

# Fresnans hope to derail train plan

Passing track proposed alongside existing line.

By Matt Leedy  
The Fresno Bee

Live near a railroad long enough and, northwest Fresno residents say, you'll understand why trains don't always make for good neighbors: diesel pollution, horns that blare at all hours, and a fear that the smallest mistake could bring a devastating crash to your backyard.

So when train officials talk about plans to lay more track in the Figarden Loop area, long-simmering passions reach an angry boil.

A proposal to add 2.5 miles of track alongside the existing Burlington Northern Santa Fe

line brought a raucous crowd to the Figarden Elementary School cafeteria Thursday night.

"A lot of people are worried about being able to sleep at night," Michael Napoli says of the penetrating sound of train horns that residents fear will become more frequent. "A lot of people are worried about the pollution, a lot of people with children."

Napoli was among the more than 100 northwest Fresnoans who voiced their opposition to Caltrans and BNSF officials who want to create a passing track in the Figarden Loop area with the hope that trains will roll past each other without stopping.

Plans call for the passing track to be created by extending a two-mile turnout. Cur-

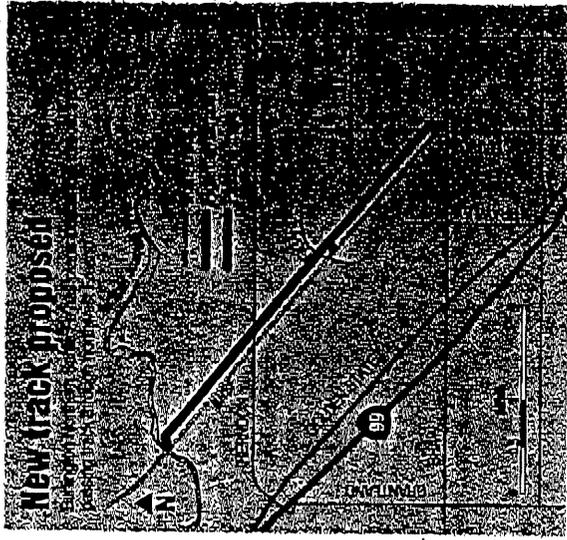
rently, one train must wait on the turnout track for another to pass. And local residents say they do more than wait — they park for several days while pollution spreads from running engines.

Lengthening the turnout, they fear, will simply create more room for several trains to park at once.

Officials from BNSF and Caltrans who hosted the community meeting say that's a possibility, but that the new line is intended to keep trains moving. They explained the passing track is needed to accommodate an increasing number of trains that travel up and down the state.

For the passing track to be built, the California Depart-

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# Train: Calhoun opposes plan

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ment of Transportation would need to spend \$12.7 million on the project. The California Transportation Commission must still approve the expenditure.

"Hallelujah!" Mary-Nomig Law shouted after hearing that the passing track plan could still be defeated.

Law believes the new track would bring more trains, more pollution and more delays for residents who have to wait at railroad crossings as freight cars pass.

And she fears the danger of fast trains passing each other near heavily populated neighborhoods.

"If you have trains passing at high speed and something doesn't go right, you can have a very serious accident," Law says.

She wants underpasses at major streets and for BNSF to perform extensive studies about

the effects a passing track could have on the area.

Amtrak passenger trains share tracks with BNSF freight trains. The line that cuts through Fresno and the Figarden Loop begins at Oakland's ports and continues to Los Angeles.

A passing track in the Figarden Loop would help Amtrak run on time and relieve freight train congestion, BNSF officials say.

Fresno City Council Member Brian Calhoun, who represents northwest Fresno and the Figarden Loop, has been an adamant opponent of the proposed passing track.

He attended the meeting at Caltrans' invitation and plans to lead a follow-up meeting later this year when city officials will chime in on the passing track proposal.

Fresno leaders are waiting on the results of a \$10,000 study paid for by the city to analyze

Calhoun has said the track would be a better fit just a few miles north in rural Madern County. Many who picked the Figarden Elementary cafeteria agreed.

▲ The reporter can be reached at mleedy@fresnobee.com or (559) 441-6208.

**Exhibit B**

Andrew T. Souza  
City Manager

March 14, 2006

Mr. John F. Bama, Jr., Executive Director  
California Transportation Commission  
Department of Transportation  
1120 N. Street, Room 2233  
Sacramento, CA 95814

Subject: Fig Garden Siding Project

Dear Mr. Bama:

I would like to take this opportunity to thank you for taking the time to meet with the representatives from the County of Fresno Council of Governments regarding the Governor's proposed infrastructure bond and the \$1 billion set aside for State Route 99. I would also like to follow up on our conversation regarding the proposed BNSF/CalTrans Fig Garden Siding Project located within the City of Fresno.

The proposed siding project has raised several concerns in our community and has been the topic of numerous meetings between CalTrans, BNSF, and the City of Fresno for approximately two years. While the City of Fresno understands and can appreciate the need to improve the operational functionality and capacity of this rail line, we remain frustrated with the lack of cooperation and the inconsideration that has been afforded to us from BNSF.

Councilmember Brian Calhoun, who represents the district that will be adversely impacted by this proposal, is extremely engaged in the issue and has personally been involved in numerous meetings with representatives from CalTrans, BNSF, and City staff. Although our intent is to be fair and reasonable as it relates this project, Councilmember Calhoun firmly believes that an acceptable level of improved operational efficiencies can be achieved by moving the passing tracks just north of the proposed location and San Joaquin River.

For your edification, the following information is being provided as a chronological summary of key events that have contributed to current position of concern, frustration, and the possibility that the City of Fresno could take action to formally oppose this project.

- Councilmember Calhoun and key City staff learned of the proposed siding project in the spring of 2004. A meeting was quickly held with representatives from BNSF, CalTrans, and the City of Fresno, during which time issues related to environmental impacts and possible alternatives were discussed.

City of Fresno

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- In July of 2004, Councilmember Calhoun, in an act of good faith, removed an item from the City Council Agenda which would have publicly aired his concerns over the proposed project. This action was taken based on an agreement with BNSF and CalTrans that a new model would be ran in order to evaluate the City's request to relocate the project to a non-urbanized area just north of the proposed site. The City agreed that it would then hire a third party consultant to affirm the determination of the new model (see enclosed letter dated July 22, 2004).
- In an effort to gain a complete understanding of the proposal and goals of the project, the City of Fresno again initiated a joint meeting at Fresno City Hall on September 23, 2004. Representatives from CalTrans, BNSF, Councilmember Calhoun, the City Manager's Office and Public Works again discussed possible solutions and agreed to three key points that the City of Fresno felt were essential in order to gain a better understanding of the project including:
  1. BNSF would run an additional model, as requested by the City, directly north of the proposed location and San Joaquin River.
  2. A mutual understanding that full and accurate disclosure to the public was imperative, and therefore, a follow up meeting would not be held until the City of Fresno received and confirmed the additional information requested from BNSF and CalTrans.
  3. Assurances that this project was not a "done deal" and the City would be given an opportunity to evaluate the second model and that it was the goal of everyone involved to work toward an outcome that was acceptable to all the parties.

Since that time City staff and Councilmember Calhoun continued to receive a variety of conflicting second-hand reports regarding the status of this project. Each time we verified these reports with CalTrans, we were advised that actual funding continued to be delayed due to the State's ongoing budget crisis, but that BNSF was working on modeling the second option as requested.

To our surprise the City was contacted in November, 2005, by the CalTrans Rail Division indicating a desire to hold a public meeting regarding the project on December 14, 2006. This meeting has since been characterized by the Councilmember Calhoun as a "stealth" meeting and perceived by the City of Fresno as an effort to purposely disengage the community. Additionally frustrating, was the fact that the requested model had yet to be provided by BNSF. Upon the adamant urging and assistance by the City, the meeting was rescheduled to a location closer to the proposed project on January 26, 2006.

As was expected, this meeting, which was attended by approximately 200 concerned residents, was characterized as a disaster even by CalTrans and BNSF representatives (see enclosed Fresno Bee article). During this meeting, it was painfully obvious that neither BNSF nor CalTrans were adequately prepared to effectively address questions, including the idea of

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relocating the siding project north of the San Joaquin River. Nor did the BNSF representatives seem to appreciate the community's frustration in regards to what appeared to be lack of concern over the impacts that this project would have on the surrounding neighborhoods.

A second meeting was subsequently promised by BNSF representatives to effectively communicate with the community the reasons for the project and why moving the siding north was not viable. As of today, there has been no follow up meeting scheduled and the City, who has already expended \$10,000 on an outside consultant, has yet to receive any information related to the alternative site model that had been requested almost two years ago. This lack of information obviously has added to our disappointment and frustration over this project and subsequently makes it increasingly difficult to support anything other than outright opposition to the project.

For these reasons, I feel compelled to advise you that Councilmember Calhoun will be bringing a resolution to the Fresno City Council on March 28, 2006, which seeks to take an official position of opposition to the project. If adopted by Council, this item will then be placed on the April agenda of the California Transportation Commission (CTC) meeting scheduled next month in Fresno. I have also been advised that the Councilmember will request a specific time on the CTC agenda so that he and other members of the community can speak to this issue.

It should be noted that in addition to the other issues related to this matter, that we still have not been advised when the CalTrans Rail Division actually plans on bringing this matter forward to the CTC for actual funding. Nevertheless, I wanted to provide this information to you in advance of the April meeting so that you and the members of the CTC may have a better understanding of what has transpired and why the Council is preparing to take the action on March 28, 2006.

Please call me at (559) 621-7784 or e-mail me at [Bruce.Rudd@fresno.gov](mailto:Bruce.Rudd@fresno.gov) if you have any questions or need further information regarding this matter.

Sincerely,



Bruce A. Rudd  
Interim Assistant City Manager

C: Andy Souza, Fresno City Manager  
Brian Calhoun, Fresno City Councilmember  
Georgeanne White, Chief of Staff, Mayor Alan Autry  
Will Kempton, Director, Department of Transportation

Enclosures: (2)



RESOLUTION NO. 2006-108

A RESOLUTION OF THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF FRESNO, CALIFORNIA, PROCLAIMING ITS OPPOSITION TO THE PROPOSED BURLINGTON NORTHERN and SANTA FE RAILROAD AND CALTRANS PROJECT SEEKING TO CREATE A DOUBLE TRACK THROUGH NORTHWEST FRESNO.

WHEREAS, Burlington Northern and Santa Fe Railroad (BNSF) and CalTrans have proposed creating a double track along the railroad corridor in Northwest Fresno, ostensibly to mitigate inefficiencies from Amtrak trains running on the same tracks; and,

WHEREAS, this proposed double track is surrounded by the homes of nearly 30,000 residents; and,

WHEREAS, if the double track is built, residents of these homes will be subjected to potentially high levels of pollution from idling trains, visual blight, deafening noise from double passing train traffic, and longer vehicular delays resulting from increased train traffic due to imports and exports through the Los Angeles and Long Beach Harbors; and,

WHEREAS, this residential area would also be subjected to environmental degradation from the increased train traffic; and,

WHEREAS, the City of Fresno would have considered accepting this residential burden if BNSF and CalTrans had shown that the efficiencies gained by the placement of the double track were significant and only achievable at this location; and,

Adopted \_\_\_\_\_  
Approved 3/28/06  
Effective 3/28/06

2006-108



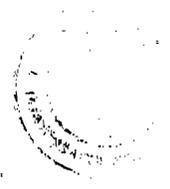
WHEREAS, despite BNSF's June 25, 2004, promise to "be a good neighbor," BNSF has failed to complete the previously agreed to modeling required to justify the double track; and,

WHEREAS, BNSF and CalTrans are unable to prove to the City of Fresno that the efficiencies gained by constructing the double track in Northwest Fresno outweigh those gained by in an alternate location north of the San Joaquin River in a non-urbanized area; and,

WHEREAS, over the past three years, BNSF and CalTrans have ignored entreaties from the City of Fresno for more information about the impacts of the proposed passing track, the significant concerns raised by Councilmember Brian Calhoun (the elected representative of Northwest Fresno), and attempts by City of Fresno officials to broker a compromise on the location of the proposed double track; and,

WHEREAS, BNSF and CalTrans have displayed a lack of concern for the City of Fresno and its residents by trying to force the double track into Northwest Fresno without taking seriously the concerns and ideas of the Northwest Fresno residents; and,

WHEREAS, as a result of the aforementioned concerns, the Council of the City of Fresno opposes the proposed double track in Northwest Fresno, and advises BNSF and CalTrans to reevaluate the location of the proposed double track by taking into account the environmental, sonic, vehicular, and adverse quality of life impacts on the residents of Northwest Fresno.



NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Council of the City of Fresno:

- Opposes the proposed creation of a double track in the City of Fresno;
- Believes that the most viable and least intrusive location for the proposed double track is in a non-urbanized area to the north of the San Joaquin River;
- Requests that BNSF and CalTrans withdraw their current plan to create a double track in the City of Fresno and, instead, transfer the location of the proposed double track to a non-urbanized area to the north of the San Joaquin River;
- Appreciates the involvement of the local State legislators, and seeks their support for the City of Fresno's objectives;
- Requests the California Transportation Commission to deny any requests for funding of this double track project as it is currently proposed since BNSF and CalTrans cannot establish that the efficiency gained from placing the double track in Northwest Fresno will significantly outweigh the problems of environmental degradation, amplified sonic levels, increased pollution in an area with unhealthy air, and the diminished quality of life that the double track will impose on the affected residential neighborhoods.

The Council of the City of Fresno requests this on behalf of all the citizens of Fresno and their quality of life.

\* \* \* \* \*



STATE OF CALIFORNIA )  
COUNTY OF FRESNO ) ss.  
CITY OF FRESNO )

I, REBECCA E. KLISCH, City Clerk of the City of Fresno, certify that the foregoing resolution was adopted by the Council of the City of Fresno, at a regular meeting held on the 28<sup>th</sup> day of March, 2006.

AYES : Boyajian, Calhoun, Dages, Perea, Sterling, Westerlund, Duncan  
NOES : None  
ABSENT : None  
ABSTAIN : None

REBECCA E. KLISCH  
City Clerk

BY: Rebecca E. Klisch

APPROVED AS TO FORM:  
CITY ATTORNEY'S OFFICE

BY: [Signature]