

January 31, 2002

To: Mr. Jerome Wiggins
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Federal Transit Administration, Region IX
201 Mission Street
San Francisco, CA 94105

To: Ms. Azadeh Doherty
Planning Manager
Sacramento Regional Transit District
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**RE: Comments to Northeast Corridor Service and Facilities Enhancement Project
Initial Study / Environmental Assessment**

The Chamber believes, as is supported by past studies, that Swanston Station has the greatest potential as an intermodal transfer station between heavy rail (Capitol Corridor Trains) and light rail, making it the most logical choice for other alternative mode connectivity being planned by Sacramento Regional Transit (RT).

RT has the chance at the Swanston site, because of the availability of land, the adjacent Union Pacific mainline, the ability of the Sacramento Housing and Redevelopment Agency to consolidate parcels and the regional momentum for quality in-fill and transit related development to bring in several financial partners and create a regionally significant, if not nationally significant, proof of concept project. To attempt to do any less would squander a rare opportunity we all currently have.

The Chamber and its members continue to be very concerned about the magnitude of the bus transfer activity (457 daily trips) being co-located solely at any one station. We strongly believe the over-concentration of bus transfer activity at Arden/Del Paso has not only greatly contributed to the overcrowding and inefficient bus circulation noted in the report, but also the security/crime activity occurring at that station. The wholesale relocation of all the bus transfer activity to any other single station is not a prudent solution for this community or transit users, unless significant mitigations are made to control and accommodate their impact.

Therefore, the Chamber supports the findings of the INDEX report produced by the Point West TMA (with the support and participation of RT staff) to limit bus transfer to five or six bus berths. This finding is supported by the North Sacramento Special Planning Districts and Light Rail Station Land Use Study adopted by the City of Sacramento in 1994 which advocates safe and convenient rail crossings to allow pedestrians easy access between light rail stations and work places. As the intensity of bus transfer is inversely related to the walkability of the "transit village," the proposed 457 daily trips is unreasonable to locate at a station for both traffic congestion and usability. We encourage RT to revisit the community findings and value the process and investment that the INDEX process represents for many community and public agency (including RT, City, and SHRA) staff in a vision-direction for Swanston Station.

The Chamber supports the following recommendations from studies we have participated in related to our local Light Rail Stations, and in particular Swanston:

- Increase office development on a scale that contributes to the City's employment base and takes advantage of the availability of Swanston's intermodal potential and planned pedestrian connection to Harvard Street (USAA).

- Create land use and design standards that allow for a mix of uses and quality of buildings much like the Special Planning Area (SPA) suggested in the North Sacramento Special Planning Districts and Light Rail Station Land Use Study (Nov. 1993).
- The City of Sacramento, Sacramento Housing & Redevelopment Agency (SHRA), and Regional Transit jointly plan and adopt policies to support the creation the “Transit Village” the community recommended from the results of the May 3, 2001 INDEX workshop sponsored by the Point West TMA.
- Swanston Station be formally recognized as the north of the American River Intermodal Station, and begin talks with the Capitol Corridor JPA to secure future service.
- RT and SHRA should look at feasibility of land assemblage adjacent to the Swanston Station as well as infrastructure improvements coordinated with the City to accommodate bus traffic (*infrastructure deficiencies noted in Katz-Hollis Study dated April 1992, and in goals of North Sacramento Redevelopment Implementation Plan dated 1995, and the Sacramento Community Plan Land Use and Design Study dated January 1993, and the City’s Dixieanne Action Plan 1999*).

The Chamber shares RT’s vision to improve operational features of their system by reducing passenger travel times, introducing Bus Rapid Transit service from North Sacramento to downtown, improving schedule reliability, reducing overcrowding, increasing service frequency, and creating safer boarding (lighting, enhanced security patrol, surveillance cameras, etc) at light rail and bus transfer facilities. Similarly, service quality could be improved by using clean and comfortable vehicles, accessible route and schedule information, and reasonable security and comfort on buses and trains and at stations. These should be elements of the overall Northeast Corridor Service and Facilities Enhancement Project.

Specifically, the report fails to note the isolated location of the new proposed Royal Oaks Station and associated safety/security risks to this relocation. Also to be considered is the impact of displaced businesses, as in RT workshops it was noted that some nearby tenants would relocate out of area if that station were constructed. The Chamber is concerned with the economic loss this could cause to the area, especially any reduction in office workers who support our retail and restaurants in the Uptown District.

The Chamber also shares the comments of many Northeast Corridor Service and Facilities Enhancement Project workshop participants that the proposed site plan for Swanston is unimaginative and incompatible with the “transit village” concept reached for Swanston Station. As this process moves forward, we are hopeful that an architect with mixed use experience (preferably at a light rail station) will be retained to design with public comment opportunity an attractive station design that is complementary to redevelopment and pedestrian-oriented “transit village” concepts we have discussed.

Thank you for your thoughtful consideration of our concerns and while repeated planning and studies are onerous on our member’s personal time, we believe it is an important investment in our future, and the Chamber is committed to working with RT, the City and SHRA to achieve our vision and improve our transit opportunities in Uptown – North Sacramento.

Sincerely,

Franklin Burris
President