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The Valley Press

By: Allison Gatlin

PALMDALE - The recommended route for the proposed state bullet train between stations in Palmdale and Burbank will travel roughly along the Antelope Valley Freeway past Aqua Dulce before turning south around Soledad Canyon Road towards San Fernando and the Burbank station.

The route is being recommended by authority staff as the preferred route, but the California High Speed Rail Authority board has not yet approved it.

The California High Speed Rail Authority will hold open house presentations next week on the route and the overall project to create a rail system carrying passengers at 220 mph between Los Angeles and San Francisco.

The open house in Palmdale is Thursday from 5:30 to 7:30 p.m. at the Chimbole Cultural Center, 38350 Sierra Highway. A presentation on the project will begin at 6 p.m.

An open house in Acton is scheduled for Saturday from 10 a.m. to noon, with a presentation at 10:30 a.m., at High Desert School, 3620 Antelope Woods Road.

The recommended route, known as the "refined SR14" alternative, is 38 miles long, with five tunnels totalling approximately 24 miles, according to the rail authority report.

It will travel on the surface following the existing railroad tracks from the Palmdale station to a point south of Lake Palmdale, where it will enter a tunnel north of the freeway. It will re-emerge about seven miles further to cross to the south of the freeway.

Bridges will carry the train over the Red Rover Mine Road interchange and the Santa Clara River, alternating with tunnels and surface tracks. It will tunnel under the San Gabriel Mountain National Monument and Angeles National Forest, as well as under Sylmar and most of Pacoima before emerging and joining the existing rail corridor at grade and then in a trench as it arrives at the station at the Burbank Airport.

According to the authority's presentation, this route was selected from among three possible alignments because it is the easiest and fastest to construct, has the lowest risk in construction related to tunnels and geologic conditions, has the lowest risk of unexpected circumstances or conditions, means fewer traffic and air quality impacts in the communities surrounding it during construction and would generate the least amount of spoils in tunneling.

The route also has the shortest tunnel under the national monument and forest, has the lowest risk of impact to groundwater and wildlife within the national forest and avoids key archeological and tribal resources.

It also reuses a former mining area for construction, which has the potential for restoring the area of the national monument and forest to natural conditions.

Construction on the estimated \$77.3 billion rail line has begun on a 119-mile segment in the San Joaquin Valley, in Fresno and Madera County.

Workers are building viaducts elevated structures that will carry the tracks and bridges for roads as well as digging a two-mile-long trench and shifting a segment of Highway 99 in Fresno by 100 feet.

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The plan to build the first segment between north of Bakersfield and San Jose was adopted last year because it was less expensive than building from Bakersfield through the Tehachapi and San Gabriel mountains to Burbank.

The entire San Francisco-to-Los Angeles route is expected to be operating by 2033.

The second phase of the project adds connections to Sacramento and San Diego, through the Imperial Valley.

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