



## **North Valley Passenger Rail** **Virtual Workshop #2 Event Summary**

### Introduction

On December 13, 2023, the Butte County Association of Governments (BCAG) held its second virtual workshop through Zoom. The main purpose of the meeting was to provide an update on the passenger rail project that aims to connect Sacramento and Chico, which will subsequently expand the existing passenger rail service. The goal of this initiative is to connect Butte County to Sacramento, the Bay Area, the Central Valley, and beyond. The meeting was held through Zoom, and 86 attendees were present.

### Project Overview

The North Valley Passenger Rail Strategic Plan will determine what is needed to bring passenger rail service northward from the Natomas area in Sacramento to the City of Chico in Butte County, with stops in Plumas Lake, Marysville-Yuba City, and Gridley. The study will evaluate the existing Union Pacific Railroad corridors coming north from Natomas to Chico. Bus connections will link Oroville with the proposed Gridley station and the Natomas station with the Sacramento International Airport. Coordination with public transit service providers will ensure local transit system schedules align with the proposed passenger rail schedules. BCAG received a Caltrans Strategic Partnership Transit grant to study what is needed to bring passenger rail service northward from the Natomas area in Sacramento to Butte County.

### Workshop Purpose

As the second community outreach effort of the North Valley Passenger Rail, the purpose of this community meeting was to refresh, update, and inform the public with dialogue. This virtual workshop included a presentation of the project refresh, draft strategic plan, review of planning work completed, stations and track improvements, and next steps. Followed by a Q&A.



### Meeting Overview

At the beginning of the meeting, Katie DeMaio from AIM Consulting provided a brief introduction to all participants. She explained that during the presentation, all attendees would be muted, but they could participate by typing their comments in the chat box. Following the introduction, the meeting agenda was presented.

*Welcome Slide*

### Agenda & Objectives:

- Welcome & Meeting Orientation
- Project Team Introductions



- Project Refresh and Update
- Overview of Draft Strategic Plan
- Review of Planning Work Completed
- Stations, Layover Facility, and Track Improvements
- Next Steps
- Q&A

#### DeMaio introduced the project team:

- Andy Newsum, Executive Director with BCAG
- Chris Devine, Planning Director with BCAG
- Michael Hanebutt, Senior Planner SJRRRC
- Daniel Krause, Project Manager with AECOM
- Daniel Hartman, Project Engineer with AECOM
- Katie DeMaio, with AIM Consulting

### Project Refresh and Update

Chris Devine from BCAG gave a presentation providing an update and refresh on the strategic plan, the Valley Rail Program Overview, and the progress of the project since the last virtual meeting held earlier this year.

### What is the North Valley Rail Passenger Rail Strategic Plan?

The plan aims to provide a convenient service to the Sacramento region, Bay Area, and Central Valley. It identifies necessary improvements and sets the foundation for moving the project into the environmental clearance phase.

### Valley Rail Program Overview

The Valley Rail Program received \$1.6 billion in funding to expand ACE and San Joaquins Services. North Valley Rail is an extension of ACE and Amtrak San Joaquins trains to improve transportation from Natomas to Chico.

### Project Update: Since the Last Meeting

The Project Development Team has completed the first draft of the Strategic Plan since the last virtual meeting. They are currently reviewing it. The second draft of the Strategic Plan will be available for public review in early January 2024 states Devine.

### Project Update: Additional Progress Since Last Meeting

#### Project Team



**Andy Newsum**  
Executive Director  
Butte County Association of Governments



**Chris Devine**  
Planning Director  
Butte County Association of Governments



**Michael Hanebutt**  
Senior Planner  
San Joaquin Regional Rail Commission



**Daniel Krause**  
Project Manager  
AECOM



**Daniel Hartman**  
Project Engineer  
AECOM

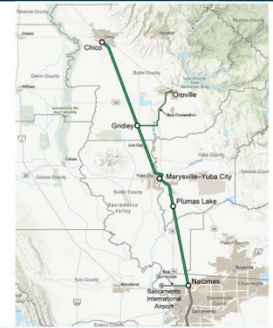


**Katie DeMaio**  
Principal  
AIM Consulting

#### Project Introduction Slide

#### What is the North Valley Rail Passenger Rail Strategic Plan?

- The North Valley Passenger Rail Strategic Plan (Strategic Plan) is a planning-level effort to study a new passenger rail corridor and service – called “North Valley Rail” – which would extend trains north from the Sacramento Region to service Butte, Sutter and Yuba Counties.
- Butte County Associations of Governments is leading the development of the Strategic Plan on behalf of the SJRRRC and SJJPA
- The Strategic Plan will define a service plan that provides convenient service to the Sacramento region, the Bay Area, and the Central Valley and beyond
- The Strategic Plan identifies needed capital improvements for North Valley Rail
- The Strategic Plan is the foundation for moving the project into the environmental clearance phase



#### North Valley Rail Passenger Rail Strategic Plan Slide

#### Valley Rail Program Overview



- Valley Rail Program includes expansion of both ACE and the San Joaquins Services
- Valley Rail has received about \$1.6 billion in state and other funding sources
- North Valley Rail will be an extension of ACE and Amtrak San Joaquins north from Natomas

#### Valley Rail Program Slide



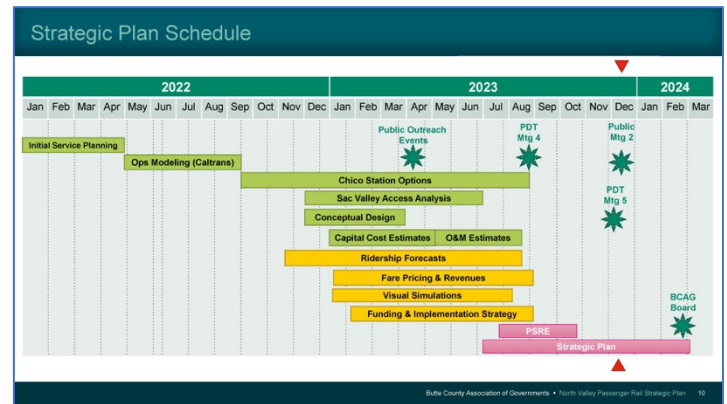
Devine informed the public of the Addition of a new site option for Marysville/Yuba City Station with detailed diagrams, funding strategy, revised ridership and revenue estimates, and visual simulations.

### Schedule for the North Valley Passenger Rail Strategic Plan Schedule

Devine informed the public that the project team is currently under strategic planning until early 2024.

### What We Have Heard

Lastly, Devine went over public engagement metrics and highlighted community input that has been taken from a previous community, six pop-up workshops with 500+ responses from community members.



*Strategic Plan Schedule Slide*

### Overview of Draft Strategic Plan

After providing an overview and update on the project and what has happened since the last virtual meeting, Devine handed over the presentation to Dan Leavitt from AECOM to discuss the Overview of the Draft Strategic Plan.

### Strategic Plan Overview

Leavitt reviews the overview of the Strategic Plan and the topic to be covered, which include: project background, community and stakeholder engagement, service and operations planning.



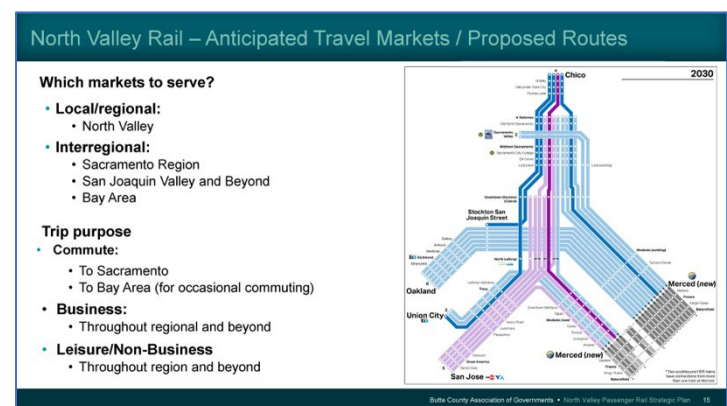
*Overview of Draft Strategic Plan Slide*

### Review of Planning Work Completed

Leavitt continues his presentation by showing maps of the statewide network and Anticipated travel Markets/Proposed Routes.

### North Valley Rail – Details of Initial “Starter” Service

Leavitt explained how the initial service would commence. He emphasized that the first journeys from Chico to Merced are expected to take approximately 3 hours and 30 minutes, whereas the trips from Chico to the South Bay (Bay Area) would take around 4 hours.



*Proposed Routes Slide*

### North Valley Rail – Service Planning Findings

In service planning findings, Leavitt highlights that the relationship with Union Pacific was essential for the project. Additionally, Chico was chosen over Oroville due to its higher population, the presence of Chico State, higher potential ridership, and the ability to extend the service further north. Within 10 years, 4 round trips and 4 new stations will be established.





### North Valley Rail – Potential Future Service

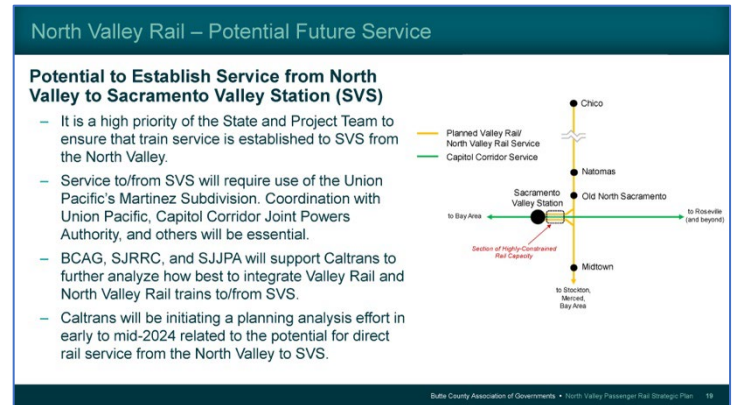
The project aims for mid-term improvements: 4 daily round trips in 10 years. Long-term, hourly service to/from North Valley by 2050. Chico was chosen over Oroville for its higher population, ridership potential, and ability to extend service north. In mid-term, starter service of 4 round trips, 4 new stations. Building off service to Natomas Leavitt explains.

### North Valley Rail – Potential Future Service:

It's important to create a train service between North Valley and Sacramento Valley Station (SVS). To make it happen, we'll need to use Union Pacific's Martinez Subdivision and work with Capitol Corridor Joint Powers Authority and others. BCAG, SJRRRC, and SJJPA will help Caltrans analyze how to combine Valley Rail and North Valley Rail trains to/from SVS. In early to mid-2024 Leavitt explains.

### North Valley Rail – Updated Ridership Forecast

Lastly, Leavitt breaks down the estimated forecasted annual ridership systemwide.



*North Valley Rail – Potential Future Service Slide*

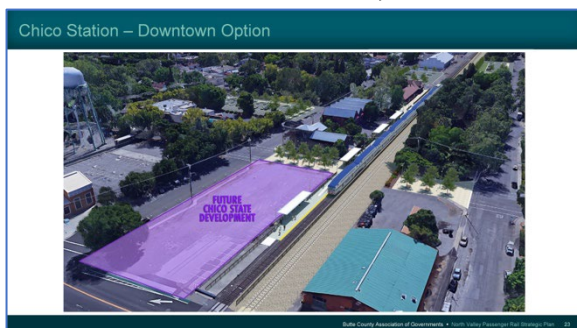
### Station and Track Improvements

Leavitt ended by going over the project development findings and passing the presentation over to Daniel Hartman from AECOM, who spoke about the different stations and alternatives and presented the public with how they would be configured if chosen. They are as follows:

### Chico Station – Downtown Option



### Chico Station – Downtown Option





The additional alternatives can be found in the appendix.

- Chico Station – Downtown Option
- Chico Station – Barber Yard Option
- Chico Station – Barber Yard Option
- Chico Station – Barber Yard Option
- Gridley Station
- Marysville/Yuba City Station – North Option
- Marysville/Yuba City Station
- Marysville/Yuba City Station
- Marysville/Yuba City Station – South Option
- Plumas Lake Station
- Plumas Lake Station
- Plumas Lake Station
- Natomas Station Expansion
- Typical Track Improvements
- Infrastructure Improvements – Capital Cost Estimates

## Next Steps

Hartman ended by introducing capital cost estimates to the public and then headed it off to Chris Devine of AECOM for the next steps.

## Upcoming Work

Devine has presented the following steps to the public: The project team aims to present the final strategic plan to the BCAG Board of Directors in late February of 2024 while maintaining coordination with Caltrans, PDT, and UP. The team will also seek funding for future project development phases. Additionally, they will continue to update the website and send email updates to the public.

### Next Steps

#### Upcoming Work

- Present final Strategic Plan to BCAG Board of Directors (*late February 2024*)
- Coordinate with Caltrans on further study of Sacramento Valley Station (*early/mid 2024*)
- Continued coordination with PDT, Caltrans, and UP (*Ongoing*)
- Initiate work on environmental/preliminary engineering phase of project\* (*April 2024*)
  - \*Note: Project Study Report Equivalent document completed October 2023, which allows project to move into this next phase
- Seek funding for future project development phases (design, right of way, construction, etc.)
- Continued website updates and email notices to distribution list

Devine thanked everyone for joining the meeting and reintroduced Katie DeMaio of AIM. Following the presentation, DeMaio continued the presentation by moving into the question-and-answer session.

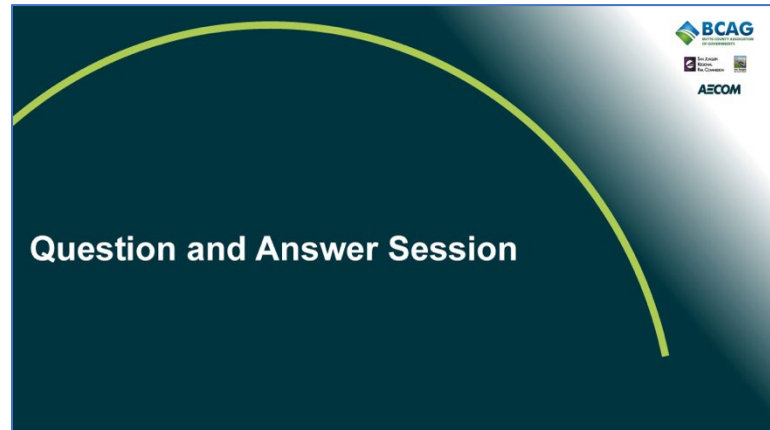
## Question and Answer Discussion

DeMaio then facilitated the question-and-answer session. Questions were asked through the chat via Zoom.



The answers to the following questions can be found on the recording:

1. In the near term, will there be a bus connection from the mid-town station to Sacramento Valley station?
2. What is the projected fare, and when is service slated to start?
3. Are we going to see a more accessible train option between Chico and Sac? Currently, there is only the late-night train.
4. Question about estimated pricing for ridership.
5. With the 2nd/3rd Street option in Chico, how much clearing of existing structures would be required? Barber Yard would probably not require the destruction of existing buildings.
6. Question about preference between two Chico locations: Has the strategic planning thus far identified a preference between the two Chico locations?
7. At the Gridley Station, there is a partially burned-down building now. Will it all be demolished very soon?
8. What determining factors are considered when choosing between the two Chico station sites?
9. Although paying UP for general Capital Improvements would help speed up the process, would this diminish the specific improvements for the North Valley Rail and possibly reduce the overall performance by eliminating side rails?
10. Is the slide presentation available on the website?
11. For Chico, if we go with Barber Yard, could there be a shuttle service to downtown?
12. The Capitol Corridor Express is a great train for Sac to the Bay Area. Sometimes, I take the Amtrak to connect with that train. Will the schedules be coordinated to allow for connection to these trains?
13. What has been the communication strategy with other associations of governments and counties/cities (Sacramento, SF, and others) that will be impacted (presumably positively for citizens and businesses) when this project is completed?
14. Have you done any studies about how much of the Sac airport travel will be taken up by this train service?





15. Comment: The Chico Airport should be the Chico terminus. Adding surface parking to either of the current locations is unacceptable for a city that is moving toward multi-use development. The airport site would also preclude needing a second layover site.
16. Comment: The Chico Airport is woefully underutilized and could be very well served to create a regional transportation hub that would serve the entire north state beyond Chico without negatively impacting the quality of life in the downtown or Barber Yard development.
17. Is it anticipated that fares will cover operating costs, including maintenance and repairs?
18. Money - where and how is it coming to be accomplished?
19. Comment about the impact on current rail corridors and multi-use development.
20. Has there been any analysis about people currently commuting from cities north of Chico (Red Bluff/Redding) that would be served by a terminus at the north end of Chico?
21. The question is about travel from Chico to the airport, now almost 100% via automobiles. How much of that travel to the airport will switch to the train?
22. Comment: For now, B-Line and Yuba Sutter Transit need to have Gridley and Live Oak connections. It could help the North Valley Rail Project.
23. Will the train service be more or less reliable compared to Amtrak's Coast Starlight (which is quite poor)?
24. How many people travel from Chico to the airport each day on average, and how many of those travelers will use the train? And how much will the train increase air travel from Chico?
25. Comment: Chico is growing so quickly, that the north terminus should be at the Chico airport with a quick stop at the Chico Downtown station. This would allow folks needing longer-term parking to go to the airport and people living in town to utilize alternate means to connect to the train.
26. It is imperative that this service allow bicycles to be taken onto the trains. Has this allowance been looked at?

**These additional questions were asked on BCAG's website and responded to internally.**

1. Please include a discussion that any Chico depot needs to be at the existing historical Amtrak station or bust. Ridership potential will never be realized with any other location, especially out of site (barber yard) to the university campus community. Trains can stop traffic for 1- 1/2 minutes. It's legal and ok. The nearby firehouse, in the event of needing to cross the rails, would use the Hwy 32 crossing as any passenger's small train length does not tie up all the downtown crossings. I believe UPRR dug up the siding at the depot about 2002-ish that they used for rolling stock storage, which just made Amtrak go to nearby sidings to allow freight to pass and vice versa.



2. This is a very important project, and I would love to see it move forward. I would love to see myself using this platform.
3. Great project! I look forward to seeing progress.

### Next Steps and Conclusion

At the end of her presentation, DeMaio shared the next steps in the project, which are expected to be completed by spring 2024. She also reminded attendees that the recording of the meeting will be available online soon. The feedback received during the meeting will be used by the project team to develop station concepts. These concepts will be shared with the community later in 2024. Following this, the project will undergo an environmental clearance phase. Construction is not expected to begin before fall 2026 at the earliest, and the first ridership is not anticipated until 2028.

People can stay up-to-date with the project by visiting the project website at

[www.bit.ly/NorthValleyPassengerRail](http://www.bit.ly/NorthValleyPassengerRail) and can direct questions to Chris Devine at [cdevine@bcag.org](mailto:cdevine@bcag.org)

### Publicity and Noticing

It was imperative in this project that outreach spanned across multiple counties and interests, and that priority populations were intentionally communicated with. Accordingly, AIM Consulting created a stakeholder database of 173 unique contacts spanning education, human service agencies, chambers of commerce, hospitals, transportation and environmental advocates, and more. Using the database, AIM then created a smaller list of 29 organizations that represent six different priority populations: low-income, disabled/elderly, Native American, Hmong, Hispanic, and African American. Earlier in the project, AIM reached out to the 29 priority population organizations to create a relationship, re-introduce the project, and ask if they would share information within their organization once it was available. Once awareness was launched, AIM reconnected with these organizations specifically and provided the project flyer and social media images for these groups to share.