

Bullet train to potentially change course into Southern California

By Dana Bartholomew, Los Angeles Daily News

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The bullet train was to either barrel through Santa Clarita and San Fernando, disrupting homes, schools and businesses, or soar over and under San Fernando Valley horse country, disrupting equestrians.

But now the proposed California High-Speed Rail run from Burbank to Palmdale may be changing course, the Daily News learned late Tuesday. A surface train that might have severely impacted Santa Clarita, Sylmar, San Fernando and

Pacoima would now bypass them underground.

“I think this is absolutely phenomenal,” said San Fernando Mayor Joel Fajardo, who’d just learned of the switch. “The revised SR-14 alignment is an extraordinary development for the city of San Fernando, Pacoima and other neighboring communities. This is a step in the right direction, but there is still more work to be done to address the concerns of other valley neighborhoods.

“I am so proud of the hard work and strong positions that residents, the vice mayor and I took in fighting this project,” he said. “Over 1,000 people in San Fernando signed a petition in just two days to oppose the high-speed rail from coming through and destroying our beautiful city.”

Four proposed rail routes into Los Angeles had spurred intense opposition from residents and city officials who said the trains would either displace hundreds of homes and businesses, while forcing the San Fernando police station to move. Or they would harm historic north San Fernando Valley horse country.

The original route proposed along Highway 14 would have cut through Santa Clarita, then run along San Fernando Road through Sylmar, San Fernando and Pacoima before arriving a station near Bob Hope Airport in Burbank. Opponents said it would have “bifurcated” close-knit working-class neighborhoods with 20-foot walls.

Three later route proposals, known as the East Corridor, would have tunneled beneath the San Gabriel Mountains before popping up in Lake View Terrace or Sun Valley. Opponents were especially jarred by a plan to send the train soaring 30 feet over Tujunga Wash.

After extensive hearings, the rail routes are now undergoing a years-long environmental review.

But in a letter late Tuesday to state Sen. Kevin de León, president pro tempore, the head of the state’s high-speed rail agency said only three revised alignment alternatives would be considered. Each will

be explained in depth in an analysis submitted to the high-speed rail board on April 12 during a monthly meeting held in Anaheim at the Anaheim Convention Center.

Under the new plan, the Highway 14 route would swing directly south under the mountains east of Canyon Country before surfacing near Branford Street in Sun Valley.

The East Corridor Routes have now been reduced to two proposed routes. One would stay underground, also surfacing at Branford Street. The other would still include an above-ground viaduct over Tujunga Wash, then run underground on the edge of the equestrian community of Shadow Hills.

“Updated alignment alternatives have been developed as a result of continued engineering and environmental technical evaluation, including environmental justice issues, as well as ongoing community and regulatory agency input,” said Dan Richard, chairman for the California High-Speed Rail Authority, in a letter to De Leon. “Our analyses are being conducted under all applicable environmental laws.”

He said the newly proposed routes involve many factors, including construction and operation requirements, as well as natural habitat and “environmental justice impacts in the highly-populated communities of Santa Clarita, Sylmar, San Fernando and Pacoima.”

Richard is scheduled to speak Thursday before the San Fernando Valley Council of Governments, in Van Nuys, to update local leaders on bullet train plans.

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