Trains also voiced objections and raised questions.

Currently, comments are being accepted on the draft environmental impact report (DEIR).

ACEforward is a phased improvement plan proposed by the Regional Rail Commission (SJRR) to increase service reliability and frequency, enhance passenger facilities, reduce travel times along the existing ACE service corridor from San Jose to Stockton and extend ACE service to Manteca, Modesto, Ceres, Turlock and Merced.

ACEforward is presented as a commuter rail project, which would begin in Merced and end in San Jose. The majority of the rail line on which ACE travels is owned by Union Pacific Railroad, including the portion of the line through Niles Canyon and the Don Edwards San Francisco Bay National Refuge. In order to increase the number of commuter trains from the current four round trips a day to six round trips in the near future and ultimately ten round trips, Union Pacific has stated that ACEforward must improve the capacity of the existing rail line.

Ohlone's latest news letter notes that of most concern would be the near term proposal to provide track improvements.

The proposal to expand the existing rail line from a single track to a double track through Niles would require installation of new retaining walls 5 to 20 feet high, protective debris flow and rockfall energy absorbing fences 10 to 20 feet high and new or replacement bridges over Alameda Creek.

The longer term project from Newark to Alviso would entail either adding another berm and track alongside the existing track, raising and expanding the existing railroad berm and track, placing a double track on a trestle, or an option that includes segments that have either double tracks on a raised berm or double tracks on a trestle structure. The expansion through the refuge would take place within the existing right of way, though there could be impacts during construction outside the right of way.

At issue is that the track improvements are likely to result in increased freight traffic and the potential with increased rail traffic for derailment. According to Alameda Creek Alliance, the DEIR should identify the frequency of train traffic, the possible toxic and flammable contents of freight trains and the risks to public safety, water quality and wildlife habitat from derailments or accidents. None of these issues have been adequately evaluated or addressed, according to the Alliance.

SJRR has extended the comment period for the Draft Environmental Impact Report (DEIR) for ACEforward to August 31, 2017.

To view the DEIR, or to view a list of the 26 libraries where hard copies of the DEIR will be available, visit www.aceforward.com. Submit comments before the end of the comment period via email to aceforwardEIR@acerail.com with subject line "ACEforward DEIR."

Written comments can be mailed to: San Joaquin Regional Rail Commission ATTN: ACEforward DEIR 949
E. Channel Street Stockton, CA 95202