



North Valley Passenger Rail Strategic Plan

CHICO • GRIDLEY • MARYSVILLE/YUBA CITY
PLUMAS LAKE • SACRAMENTO

Draft Report

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List of Acronyms and Abbreviations

AB	Assembly Bill	MP	milepost
AC Transit	Alameda-Contra Costa Transit District	MPDG	Multimodal Project Discretionary Grant
ACCMA	Alameda County Congestion Management Agency	MPO	metropolitan planning organization
ACE	Altamont Corridor Express	MSA	Metropolitan Statistical Area
ACTC	Alameda County Transportation Commission	MTC	Metropolitan Transportation Commission
BART	(San Francisco) Bay Area Rapid Transit (District)	MTS	(San Diego) Metropolitan Transit System
BCAG	Butte County Association of Governments	NAHC	Native American Heritage Commission
CAF	capital access fee	NEPA	National Environmental Policy Act
Cai-ITP	California Integrated Travel Project	NCTD	North County Transit District
CaISTA	California State Transportation Agency	NTD	National Transit Database
CAP	Community Assistance Program	O&M	operations and maintenance
CCJPA	Capitol Corridor Joint Powers Authority	OHP	(California) Office of Historic Preservation
CCTA	Contra Costa Transportation Authority	PA&ED	Project Approval and Environmental Document
CDFW	California Department of Fish and Wildlife	PDF	Portable Document File
CDP	census-designated place	PDT	Project Development Team
CEQA	California Environmental Quality Act	PE	Preliminary Engineering
CIG	Capital Investment Grants	PS&E	Plans, Specifications, and Estimates
COG	Council of Governments	Q&A	question-and-answer
Corridor ID	Corridor Identification and Development	RABA	Redding Area Bus Authority
CP	Control Point	RAISE	Rebuilding American Infrastructure with Sustainability and Equity
CPUC	California Public Utilities Commission	RFI	Request for Information
CRISI	Consolidated Rail Infrastructure and Safety Improvements	RFP	Request for Proposals
CSA	Combined Statistical Area	ROW	right-of-way
CSRP	California State Rail Plan	RTC	Regional Transit Connection
CSU	California State University	RTP	Regional Transportation Plan
CTC	County Transportation Commission	SACOG	Sacramento Area Council of Governments
CVFPB	Central Valley Flood Protection Board	SacRT	Sacramento Regional Transit
CVRWG	Central Valley Rail Working Group	SB	Senate Bill
DFC	Discount Fare Card	SCCP	Solutions for Congested Corridors
DMV	Department of Motor Vehicles	SJCOG	San Joaquin Council of Governments
DTSC	(California) Department of Toxic Substances Control	SJJPA	San Joaquin Joint Powers Authority
DWR	(California) Department of Water Resources	SJRRC	San Joaquin Regional Rail Commission
EIR	Environmental Impact Report	SLC	(California) State Lands Commission
EIS	Environmental Impact Statement	SMF	Sacramento International Airport
EOS	Early Operating Segment	SPA	Special Planning Area
ETO	Early Train Operator	SR	State Route
FEMA	Federal Emergency Management Agency	SRA	State Rail Assistance
FSP	Federal-State Partnership	SRTA	Shasta Regional Transportation Agency
FTA	Federal Transit Administration	STA	State Transit Assistance
GHG	greenhouse gas	STIP	State Transportation Improvement Program
GTFS	General Transit Feed Specification	SWRCB	State Water Resources Control Board
HSR	high-speed rail	TCAG	Tulare County Association of Governments
IDOT	Illinois Department of Transportation	TCEP	Trade Corridor Enhancement Program
JPA	joint powers authority	TIRCP	Transit and Intercity Rail Capital Program
KCAG	Kings County Association of Governments	TOD	transit-oriented development
LACMTA	Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority	UP	Union Pacific (Railroad)
LAVTA	Livermore Amador Valley Transit Authority	UPRR	Union Pacific Railroad
LIFE	Low Income Fare is Easy	USACE	United States Army Corps of Engineers
LTF	Local Transportation Fund	USCG	United States Coast Guard
MCAG	Merced County Association of Governments	USFWS	United States Fish and Wildlife Service
MITC	Merced Intermodal Track Connection	VMT	vehicle miles traveled
		VTA	(Santa Clara) Valley Transportation Authority
		WREC	Wildcat Recreation Center
		YOE	year-of-expenditure
		ZEMU	zero-emission multiple-unit

Executive Summary

What is the purpose of the Strategic Plan?

The North Valley Passenger Rail Strategic Plan is a blueprint for establishing a new passenger rail service to link Butte, Yuba, and Sutter counties with Sacramento and the rest of the state. It describes the initial planning and development process to define the project, including selecting a proposed route and stations, as well as the stakeholder and community engagement work to bring public input into this initial planning effort. It also describes a funding and implementation strategy to move the project forward to environmental clearance, detailed design, construction, and eventual operation.

What is the Proposed Project?

North Valley Rail (the “Project”) builds upon already-planned expansions to the Altamont Corridor Express (ACE) and Amtrak *San Joaquin* systems by extending trains north of Natomas into the North Valley. An initial “starter” service of four roundtrips/day would begin running within the next decade, serving four stations in the North Valley, at Plumas Lake, Marysville–Yuba City, Gridley, and Chico. Bus connections would be provided for Oroville (via Gridley) and Sacramento International Airport (via Natomas).

Trains would continue south of Natomas to/from Sacramento and other parts of the state, including Stockton, the Bay Area, and the heart of the San Joaquin Valley. In Merced, three of the four roundtrips/day would have timed transfers with the future high-speed rail line currently under construction, providing ongoing connections to Fresno, Bakersfield, and Southern California.

To support train operations, the Project includes a new layover facility in Chico for storing trains and—pending further coordination with the host railroad, Union Pacific Railroad—a combination of infrastructure improvements and/or capital access fees to permit shared use of the existing freight rail corridor by passenger trains.

Preliminary capital cost estimates are on the order of \$500 million for capital costs (\$275 million if capital access fees are used in lieu of all corridor improvements outside of the proposed station and layover facility).

What are the benefits of the Proposed Project?

The Project would better connect the North Valley with the rest of Northern California and the larger statewide rail network, relieving traffic congestion on highways and reducing associated greenhouse gas emissions. By providing a new rail service in an underserved market, North Valley Rail would reduce reliance on personal automobiles, encourage more environmentally-sustainable travel choices, and support the region’s long-term growth and economic development. Low-income and historically disadvantaged communities in the North Valley would also benefit from improved access to housing, jobs, and education. The Project is forecasted to increase ridership across the combined future ACE and San Joaquin system by almost 600,000 passengers annually in the initial years of service.

What is next for North Valley Rail?

A funding strategy using State funding sources has already been developed to move the Project into the environmental clearance and preliminary engineering phase shortly. During this phase, the project definition will be further refined and the potential environmental impacts of the Project will be evaluated. This will be followed by detailed design, permitting and right-of-way acquisition, procurement, and construction, with an expected service start in 2031, in time for the start of the initial high-speed rail service between Merced and Bakersfield.



Chapter 1

Introduction

This chapter briefly discusses the context for the Project and this Strategic Plan and provides a high-level overview of the Project and its key benefits. The final section describes the general organization of the plan by chapter.

- **1.1 Project Background**
- **1.2 Project Overview**
- **1.3 Project Benefits**
- **1.4 Plan Structure**

1.1 Project Background

The Project advances the recommendations of the Draft 2023 *California State Rail Plan* (CSR) by extending passenger rail service north of the Sacramento area into the Northern Sacramento Valley (“North Valley”) to serve population centers in Yuba, Sutter, and Butte Counties. Currently, passenger rail service in these areas is only provided by the *Coast Starlight*, which only operates one daily roundtrip that stops only in Chico.⁽¹⁾ Outside of the *Coast Starlight*, intercity transit connections are currently provided primarily by Amtrak Thruway Bus Route 3, which connects with *San Joaquin* trains in Stockton, and privately-operated intercity buses (Greyhound and FlixBus).

This North Valley Passenger Rail Strategic Plan (“Strategic Plan”) defines the scope of the Project in detail and develops a blueprint for its implementation and eventual operation. Preparation of the Strategic Plan was led by the Butte County Association of Governments (BCAG), in a multi-agency partnership with the California Department of Transportation (“Caltrans”); the San Joaquin Regional Rail Commission (SJRRC) and San Joaquin Joint Powers Authority (SJPPA), which manage Altamont Corridor Express (ACE) and the *San Joaquin* services, respectively; and Union Pacific Railroad (“UP” or “UPRR”), the owner of the rail corridor. Funding for this planning effort was provided through the Caltrans Sustainable Transportation Planning Grant Program (using Federal Transit Administration (FTA) Section 5304 (Statewide Planning) funds) and the Local Transportation Fund (LTF) derived from the general statewide sales tax.

Work on the Strategic Plan began in January 2022 and culminated with the publication of the Draft Report in December 2023, followed by the Final Report in February 2024. BCAG is now seeking to initiate work on environmental clearance and preliminary engineering for the Project.

1.2 Project Overview

The Project builds upon the Valley Rail Program’s Sacramento Extension, which will bring additional passenger rail service into the Sacramento area from the south via a new alignment through Midtown Sacramento, with a terminus in Natomas at Elkhorn Boulevard. The Project proposes to extend some of these trains further north from Natomas and into the North Valley, serving four new stations at Plumas Lake, Marysville–Yuba City, Gridley, and Chico. The target start date of service is sometime in 2031.

The proposed initial “starter” service includes four daily roundtrips tailored to the North Valley’s unique needs, connecting to multiple destinations within the Northern California Megaregion including Sacramento, Stockton, and the San Francisco Bay Area:

- Two of the roundtrips would provide direct, one-seat rides between the North Valley and high-speed rail (HSR), providing timed connections at the future HSR station in Downtown Merced and allowing for ongoing connections to Los Angeles and the rest of Southern California via the HSR Early Operating Segment (EOS) to/from Bakersfield.
- An additional third daily roundtrip would provide timed connections in Stockton for continuing travel to/from Merced and HSR, and to/from the San Francisco Bay Area.
- The fourth daily roundtrip would connect the North Valley with the Tri-Valley area and Southern Alameda County, terminating at ACE’s new planned terminal at Union City Intermodal Station, allowing for direct connections with BART and Transbay bus services.

(1) Refer to the *Coast Starlight* timetable provided in **Table 3-1** on page 19.

Two of the roundtrips would also be in slots that are well-positioned to serve the commuter and business/leisure day-trip market into Sacramento.

At the Gridley station, buses would provide convenient connections for passengers continuing to/from Oroville, the county seat of Butte County. Bus connections to/from Sacramento International Airport are also planned to be available at the Natomas station, consistent with the Valley Rail Program, allowing for seamless airport connections via public transit for North Valley residents and visitors. With an approximate travel time of 90 minutes between Chico and Sacramento, the service would also be competitive with private automobiles in the key shorter-distance travel market between the North Valley and Sacramento.

While the initial service plan focuses on four daily roundtrips, the Project lays the groundwork for potential future service expansion beyond the initial service. Stations and other infrastructure constructed as part of the Project will be the critical first step in achieving the long-term service goals envisioned in the Draft 2023 CSRP, which call for hourly service or better in the North Valley corridor by 2050. The Project will also build support for potential future extensions into the North State area (e.g., Red Bluff and Redding) and open up other potential avenues for exploration, such as direct service to Sacramento Valley Station, expanded commuter service into Sacramento, and interlining with the *Capitol Corridor*. Caltrans is currently leading a study to look at opportunities for direct service to Sacramento Valley Station and what might be required to enable this connection.



1.3 Project Benefits

The Project would improve transit connections for the underserved North Valley, by building upon planned future expansions of the statewide passenger rail network being implemented as part of or in conjunction with the Valley Rail Program. This would provide direct, one-seat rides to/from Sacramento (a major short-distance market) and other major rail hubs across the Northern California Megaregion. Linking North Valley communities to the Northern California Megaregion and the larger statewide rail network would provide major benefits by reducing traffic congestion, vehicle miles traveled (VMT), and greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions; expanding equity through improved access to housing, high-quality jobs, and higher education; and promoting economic development and tourism.

1.3.1 Expanded Rail Connectivity

By substantially expanding rail service in the North Valley beyond the existing once-daily *Coast Starlight*, the Project will provide an attractive and viable transit alternative in the corridor for a variety of trip purposes and ridership markets, including intercity travelers throughout the Northern California Megaregion; longer-distance intercity travelers to destinations throughout the State through connections to other services such as HSR; commuters and business travelers into Sacramento; and other passengers.

The Project is designed to seamlessly integrate and complement existing and planned future rail service, including the following major projects and service improvements being implemented as part of, or in conjunction with other rail expansion efforts as part of the Valley Rail Program:

- Sacramento Extension for ACE and the *San Joaquin*s, from Stockton to Midtown Sacramento and Natomas
- Merced Extension for ACE, from Lathrop to Modesto, Turlock, and Merced
- Union City Extension for ACE, providing a direct connection to BART and Transbay buses
- Timed connections with the HSR EOS (Merced–Bakersfield) in Merced
- Expanded *San Joaquin*s service with up to 12 daily roundtrips and the new Merced Intermodal Track Connection (MITC) project to bring *San Joaquin*s trains directly to the new HSR station

1.3.2 Progress towards Housing and Climate Goals

The Project also supports the State’s housing and climate goals by providing an environmentally friendly and reliable transit-based travel option within the North Valley. Proposed stations are envisioned to become new transit hubs, creating opportunities for transit-oriented development (TOD) and downtown revitalization to bolster the state’s supply of transit-accessible housing. At the same time, the Project is anticipated to induce mode shifts and other changes in travel behavior, promoting independence from automobiles and fossil fuels, taking traffic off roads, and reducing VMT and GHG emissions.

Sites for the four planned stations—at Plumas Lake, Marysville–Yuba City, Gridley, and Chico—have been carefully selected to maximize connectivity and capitalize on local planning efforts:

- The proposed station in Plumas Lake would provide a new station to serve a growing community that is over 30 years in the making. The Plumas Lake Specific Plan, adopted in 1993 by Yuba County, calls for approximately 11,750 dwelling units and supporting retail and commercial uses at full build-out. The Project would connect Plumas Lake with Sacramento and the rest of the North Valley and also provide enhanced access to key destinations, including the Toyota Amphitheatre and the Hard Rock Hotel & Casino Sacramento at Fire Mountain.
- The proposed stations at Marysville–Yuba City⁽²⁾ and Gridley would be centrally located in historic downtowns, promoting opportunities for economic development and neighborhood revitalization. These station locations are also surrounded by multiple opportunity sites for TOD.
- The two potential station sites in Chico include one at the existing Amtrak station in Downtown Chico, within short walking distance of the Chico State campus, and another adjacent to Barber Yard, a major redevelopment site.

Based on preliminary ridership forecasts prepared as part of the Strategic Plan, the Project is expected to increase annual ridership for the expanded ACE and *San Joaquin*s system by approximately 592,000 passengers in the initial years of service with four daily roundtrips. This is equivalent to an annual VMT reduction benefit of approximately 40.92 million VMT.

Building upon ACE’s pioneering milestone of being one of the first passenger rail services in Northern California to fully switch to renewable diesel operations, North Valley Rail is expected to be operated with an environmentally-friendly train fleet, in alignment with State goals to decarbonize rail and other transportation.

(2) Two potential sites are under consideration for the Marysville–Yuba City station, both of which would be located in Marysville’s historic downtown.

1.3.3 Greater Equity and Social Mobility

The Project focuses and advances equity and social mobility through transportation investments. As illustrated in **Figure 1-1**, large swaths of the Project alignment have been designated as California Climate Investments Priority Populations (Disadvantaged or Low-Income Communities) by the California Air Resources Board, and 3 of the 4 stations are directly located in such communities. These residents, and transit-dependent riders in general, would benefit from an environmentally-friendly regional and intercity transit solution that takes polluting cars off the road and improved access to employment, healthcare, and educational opportunities.

Prospective students across the Central Valley and state would benefit from better access to Chico State, Butte College, and other higher-education institutions along the expanded future ACE and *San Joaquin* networks including California State University, Sacramento and University of California, Davis. For example, Chico State's enrollment of over 13,000 students comes from all over California and would be able to take full advantage of the new passenger rail service:

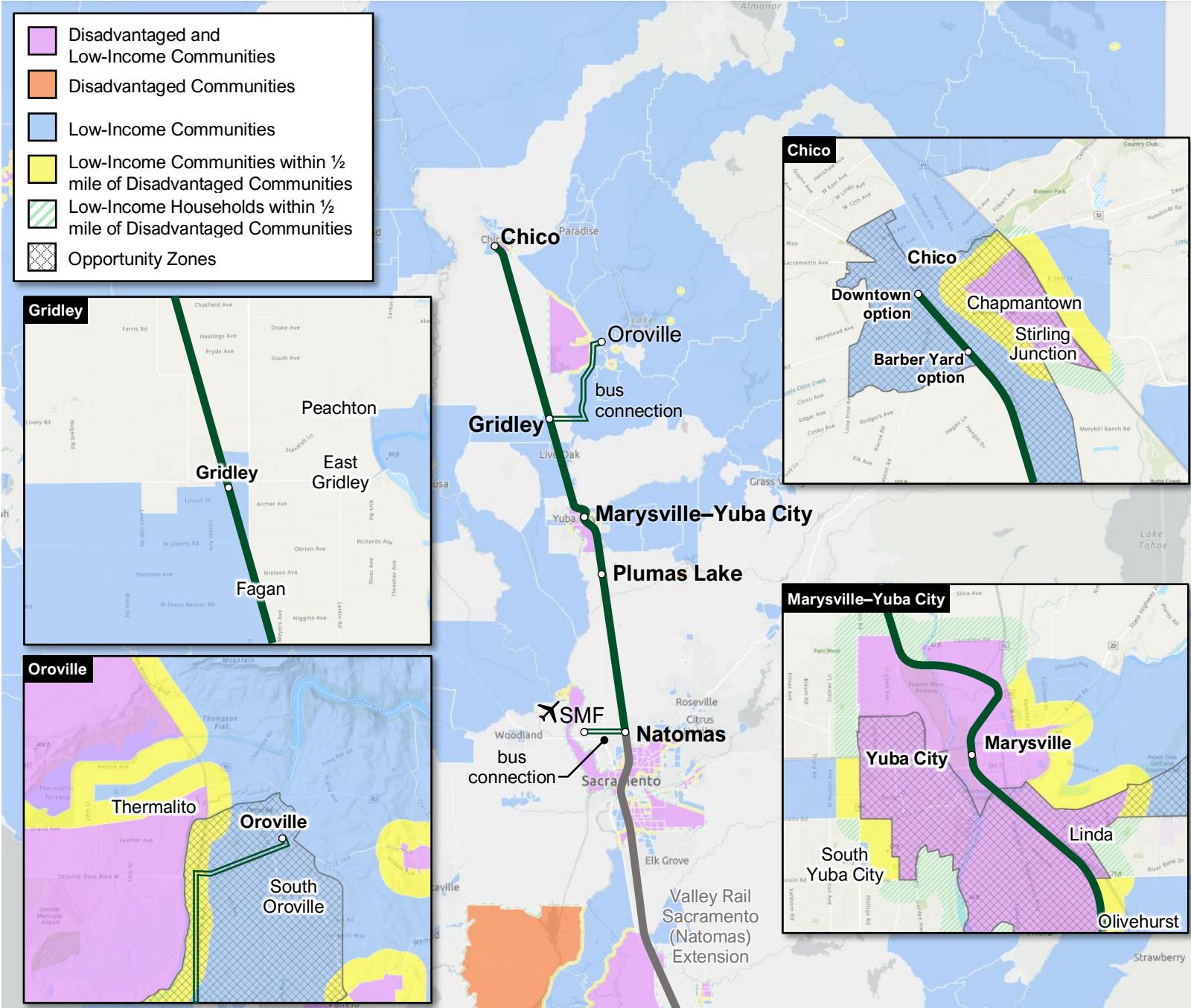
- 26.5% from Chico State's service area
- 10.3% from the Sacramento area
- 22.3% from the San Francisco Bay Area
- 20.9% from the Los Angeles area
- 17% from the rest of California
- 3% from out-of-state or international

1.4 Plan Structure

The Strategic Plan is organized into the following chapters:

- **Chapter 2: Community and Stakeholder Engagement**
- **Chapter 3: Service and Operations Planning**
- **Chapter 4: Infrastructure Improvements**
- **Chapter 5: Ridership Forecasts**
- **Chapter 6: Funding and Implementation Strategy**
- **Chapter 7: Fare Strategy**
- **Chapter 8: Conclusion and Next Steps**

Figure 1-1: Priority Populations (Disadvantaged and Low-Income Communities)



Source: Priority Populations base mapping from [California Air Resources Board](#). Annotations by AECOM.

Chapter 2

Community and Stakeholder Engagement

Development of the Strategic Plan was informed by a robust outreach effort targeted at the community at large and relevant stakeholders, with the intent of incorporating valuable input into project planning and development. The outreach process, including key engagement events and milestones, is described in this chapter.

- **2.1 Community Engagement**
- **2.2 Other Stakeholder Engagement**

2.1 Community Engagement

AIM Consulting led the Project Team's community engagement process which included a series of events to introduce the Project to the community and gather valuable input from community members. This included the creation of a stakeholder database of 173 unique contacts representing education, human services agencies, chambers of commerce, hospitals, transportation and environmental advocates, and more. This database was used to create an additional list of 29 community-based organizations representing priority populations within the counties, including low-income and disabled/elderly groups and minority communities (Native American, Hmong, Hispanic, and African-American).

Keystone community engagement events included the following:

- **Community Meeting #1** was held virtually via Zoom on Thursday, February 23, 2023 from 5:00 p.m. to 6:30 p.m. and included a presentation of the Project and the larger Valley Rail Program; train service planning and implementation; station, layover facility, and track improvements, and next steps. Total attendance at the community meeting was 127 people. The meeting included two live polls—one to ask where participants were from and if they had taken passenger rail before, and a second to ask what kinds of trips participants anticipated to take with the new service and where they anticipate going. The workshop ended with a question-and-answer (“Q&A”) session.
- **Pop-up events** were held at the Bok Kai Festival in Marysville (Saturday, February 25, 2023) and Chico Certified Farmers Market (Saturday, March 4, 2023) to introduce community members to the Project and invite participation in the upcoming questionnaire.
- An **online questionnaire** was open April 1–May 15, 2023 to collect initial feedback on how community members anticipate using the proposed North Valley Passenger Rail, possible opportunities and challenges regarding the alignment and stations, and connections to the stations. At the end of the campaign, the questionnaire received 506 responses, with a 95% completion rate. The average user spent 2 minutes completing the questionnaire. Respondents envisioned themselves using the new rail service for a variety of trip purposes, including recreation/leisure (84 percent), non-commute business travel (32 percent), medical (24 percent), commute (18 percent), and school (5 percent). A summary report of the questionnaire results is provided in **Appendix A** for reference.
- **Community Meeting #2** was held virtually via Zoom on Wednesday, December 13, 2023 from 5:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m. This meeting included a presentation to review work completed during the course of development of the Strategic Plan, along with key findings. Additionally, participants were notified that the draft Strategic Plan would be available for public review in January of 2024. Total attendance at the community meeting was 86 people. The workshop ended with a Q&A session.

The Project Team developed and continues to maintain a dedicated Project website at <https://northvalleyrail.org/> to disseminate Project information and updates, including notices regarding upcoming meetings and events.

In addition to workshop flyers and social media content, materials produced to support public outreach and engagement included an 8-page Project booklet and 2-page fact sheet distributed online through the Project website in Adobe Portable Document File (PDF) format, as well as press releases and other information shared with database contacts, community-based organizations, and various media outlets, including the following:

- **Newspapers:** *The Sacramento Bee*, *Chico News & Review*, *Chico Enterprise-Record*, *The Orion* (Chico State's independent student newspaper), *Oroville Mercury-Register*, *Paradise Post*, *The Appeal-Democrat* (Yuba–Sutter area), *Red Bluff Daily News*, and *Citrus Heights Sentinel*

- **Periodicals:** *Sacramento Business Journal*, *Sacramento Magazine*, *Sactown Magazine*, and *Comstock's magazine*
- **Online news outlets:** Action News Now, Chico State Today, and YubaNet
- **Television stations:** KCRA-TV (Channel 3), ABC10 (KXTV), CBS13 (KOVR), and FOX40 (KTXL) in the Sacramento area and ABC7 (KRCR) in the Chico–Redding area
- **Television programs:** GoodDay Sacramento (KMAX-TV / Channel 31)
- **Radio stations:** KCSC Radio (Chico State's student-run radio station)

2.2 Other Stakeholder Engagement

The Strategic Plan was developed by BCAG in partnership with Caltrans, SJRRC, SJJPA, and UP. BCAG and its consultants met regularly with SJRRC, SJJPA, and Caltrans representatives throughout the planning effort. The Strategic Plan was also developed in coordination with other key stakeholders and decisionmakers along the Project route, including the following:

- Metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs) including the Sacramento Area Council of Governments (SACOG)
- Local counties and municipalities including the Counties of Butte and Yuba; the Cities of Chico, Oroville, Biggs, Gridley, Marysville, and Yuba City; and the Town of Paradise
- Transit agencies including Butte Regional Transit (“B-Line”), Yuba–Sutter Transit, and Shasta Regional Transportation Agency (SRTA)
- Chico State
- Central Valley Rail Working Group (CVRWG)

The primary method to engage these stakeholders was through the Project Development Team (PDT), which was established at the outset of the Project. Meetings of the PDT have taken place periodically to provide project updates and to allow for input from stakeholders. To-date, a total of 5 PDT meetings have taken place:

- PDT #1: Thursday, March 24, 2022 3:00–4:30 p.m.
- PDT #2: Thursday, December 15, 2022 9:00–10:30 a.m.
- PDT #3: Thursday, April 27, 2023 1:00–2:30 p.m.
- PDT #4: Tuesday, August 22, 2023 10:30 a.m.–12:00 p.m.
- PDT #5: Tuesday, December 5, 2023 1:00–2:30 p.m.

The PDT will continue during the environmental clearance phase of the Project.

In addition, numerous individual meetings and site walks were conducted with stakeholders along the corridor to gain an understanding of specific issues. This work will continue throughout the entire project development process.

Community Workshop #1 flyer

NORTH VALLEY RAIL
 CHICO • GRIDLEY • MARYSVILLE/YUBA CITY
 PLUMAS LAKE • SACRAMENTO



Would you ride a train between Chico and Sacramento, and beyond?



Join us for a discussion about creating a passenger rail service between Sacramento and Chico, and beyond.

VIRTUAL COMMUNITY WORKSHOP: **FEBRUARY 23**

5:00 PM via Zoom

RSVP: bit.ly/NorthValleyRailMeeting



Learn more about the North Valley Passenger Rail Strategic Plan: bit.ly/NorthValleyPassengerRail

Chapter 3

Service and Operations Planning

The initial technical task in development of the Strategic Plan involved a comprehensive planning effort to define the proposed rail service and operations. This includes researching and establishing the background context of existing transit services in the North Valley, developing and defining the critical Project attributes (route, station and layover facility locations, rolling stock, and service levels), exploring potential opportunities for improved bus connections, and estimating the operating costs for the proposed service. This technical work is described in detail in this chapter.

- **3.1 Existing Transit Services**
- **3.2 Proposed Route Alignment**
- **3.3 Proposed Stations**
- **3.4 Proposed Service Plan**
- **3.5 Rolling Stock**
- **3.6 Proposed Layover Facility**
- **3.7 Bus Connections**
- **3.8 Estimated Operations and Maintenance Costs**

3.1 Existing Transit Services

Currently, there are three major transit options available to passengers in the North Valley corridor: long-distance intercity rail (the *Coast Starlight*), intercity bus (Greyhound and FlixBus), and commuter buses (Yuba–Sutter Transit). Amtrak Thruway bus service (Route 3), which connects with *San Joaquin* trains in Stockton, also serves the North Valley corridor but currently requires that passengers purchase a connecting *San Joaquin* train ticket. These services are described in more detail below (reflecting conditions as of July 2023, unless otherwise noted).

3.1.1 *Coast Starlight*

Amtrak's *Coast Starlight* is a long-distance intercity service connecting Seattle, Portland, Sacramento, the San Francisco Bay Area, and Southern California (Los Angeles). Within the North Valley, only Chico is served, with the next nearest stations being Redding to the north and Sacramento Valley Station to the south. Service is one roundtrip daily, and travel between Chico and Sacramento is only available in the late evening or early morning. An abridged timetable for the *Coast Starlight* showing all stations in the North Valley and other key stations is provided in **Table 3-1**.

Table 3-1: *Coast Starlight* Timetable

Southbound	(read down)	Station		(read up)	Northbound
<i>Coast Starlight</i> #11					<i>Coast Starlight</i> #14
9:50	▼	Seattle (King Street)	SEA	▲	19:51
13:50	▼	Portland (Union)	PDX	▲	15:56
14:22	▼			▲	15:40
4:12	▼	Chico	CIC	▲	1:37
4:12	▼			▲	1:37
6:28	▼	Sacramento (Sacramento Valley)	SAC	▲	23:49
6:48	▼			▲	23:49
8:29	▼	Emeryville	EMY	▲	21:41
8:39	▼			▲	21:31
8:54	▼	Oakland (Jack London Square)	OKJ	▲	21:21
9:09	▼			▲	21:06
10:14	▼	San Jose (Diridon)	SJC	▲	19:58
10:26	▼			▲	19:46
21:11	▼	Los Angeles (Union)	LAX	▲	9:51

Source: AECOM.

Notes:

Not all stations north of Chico and south of Sacramento (Sacramento Valley) are shown.

Arrival and departure timepoints are shown separately for intermediate stations.

3.1.2 Intercity Bus

Intercity bus service in the North Valley corridor is available through Greyhound and FlixBus (which acquired Greyhound in 2021). While the two companies are branded differently, passengers can book both Greyhound and FlixBus tickets through either company's website. Service in the North Valley consists of one daily Greyhound roundtrip between Seattle and Sacramento and one FlixBus roundtrip between Portland and Sacramento. An abridged timetable for intercity buses showing all stops in the North Valley and other key stops is provided in **Table 3-2**.

As shown in **Table 3-2**, intercity buses generally offer slightly better timepoints than the *Coast Starlight* for North Valley passengers, particularly for travel to and from Sacramento. With two roundtrips available, passengers also have some flexibility to choose between morning or evening trips. It should be noted, however, that neither of the buses currently (as of November 2023) appears to serve Marysville, although a review of some past timetables showed stops there for both operators. In addition, at least some past timetables for FlixBus also did not include a stop in Chico. In general, it is likely that service is frequently modified as needed to tailor the service to travel patterns (e.g., school-related travel), including the addition/removal of stops and adjustments to timepoints.

Table 3-2: Intercity Bus Timetable

Southbound		(read down)	Stop	(read up)	Northbound	
FlixBus	Greyhound				Greyhound	FlixBus
—	6:00	▼	Seattle	▲	3:55	—
19:25	10:25	▼	Portland	▲	23:30	—
	11:25	▼		▲	22:45	9:05
4:35	20:55	▼	Redding	▲	13:00	00:05
4:40	21:25	▼		▲	12:20	00:05
5:15	22:00	▼	Red Bluff	▲	11:45	23:35
5:15	22:00	▼		▲	11:45	23:35
6:10	22:55	▼	Chico	▲	10:45	22:40
6:15	23:00	▼		▲	10:40	22:35
6:50	23:35	▼	Oroville	▲	10:10	22:05
6:50	23:40	▼		▲	10:05	22:05
↓	↓	▼	Marysville	▲	↑	↑
↓	↓	▼		▲	↑	↑
8:10	1:00	▼	Sacramento (Greyhound Bus Station)	▲	8:45	20:45
8:20	—	▼		▲	—	20:35
8:30	—	▼	Old Sacramento (2nd Street/J Street)	▲	—	20:25

Source: AECOM.

Notes:

Minor stops north of Redding not shown.

Arrival and departure timepoints are shown separately for intermediate stations.

3.1.3 Commuter Bus

Yuba–Sutter Transit offers frequent commuter bus service connecting Yuba and Sutter Counties with Sacramento, but only on weekdays. Service is provided along two main routes: Route 99 serving Yuba City and Bogue via State Route (SR) 99 west of the Feather River, and Route 70 serving Marysville, Olivehurst, and Plumas Lake via SR 70 east of the Feather River. However, some trips traveling via SR 99 also serve Marysville, while some trips traveling via SR 70 also serve Yuba City. A limited number of trips allow for reverse-direction travel (e.g., morning buses arriving inbound in Sacramento can pick up passengers in Sacramento heading outbound).

Service post-COVID consisted of 7 commute-period roundtrips (4 via Route 99 and 3 via Route 70) and 3 midday roundtrips. An additional 3 commute-period roundtrips (1 via Route 99 and 2 via Route 70) were in operation prior to COVID-19, but had been suspended until further notice since May 1, 2020. Starting November 1, 2023, service changes went into effect, formalizing a reduced post-COVID service level of 6 commute-period roundtrips

(3 each via Route 99 and via Route 70) and 2 midday roundtrips (via Route 70). This new timetable for Yuba-Sutter Transit commuter buses is provided in **Table 3-3**.

Table 3-3: Commuter Bus Timetable

Stop		Morning Commuter						Midday		Afternoon Commuter					
		170	199	270	299	370	399	1 MD	2 MD	199	170	270	299	370	399
Walton Terminal (Sunsweet)	<i>Yuba City</i>	—	—	—	—	—	—	7:50	11:10	—	—	—	—	—	—
Caltrans District Office	<i>Marysville</i>	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	16:10	—
Yuba County Government Center	<i>Marysville</i>	5:25	—	5:55	6:05	6:40	—	7:55	11:15	14:40	—	—	—	—	16:30
Walton Terminal (Sam's Club)	<i>Yuba City</i>	—	5:30	—	6:15	—	6:45	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
McGowan Pkwy. Park & Ride (SR 70)	<i>Olivehurst</i>	5:35	—	6:05	—	6:50	—	8:05	11:25	—	—	—	—	—	—
Plumas Lake Park & Ride (SR 70)	<i>Plumas Lake</i>	5:42	—	6:15	—	7:02	—	8:15	11:35	—	—	—	—	—	—
Bogue Road Park & Ride (SR 99)	<i>Bogue</i>	—	5:40	—	6:25	—	6:55	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Natomas Gateway Center	<i>Sacramento</i>	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	16:55	—
J St. & 4th St.	<i>Sacramento</i>	6:15	6:20	6:50	7:05	7:40	7:38	8:50	12:05	15:30	15:35	16:05	16:30	17:05	17:25
J St. & 8th St.	<i>Sacramento</i>	6:16	6:21	6:52	7:07	7:42	7:40	8:52	12:07	15:32	15:37	16:07	16:32	17:08	17:28
J St. & 11th St.	<i>Sacramento</i>	6:17	6:22	6:54	7:09	7:44	7:42	8:54	12:09	15:34	15:39	16:09	16:34	17:10	17:30
15th St. & K St.	<i>Sacramento</i>	6:20	6:25	6:57	7:12	7:47	7:45	8:57	12:12	15:37	15:42	16:12	16:37	17:15	17:35
15th St. & N St.	<i>Sacramento</i>	6:21	6:26	6:58	7:13	7:48	7:46	8:58	12:13	15:38	15:43	16:13	16:38	17:16	17:37
P St. & 13th St.	<i>Sacramento</i>	6:23	6:28	7:00	7:15	7:50	7:48	9:00	12:15	15:40	15:45	16:15	16:40	17:20	17:41
P St. & 9th St.	<i>Sacramento</i>	6:24	6:29	7:02	7:17	7:52	7:50	9:02	12:17	15:42	15:47	16:17	16:42	17:22	17:43
P St. & 5th St.	<i>Sacramento</i>	6:25	6:30	7:05	7:20	7:55	7:53	9:05	12:20	15:45	15:50	16:20	16:45	17:25	17:45
Natomas Gateway Center	<i>Sacramento</i>	6:32	—	—	—	—	—	Midday routes provide return service to all park and ride lots upon drop-off request to driver.	—	—	—	—	—	—	
Bogue Road Park & Ride (SR 99)	<i>Sacramento</i>	—	—	—	—	—	—		16:25	—	—	17:30	—	18:30	
Walton Terminal (Sunsweet)	<i>Yuba City</i>	—	—	—	—	—	—		16:40	—	—	17:45	—	18:45	
Yuba County Government Center	<i>Marysville</i>	—	—	—	—	—	—		16:50	—	—	17:55	—	18:55	
Plumas Lake Park & Ride (SR 70)	<i>Plumas Lake</i>	—	—	—	—	—	—		—	16:25	16:55	—	18:05	—	
McGowan Pkwy. Park & Ride (SR 70)	<i>Olivehurst</i>	—	—	—	—	—	—		—	16:40	17:10	—	18:20	—	
Caltrans District Office	<i>Marysville</i>	7:20	—	—	—	8:45	—		—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Yuba County Government Center	<i>Marysville</i>	7:25	—	—	—	8:50	—		—	16:55	17:25	—	18:30	—	—
Walton Terminal (Sam's Club)	<i>Yuba City</i>	—	—	—	—	—	—		—	—	—	—	—	—	—

Source: Yuba-Sutter Transit.

Notes:

Shading indicates drop-off only stop.

3.1.4 Amtrak San Joaquin Thruway Bus

In addition to the above three options, Thruway Route 3 also operates through the North Valley corridor, providing timed connections at Stockton San Joaquin Street station with Oakland-branch *San Joaquin* trains for continuing journeys south of Stockton. Stops are provided in Redding, Red Bluff, Chico, Oroville, Marysville, Sacramento, Elk Grove, and Stockton.

The current Thruway Route 3 timetable (as of January 2024) is summarized in **Table 3-4**. As shown in **Table 3-4**, Route 3 operates three daily roundtrips, two of which extend beyond Chico and serve Red Bluff and Redding. When the *San Joaquin* operated seven daily roundtrips prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, Route 3 operated four daily roundtrips, all of which extended as far north as Redding.

Because Route 3 is not currently eligible for bus-only travel, passengers must currently purchase a connecting train ticket in order to use Route 3 for travel within the North Valley corridor. Bus-only ticketing for Route 3 would

allow for travel within the North Valley corridor and is currently being contemplated as part of future ticketing changes for the service.

Table 3-4: Amtrak Thruway Bus Timetable

Southbound			(read down)	Stop	(read up)	Northbound		
3712	3716	3718				3711	3713	3715
6:05	10:05		▼	Redding (RABA Downtown Transit Center)	RDR	▲		17:45 21:35
6:40	10:40		▼	Red Bluff (TRAX Bus & Ride)	RBF	▲		17:15 21:05
7:45	11:45	15:35	▼	Chico	CIC	▲	11:55 16:20	20:10
8:10	12:10	16:00	▼	Oroville (Harbor Freight Tools)	ORV	▲	11:25 15:50	19:40
8:45	12:45	16:35	▼	Marysville (Yuba County Gov't. Center)	MRV	▲	10:50 15:15	19:05
9:50	13:50	17:50	▼		SAC	▲	10:00 14:25	18:15
10:05	14:05	18:05	▼	Sacramento Valley		▲	9:50 14:00	18:00
—	—	—	▼	State Capitol	SCS	▲	9:35 13:50	17:50
10:20	14:20	18:20	▼	Elk Grove (9180 Harbour Point Drive)	EKG	▲	— 13:35	17:35
—	—	19:00	▼	Downtown Stockton	SKT	▲	—	—
11:05	15:10	19:10	▼	Stockton San Joaquin Street	SKN	▲	8:45 12:45	16:45
↓	↓	↓				↑	↑	↑
11:23	15:23	19:23	▼	Stockton San Joaquin Street	SKN	▲	8:36 12:36	16:36
11:56	15:56	19:56	▼	Modesto	MOD	▲	8:03 12:03	16:03
12:12	16:09	20:09	▼	Turlock–Denair	TRK	▲	7:45 11:45	15:45
12:45	16:45	20:45	▼	Merced	MCD	▲	7:23 11:23	15:23
13:19	17:19	21:19	▼	Madera	MDR	▲	6:38 10:42	14:42
13:49	17:49	21:49	▼	Fresno	FNO	▲	6:12 10:16	14:16
14:24	18:24	22:24	▼	Hanford	HNF	▲	5:34 9:34	13:39
14:40	18:40	22:40	▼	Corcoran	COC	▲	5:14 9:14	13:19
15:17	19:17	23:12	▼	Wasco	WAC	▲	4:39 8:39	12:39
15:57	19:57	23:57	▼	Bakersfield	BFD	▲	4:12 8:12	12:12
712	716	718					711 713	715

Source: SJJPA.

Notes:

Arrival and departure timepoints are shown separately for Sacramento Valley Station.

3.2 Proposed Route Alignment

A map of the proposed North Valley Rail route and stations is shown in **Figure 3-1**.

Figure 3-1: North Valley Rail Route

Source: AECOM.

Base map by Esri, HERE, Garmin, FAO, NOAA, Airbus DS, USGS, NGA, NASA, CGIAR, N Robinson, NCEAS, NLS, OS, NMA, Geodatistyrelsen, Rijkswaterstaat, GSA, Geoland, FEMA, Intermap, OpenStreetMap contributor, and the GIS User Community.

From the planned Natomas Station (part of the Valley Rail Program's Sacramento Extension), the proposed route extends north, following the UP Sacramento Subdivision⁽³⁾ to Marysville. At Binney Junction immediately north of Marysville, the route diverges from the UP Sacramento Subdivision and follows the UP Valley Subdivision to Chico.

In addition to the proposed route to Chico, an “Alternate Route” to Oroville was also considered in the initial planning stages, continuing along the UP Sacramento Subdivision north of Binney Junction to Oroville instead of diverging to the UP Valley Subdivision. The Alternate Route was eventually dropped from further consideration because the population distribution and travel markets within Butte County suggested higher ridership potential for Chico compared to Oroville. This includes a consideration of total population (which is higher for Chico than for Oroville), and the presence of Chico State as the largest key destination in Butte County. Selecting the Alternate Route would also preclude future extension of passenger rail service north of Chico to Red Bluff and Redding, as currently envisioned in the Long-Term Horizon (by 2050) under the Draft 2023 CSRP.

3.3 Proposed Stations

Proposed stations were initially identified based on the location of key population and employment centers, the potential to capture important ridership markets to support the new service, and input from State, regional, and local agencies. As shown in **Figure 3-1**, the following four stations are proposed⁽⁴⁾:

- Plumas Lake
- Marysville (also serving Yuba City)
- Gridley
- Chico

Specific sites for proposed stations were identified through an initial screening analysis, generally focusing on locations that offer the highest potential to capture ridership:

- Sites located in or near communities within the rail corridor with relatively high existing or projected households/populations
- Sites that offer good transit and active transportation connections to key local and regional destinations
- Sites that provide enough space to offer opportunities for expanded station amenities (e.g., bus bays, pick-up/drop-off areas, parking, etc.)
- Sites that provide opportunities for neighborhood revitalization (e.g., historic downtowns) and for transit-oriented development (or redevelopment), either within the station site footprint or in the surrounding areas

(3) A “division” is a management unit within a railroad, typically encompassing a specific portion of the railroad’s network and falling under the purview of a designated superintendent who is responsible for the day-to-day management and operations of the division. A “subdivision” is a portion of a division, typically designated between specific terminals or key points on the railroad for the purposes of staffing (e.g., changing crews) or, historically, equipment (e.g., changing locomotives). UP’s Sacramento Subdivision, for example, was originally part of the Western Pacific Railroad’s Feather River Route and runs between Oroville Yard in the north (where it continues as UP’s Canyon Subdivision) and El Pinal in Stockton (where it joins UP’s Fresno Subdivision).

(4) The station in Natomas is being planned separately as part of the Valley Rail Program’s Sacramento Extension and is not a “new” station specific to the Project (i.e., North Valley Rail). The Project would, however, include modifications to the planned station at Natomas to allow the station to function as a “through” station. These improvements are described in more detail in **Section 4.1.6**.

Additional consideration was also given to station sites located in the primary direction of travel. In the case of North Valley Rail, for example, a substantial share of passengers, particularly among commuters, are expected to head south on the outbound leg of their journey and north on the return leg. Therefore, stations located on or near the southern edge of communities along the route can offer some advantages in capturing these riders.

Once a shortlist of one or more potential station sites was identified based on the criteria above, additional consideration was given to other important criteria, such as design standards and requirements, location of potential layover facilities, and general engineering feasibility.

Specific locations for proposed stations are summarized in **Table 3-5** and discussed in further detail in the following subsections.

Table 3-5: Proposed Station Locations

Station	Location	Subdivision	Approximate milepost (MP)	Approximate distance from Natomas (miles)
Plumas Lake	North of Plumas Lake Blvd.	UP Sacramento	170.0	24
Marysville–Yuba City (2 options)	Downtown Marysville (between 5th St. and 10th St.)	UP Sacramento	178.9	33
	Downtown Marysville (south of 3rd St.)	UP Sacramento	178.5	33
Gridley	Downtown (south of Laurel St.)	UP Valley	157.7	50
Chico (2 options)	Barber Yard (development site)	UP Valley	183.3	75
	Downtown (existing Amtrak station)	UP Valley	184.1	76

Source: AECOM.

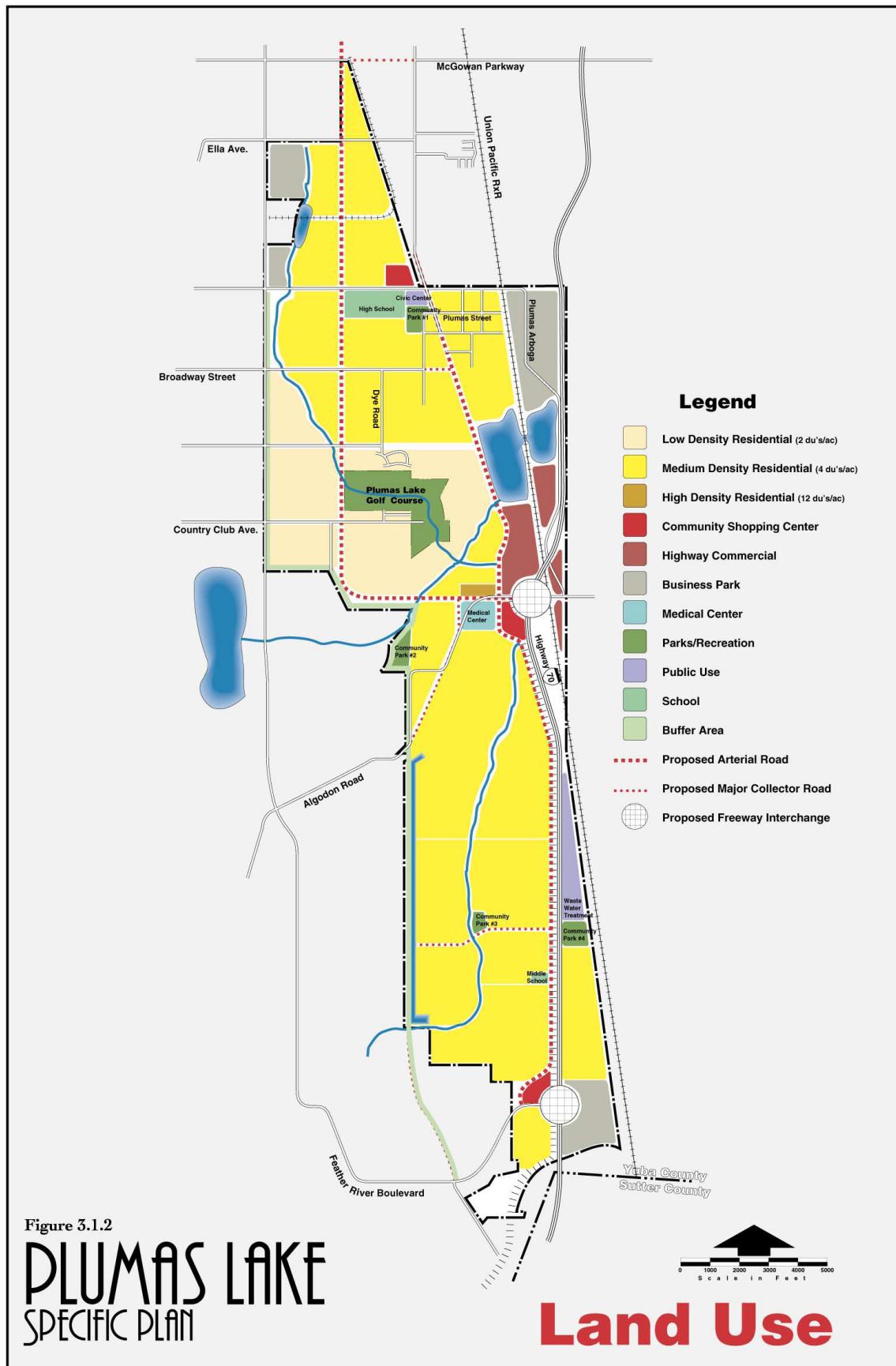
3.3.1 Plumas Lake

Plumas Lake is the first large community along the route north of Natomas and the first large community after entering Yuba County from the south. It is a master-planned development covering over 5,200 acres in unincorporated Yuba County, roughly spanning the area west of SR 70 between Olivehurst and Yuba County limits (i.e., the Bear River). Plumas Lake functions as a suburb of Yuba County's primary population center (Marysville) and as an exurb of Sacramento, which is located only 30 miles away and is well within commuting distance.

Build-out of the community is guided by the Plumas Lake Specific Plan, which was adopted in 1993 and calls for a total of approximately 11,750 dwelling units, primarily in medium- and low-density neighborhoods. The Specific Plan also includes a commercial cluster with a community shopping center and other commercial uses at the Plumas Lake Boulevard interchange. The Specific Plan's land use plan is illustrated in **Figure 3-2**.

According to U.S. Census Bureau data from the 2020 Census, the Plumas Lake census-designated place (CDP) currently has a population of 8,126 people spread across 2,305 households, with a total of 2,477 housing units and an employment rate of 66.7 percent. As part of the latest update to the Housing Element of its General Plan, Yuba County has also identified future changes to the Plumas Lake Specific Plan that will allow for high-density multi-family residential uses throughout the Specific Plan Area, which may allow for additional development capacity beyond what was originally allowed under the original Specific Plan adopted in 1993.

Figure 3-2: Plumas Lake Land Use Plan

Source: *Plumas Lake Specific Plan* (October 1992).

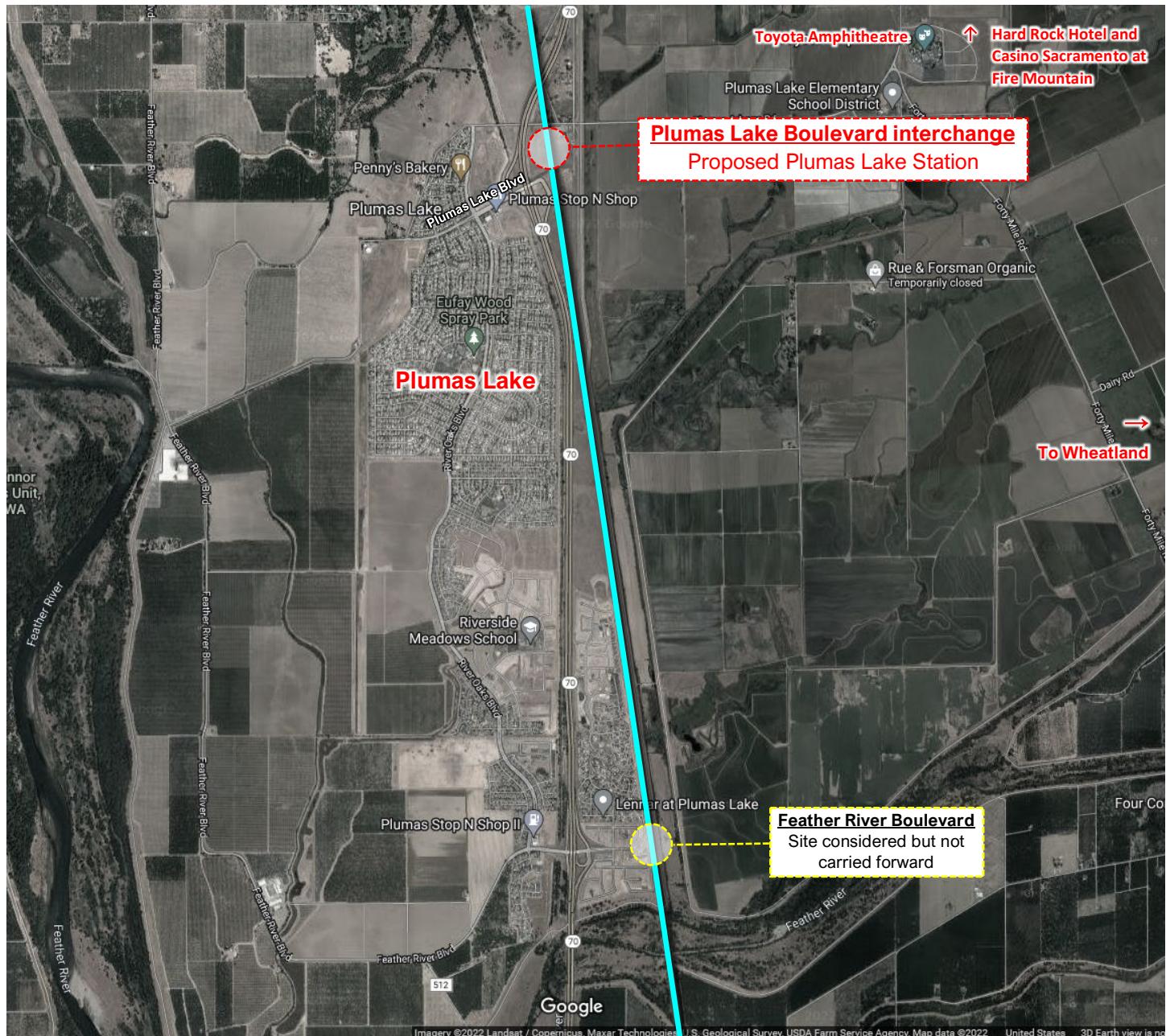
A station in Plumas Lake would also serve two key destinations located within a few miles of the station along Plumas–Arboga Road: the Toyota Amphitheatre (an outdoor concert venue with capacity for up to 18,500) and the Hard Rock Hotel & Casino. The city of Wheatland, with a population of 3,712, is also located due east of Plumas Lake, approximately 10 miles away (distance by road).

A Plumas Lake station would also capture potential markets from neighboring areas to the north that, due to their location south of the Yuba River, would require “backtracking” to/from the Marysville station. Several of these communities have sizeable populations, including Linda (21,654) and Olivehurst (16,595). Commuters and other time-sensitive riders originating in these areas would generally prefer a station located *en route* to their ultimate destination to avoid time loss while backtracking north to Marysville. The proposed Plumas Lake Station location near the SR 70 corridor would be ideally located to capture these riders. The existing park-and-ride facility at the very southern end of Plumas Lake at the Feather River Boulevard interchange, which is used by Yuba–Sutter Transit commuter buses, indicates there is already a strong commuter market in Plumas Lake.

As shown in **Figure 3-3**, the proposed station location is immediately adjacent to the Plumas Lake Boulevard interchange on vacant, undeveloped land immediately west of the UP right-of-way (ROW). A total of two different potential sites were evaluated for the station:

- **Plumas Lake Boulevard interchange.** This site would be located on vacant, undeveloped land on the northeast quadrant of the SR 70/Plumas Lake Boulevard interchange. This site is on county-owned land, with ample space for expanded station amenities and opportunities for placemaking and transit-oriented development. The site is also centrally-located within Plumas Lake (at master plan full build-out), as shown in **Figure 3-2**, and the proximity to the freeway provides good access to/from neighboring communities. While residents living south of Plumas Lake Boulevard would need to back-track some distance if heading south via the train, the associated travel time would be under 5 minutes for the vast majority of those residents and would max out at about 8 minutes for residents in the southernmost portion of Plumas Lake. This travel time loss is also balanced out by being closer to the communities to the north mentioned above, as well as closer to the regional entertainment venues to the east.
- **Feather River Boulevard.** This site would be located at the east end of Feather River Boulevard, at the intersection with the UP ROW. This site is close to the existing park-and-ride facility and is located at the southern end of Plumas Lake, placing it in the direction of travel for the majority of passengers and avoiding potential backtracking. This portion of Plumas Lake is currently partially developed, with roads already constructed and individual residential lots currently under construction. A station at this location is space-constrained, between residential development and the railroad ROW. Additionally, there is an existing electrical utility corridor and recently-completed recreational trail along the eastern edge of Plumas Lake at the site. As such, opportunities for expanded station amenities and placemaking may be more limited than at the Plumas Lake Boulevard interchange. This site is also much further from the Toyota Amphitheater and Hard Rock Hotel & Casino, as well as from Wheatland and the various communities north of Plumas Lake mentioned earlier.

Based on these considerations, the site at the Plumas Lake Boulevard interchange was selected as the preferred location to be carried forward for further analysis.

Figure 3-3: Plumas Lake Station Sites

Source: Google Earth. Annotations by AECOM.

Aerial imagery from Landsat/Copernicus, Maxar Technologies, USGS, USDA Farm Service Agency.

3.3.2 Marysville–Yuba City

Marysville is the county seat of Yuba County and its primary population center. A station at this location would serve both Marysville and its larger counterpart to the west across the Feather River, Yuba City, which is the county seat and primary population center of Sutter County. According to U.S. Census Bureau data from the 2020 Census, the cities of Maryville and Yuba City currently have populations of 12,467 and 70,117, respectively. The U.S. Census Bureau considers the Yuba City Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA), which consists of Yuba and Sutter counties, as part of the larger Sacramento Combined Statistical Area (CSA), and there is significant commuter activity between the Yuba City MSA and the Sacramento–Roseville–Folsom MSA (Sacramento, Yolo, Placer, and El Dorado counties).

Marysville previously had an Amtrak station on the *Coast Starlight* service along the former Southern Pacific Railroad's Shasta Route (San Francisco/Oakland–Portland). That station was located at 6th Street along what is now the UP Valley Subdivision, the eastern UP alignment through the city.

As shown in **Figure 3-4**, the proposed station location is between 5th Street and 10th Street. A total of three different potential sites were evaluated for the Marysville–Yuba City Station:

Figure 3-4: Marysville–Yuba City Station Sites



Source: Google Earth. Annotations by AECOM.

Aerial imagery from Maxar Technologies, USGS, USDA Farm Service Agency.

- **Between 5th Street and 10th Street.** This site is centrally located in Downtown Marysville along a stretch of tangent track adjacent to an existing underutilized shopping center and near the Yuba County Government Center. This site offers the possibility to provide a full-amenity station (e.g., bus station, parking, etc.) accompanied by significant transit-oriented development and opportunities for placemaking

and neighborhood revitalization. The site also has very good access to/from Yuba City, with access via both 5th Street (Twin Cities Memorial Bridge) and 10th Street (Colusa Avenue).

- **Between 14th Street and Binney Junction.** This site is located on a section of tangent track on the northern outskirts of Downtown Marysville. Similar to the site south of 5th Street, this site has some physical constraints that generally make it less ideal for a station. Access may also require more in-depth consideration, as a significant portion of the eastern edge of the ROW consists of already-improved properties with existing buildings and facilities. Due to the proximity to Binney Junction (the intersection of the UP Sacramento Subdivision and UP Valley Subdivision), this location may not have sufficient space to accommodate the station platform and turnouts.
- **South of 5th Street.** This site is just south of the city's historic Western Pacific Railroad depot, which is located between 4th Street and 5th Street. Because the depot is located on a curve, this site was originally not considered in discussions with the City of Marysville, as there is only approximately 1,300 feet of distance available between the south end of the curve and the single-track truss bridge over the Yuba River. However, subsequent optimization of the trainset length as part of the ridership modeling (see **Section 5.3**) reduced the required length of tangent track for stations and made this site a potential option. Access (via J Street/3rd Street) may require further coordination but is generally good, and there is sufficient vacant and/or underutilized industrial land available south of the buildings along 3rd Street to accommodate ancillary station facilities such as parking.

Based on these considerations, two sites—the site between 5th Street and 10th Street and the site south of 3rd Street—were selected to be carried forward for further analysis as the North Option and South Option, respectively. In particular, the South Option avoids some potentially substantial issues associated with the North Option, which include a large elevation difference between the track and adjacent ground; a greater potential for levee impacts; and limited parking availability without impacting existing businesses. Station access under the North Option is also complicated by the need for passengers to cross a public street (Featherside Way) running adjacent to the UP ROW in order to enter/exit the station.

3.3.3 Gridley

The proposed Gridley Station is primarily intended to serve passengers heading to/from Oroville (the county seat of Butte County), as well as passengers in Gridley and nearby surrounding communities. According to U.S. Census Bureau data from the 2020 Census, Gridley currently has a population of 7,421 and is formally the third largest city in Butte County after Chico (101,475) and Oroville (20,042), although this is largely due to the 2018 Camp Fire and the resulting damage and displacement in Paradise and surrounding communities.

As shown in **Figure 3-5**, the proposed station location is in Downtown Gridley south of Laurel Street. A total of two different potential sites were evaluated for the station:

- **Downtown site.** This site would be located near the city's historic center, immediately south of Laurel Street (to avoid closure or blockage of street crossings). The site's central location provides good station access for all parts of the city and offers substantial opportunities for neighborhood revitalization and transit-oriented development in the surrounding blocks. East Gridley Road also provides convenient access for passengers heading to/from Oroville and neighboring communities.
- **FEMA site.** Under this option, the station would be located on the Gridley Industrial Park site, which was previously used by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) as temporary housing for victims of the 2018 Camp Fire. As the site is at the southern edge of the city, within an area that is only lightly developed (primarily with light industrial or agricultural use), additional consideration would need

to be given to station access and connectivity. An integrated redevelopment of the entire site, however, offers substantial opportunities for transit-oriented development.

Given these considerations, the Downtown Gridley site was selected as the preferred location to be carried forward for further analysis.

Figure 3-5: Gridley Station Sites



Source: Google Earth. Annotations by AECOM.

Aerial imagery from Maxar Technologies, USGS, USDA Farm Service Agency.

3.3.4 Chico

Chico is the primary population center of Butte County and home to Chico State University. With a typical fall-semester enrollment of over 17,000 students, Chico State is the second largest small-metro campus⁽⁵⁾ in the California State University (CSU) system after the San Luis Obispo campus. According to U.S. Census Bureau data from the 2020 Census, the city itself currently has a population of 101,475, and is in close proximity to several other unincorporated communities with sizeable populations, including Magalia (7,795), Paradise (4,764), and Durham (5,834).

Two potential sites for a Chico station have been identified and are shown in **Figure 3-6**:

- **Downtown (existing Amtrak station).** The existing Chico Amtrak station is served by the *Coast Starlight* route (Los Angeles–Seattle) and is located in Downtown Chico between West 3rd Street and West 5th Street. This location is within short walking distance of the Chico State campus and other destinations in Downtown Chico, making it ideal in terms of capturing the largest potential ridership markets in Chico. This location is already well established as Chico's intercity transit hub, with an existing historic passenger depot, a small parking lot, and a bus stop for Amtrak Thruway buses (for *San Joaquin* Thruway service) and Greyhound/Flixbus buses. Due to grade crossing spacing, establishing a full-length platform to accommodate the project's needs would require closure of West 3rd Street at the intersection with the tracks.

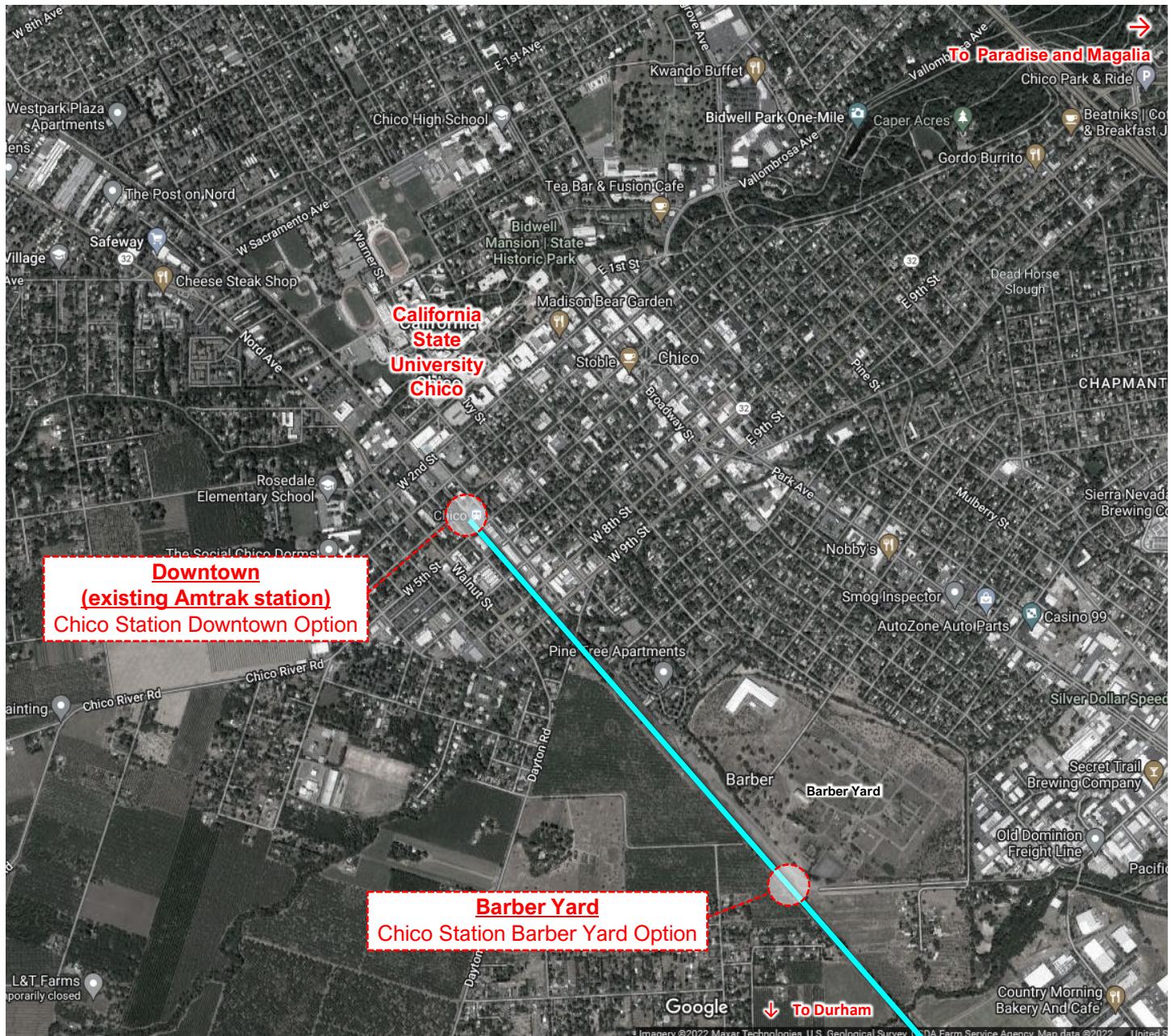
A layover facility for this station option would ideally be located to the north of the station, which could be placed a substantial distance away to avoid proximity to existing homes and impacts to existing businesses. A potential location north of Muir Avenue (discussed in detail later in **Section 3.6**), for example, would be almost 4 miles from the station.

A layover facility south of the station is not necessarily infeasible under this station option, but it would require coordination with UPRR, as trains would need to hold at the platform long enough to reverse direction (as discussed later in **Section 3.6**).

- **Barber Yard.** This site is located in the Barber neighborhood south of Downtown, adjacent to Barber Yard, a large, disused site that was originally a Diamond Match plant. The plant site has been designated as a Special Planning Area (SPA) by the City of Chico and offers a large opportunity for transit-oriented development and a full-amenity station with an adjacent layover facility. According to the Chico 2030 General Plan, the Barber Yard SPA measures approximately 150 acres in total and has development potential for approximately 1,100 dwelling units and over 400,000 square feet of non-residential (office, light industrial, and public) uses. As the site is surrounded by mostly undeveloped or rural/agricultural land along the city's southwestern city limits, however, additional consideration will need to be given to ensure that there is good access and connectivity for a station at this location. Based on the latest information published by the development team, full buildout of the Barber Yard site would take place within a timeframe of approximately 15 years following completion of environmental review and necessary project approvals.

Given the potential of the two sites, both are being carried forward for further analysis at this time as the Downtown Option and the Barber Yard Option, respectively.

(5) Defined here as a campus not located in one of the State's major metropolitan areas.

Figure 3-6: Chico Station Sites

Source: Google Earth. Annotations by AECOM.

Aerial imagery from Maxar Technologies, USGS, USDA Farm Service Agency.

3.4 Proposed Service Plan

The proposed initial service plan (to be operating within ten years) addresses the background service context (i.e., without the Project) and key travel markets, and includes a conceptual timetable.

3.4.1 Service Context

Development of the proposed service plan began with consideration of the larger context of the expanded Valley Rail Program. SJRRC has been a tenant railroad operating passenger service (ACE) on UP's network for more than 25 years, and the substantial progress and extensive coordination with UP on the Valley Rail Program—

particularly, the concept of new passenger service on the Sacramento Subdivision as part of the Sacramento Extension—laid the groundwork for consideration of a potential further extension north into the North Valley.

As the proposed North Valley Rail would begin at the future Natomas terminus of the planned Sacramento Extension for ACE and the *San Joaquin*s, it makes logical sense for a proposed service plan for North Valley Rail to begin with an extension of the Natomas trains north into the North Valley. This allows the new service to take advantage of train slots (i.e., roundtrips) that would already be allotted to passenger trains under Valley Rail, providing access to Sacramento and other markets beyond without requiring the allocation of new slots (and, potentially, additional infrastructure investments in the corridor). This approach also allows rolling stock to be shared between both Valley Rail and North Valley Rail and reduces operations and maintenance (O&M) costs. Planning for North Valley Rail as an extension of the Valley Rail Program also simplifies the coordination and partnership with the host railroad (UP), allowing them to focus on a single operator in the corridor for the initial service.

The baseline service plan across ACE and the *San Joaquin*s, which is expected to be in operation by the 2030–2033 horizon, is illustrated in [Figure 3-7](#). As shown in [Figure 3-7](#), a total of 10 roundtrips per day would serve the northern terminus of the Sacramento Extension at Natomas, including 6 roundtrips on ACE and 4 roundtrips on the *San Joaquin*s.

The Sacramento Extension is being implemented concurrently with several other major expansions to the ACE system, including the Lathrop to Ceres and Ceres to Merced Extensions, which will create a new southern branch of the ACE system to serve Modesto and Merced, where ACE will connect with HSR. The planned service for the Sacramento Extension, as described and analyzed in the associated environmental impact report, consists of up to 5 roundtrips/day for ACE and up to 2 roundtrips/day for the *San Joaquin*s.

Other expansions to ACE and the *San Joaquin*s are also in various stages of planning, including the following:

- Up to 5 additional roundtrips a day (over pre-COVID levels) for the *San Joaquin*s (for a total of 12 roundtrips/day, 4 of which would serve the Sacramento Extension route)
- A new track connection (MITC) to bring *San Joaquin*s trains directly to the new HSR station in Merced
- A new Bay Area branch for the ACE system connecting to a future East Bay Rail Hub at BART’s Union City station, with 3 roundtrips/day

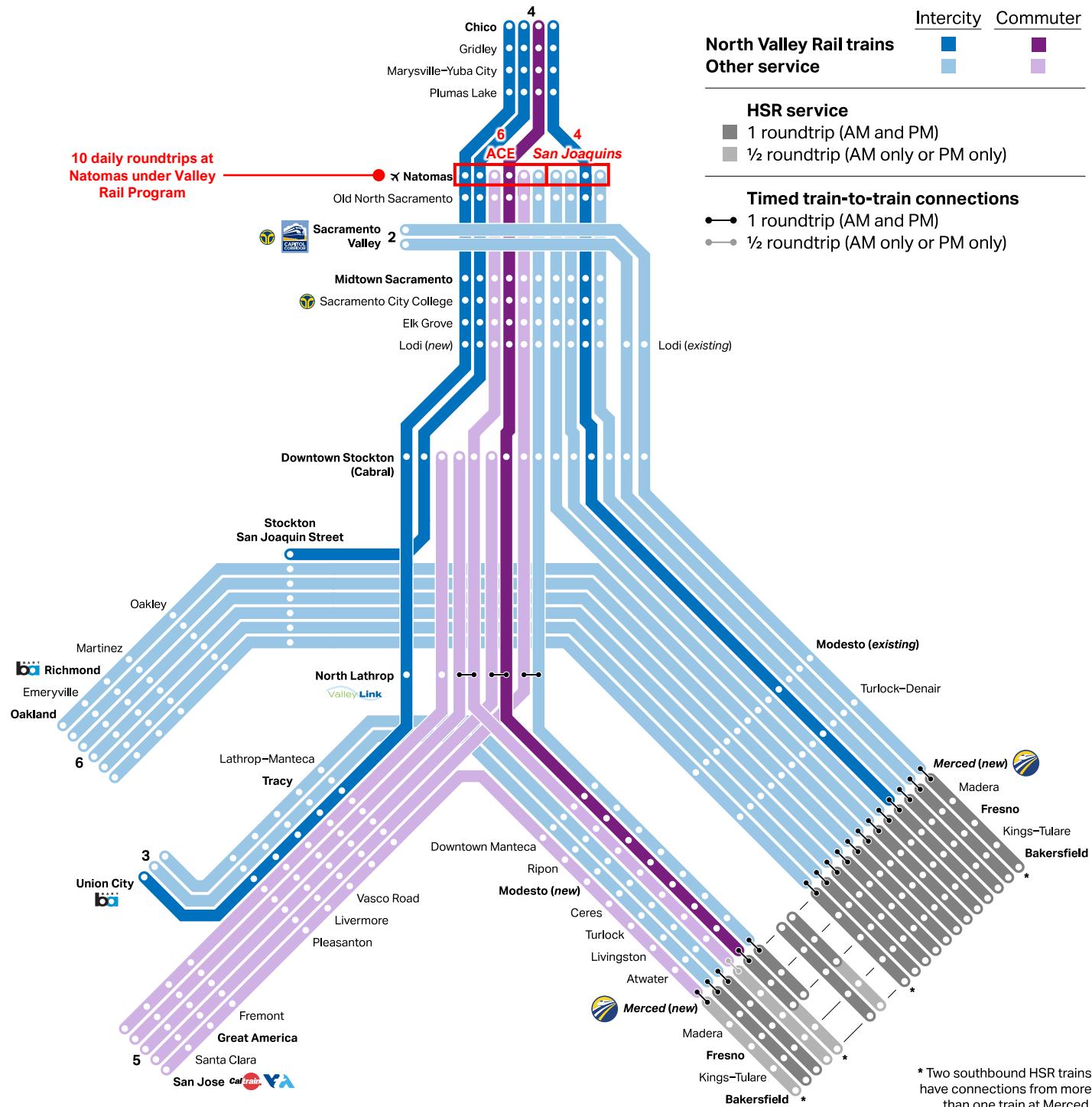
3.4.2 Travel Markets

The proposed service plan considers the travel markets to/from the North Valley. Based on existing travel patterns and an analysis of expected travel times to/from the North Valley, the following key travel markets were identified:

- **Commute trips to the Sacramento Region.** The proximity of the North Valley to Sacramento, a major job center, makes commuters a key potential market for the new service. Typically, commuter markets are served by commuter rail, which is designed to get passengers to the job center or city center before the start of the workday (by 9:00 am) and then depart after the end of the workday (late afternoon or early evening). Service is usually provided on weekdays only (typically in the commute direction only), and is usually concentrated in the morning and evening peak periods (typically, 6:00–9:00 a.m. and 4:00–7:00 p.m.). Commuter markets are usually best served when door-to-door travel times are on the order of 90–120 minutes or less. Timed local and regional transit connections at stations are also desirable, especially for first-mile/last-mile connections at the job center or city center terminal. Amenities and accommodations such as bicycle storage, in-seat power outlets, or quiet or dim-lit cars, may also be

warranted. Given the distances and travel times involved, commuter markets beyond Sacramento are likely to be negligible.

Figure 3-7: North Valley Rail and Valley Rail Mid-Term Service Vision



Source: AECOM.

- **Business and leisure travel to the Bay Area and San Joaquin Valley (with connections to Los Angeles).** This market includes passengers heading to or from the San Francisco Bay Area, the San Joaquin Valley, Southern California, or other major areas of the state beyond the distances typically served by commuter rail. These passengers generally prefer a wide range of options in terms of time of day and day of week, including service on weekends and holidays (especially for leisure travelers) and during the midday and evening periods on weekdays. Regional or intercity connections, including HSR in Merced and connecting bus services (to Los Angeles and other destinations), would also facilitate business and leisure travel by serving key population centers or tourist destinations not directly on the train route. Accommodations for baggage and on-board dining, as well as optional seat classes or special ticketing promotions (e.g., for families or groups or for special events), may also be warranted.
- **Chico State University and Butte College affiliates and visitors.** This market is fairly diverse, and can be considered a combination of smaller, overlapping subsets of the above two markets. Campus affiliates (i.e., students, faculty, and staff), for example, include both commuter submarkets (e.g., students, faculty, and staff living outside of Chico) and intercity submarkets (e.g., students living in on-campus housing returning home to other areas of the state for winter break or a long holiday). Visitors can also include a mix of shorter-distance submarkets (e.g., former alumni from Sacramento attending a home softball game or other athletic event) and longer-distance submarkets (e.g., out-of-state family visiting students, out-of-town visitors attending a conference).

To maximize cost effectiveness and potential benefits, the proposed service would ideally be focused on markets with the most promising ridership prospects. As in many other similar situations, this typically means commuter markets. However, the limitations of typical commuter rail (service during weekday peak periods only, in the commute direction only) make it less ideal in terms of trying to integrate the North Valley into the larger statewide rail network, including the goal of providing connections at Merced with the initial operating segment (Merced–Bakersfield) of the statewide HSR system. For example, a commuter service running only between Butte County and Sacramento would, at a minimum, require transfers in Sacramento for longer-distance trips, and, at the worst, make those trips impractical for most passengers due to poor connections or poor options for time of day and day of week.

Thus, the proposed service plan for North Valley Rail is configured to serve commuter markets while at the same time securing a base service level for intercity travel related to business and leisure markets.

3.4.3 Proposed Service Levels

Results of the study indicate that an initial service level target of 4 roundtrips per day for the mid-term planning horizon (service start around 2030–2033) is appropriate based on the potential markets to be served, the baseline service at Natomas (10 roundtrips/day), and the overall cost to increase capacity along the UP Sacramento and UP Valley Subdivisions to accommodate the proposed passenger rail service.

Trip Purpose

In particular, a service plan with 4 roundtrips/day provides a reasonable level of coverage over the entire service day, which, if spaced well, will secure at least some flexibility for passengers in selecting trip itineraries. It also offers good potential to capture multiple markets based on trip purpose and geography, including both intercity markets for business and leisure travel and shorter-distance markets for commute travel.

With 4 roundtrips/day, business and leisure passengers would have multiple options to plan intercity trips, instead of being limited to a single train per day (as is the current situation with the *Coast Starlight*, which is primarily tailored to longer-distance leisure travel and is not timed well for the North Valley market). A service plan with 4

roundtrips/day makes it possible to provide coverage during both the morning and afternoon/evening, allowing passengers the option of a.m. or p.m. arrivals into and departures from the North Valley.

To capture commuter markets to/from Sacramento, 2 of the 4 intercity roundtrips can also be timed to coincide with the morning and afternoon/evening commute periods (i.e., 2 southbound trains in the morning and 2 northbound trains in the afternoon/evening). This provides flexibility for commuters depending on their work schedules, both generally (in terms of assigned work shifts or business hours) and on a day-to-day basis (e.g., earlier-than-usual work start in the morning or later-than-usual work end in the afternoon/evening).

Geography

As shown in **Figure 3-7**, there are at least 5 total branches at the outer extents of the combined ACE and *San Joaquin*s network (excluding the Sacramento Valley and Natomas/North Valley branches), spread across 3 major geographic markets:

- **San Francisco Bay Area – Inner core and northeast**
 - Oakland via Richmond, Martinez, and Oakley
- **San Francisco Bay Area – Silicon Valley, Peninsula, and southeast**
 - Union City via Pleasanton, Livermore, and Tracy
 - San Jose via Santa Clara, Fremont, Pleasanton, Livermore, and Tracy
- **San Joaquin Valley south of Stockton**
 - Merced via Turlock (Downtown), Modesto (Downtown), and Manteca
 - Merced via Turlock (Denair) and Modesto (east)

The proposed service of 4 roundtrips/day would provide flexibility to capture multiple branches and geographic markets, providing more utility and convenience to the passenger and helping to ensure the success of the North Valley Rail service.

Service Phasing

A service level target of 4 roundtrips/day also allows for a logical phasing of service if warranted by the Project timeline or costs. An initial rollout phase might, for example, consist of 2 roundtrips/day, with 1 roundtrip/day each for ACE and the *San Joaquin*s. Operations can then be expanded to the target of 4 roundtrips per day as the service becomes established and ridership grows. In particular, capital and O&M costs, as well as funding/financing constraints, may warrant a phased implementation that spreads budgetary commitments and risk over one or more phases and allows the service to at least begin operations before the full vision can be realized.

3.4.4 Conceptual Timetable

Following the establishment of the proposed service levels, work began on development of a conceptual timetable for North Valley Rail.

3.4.4.1 Initial Timetable Concept

The initial timetable concept for the North Valley Rail service was developed to reflect the basic service parameters for the Project, including the target service level and desired train slots (i.e., times-of-day). The initial concept was executed in conjunction with development of a conceptual systemwide timetable for ACE and the *San Joaquin*s that incorporates the following key service expansions expected to be in place within the mid-term horizon (i.e., by 2030–2033):

- **Sacramento Extension (new route via Midtown Sacramento and Natomas)**
 - ACE: Up to 6 roundtrips/day
 - *San Joaquin*s: 4 roundtrips/day (in addition to the existing 2 roundtrips/day at Sacramento Valley Station)
- **Lathrop to Ceres and Ceres to Merced Extensions**
 - ACE: Up to 4 roundtrips/day
- **East Bay Hub service (extension to Union City BART)**
 - ACE: Up to 3 roundtrips/day, including 1 commute roundtrip originating from Natomas
- **Interim HSR service at new Merced intermodal hub**
 - *San Joaquin*s: 10th, 11th, and 12th roundtrips (4 roundtrips/day total to/from Natomas)
 - Timed HSR connections for ACE and the *San Joaquin*s

Timetable concepts developed for earlier efforts (including the Lathrop to Ceres Extension, Ceres to Merced Extension, and Sacramento Extension) were combined to develop the conceptual systemwide timetable. This systemwide timetable establishes the approximate timepoints at Natomas in the baseline condition (i.e., prior to the North Valley Rail service).

Approximate running times for the Project were developed based on track speeds and mileposts (from California Region Timetable 20 by Altamont Press, 2009) and comparable station-to-station data (from the existing *San Joaquin*s timetable). Starting with a theoretical extension of all service north of Natomas, recommendations for extension of specific trains were then developed by focusing on those trains that best served the potential ridership markets. Trains that were redundant or those that were likely to be less effective at serving these markets were removed from consideration through a process of elimination until arrival at the desired initial service level (4 roundtrips/day). In close coordination with SJRRC/SJJPA, iterative adjustments were also fed back into the systemwide timetable to balance the needs of the North Valley service with the rest of the ACE and *San Joaquin*s networks.

3.4.4.2 Timetable Modeling

An initial timetable concept is typically sufficient to convey target service levels and desired train slots, though a more detailed approach based on timetable modeling is required to allow detailed planning for the Project to move forward. Timetable modeling provides a more accurate and more precise estimate of running times, reflecting the topography of the route and actual train performance (e.g., acceleration profile). Among other things, modeling can also assist in identifying train meet locations in single-track sections and developing a proposed package of track improvements to support the new service.

To initiate the timetable modeling effort for the Project, the Project Team transmitted the initial timetable concept for North Valley Rail, together with a summary of key service parameters and assumptions, to Caltrans and DB Engineering & Consulting (“DB”) staff. Caltrans and its consultants conducted the timetable modeling in Viriato, a timetabling and service planning software used in the network integration analysis for the CSRP. Viriato includes many key functions to assist in the development of timetables, including a running time calculator, platform occupation, conflict detection, and vehicle rostering. Following additional coordination to clarify key timetable constraints (e.g., timed connections with high-speed rail in Merced) and further refine modeling parameters and assumptions (e.g., train consist length and configuration), Caltrans and DB staff provided the Project Team with a summary of the key modeling outputs.

This modeling assumes two scenarios for the design consist for ACE service (one scenario for 1 locomotive with 10 passenger coaches and another scenario for 1 locomotive with 6 passenger coaches). Under both scenarios, *San Joaquin* train consists are assumed to be 1 locomotive with 7 passenger coaches. Modeling was focused on the four proposed North Valley trains, specifically on the route segments between Chico and Merced. Areas beyond this extent (e.g., Stockton and Union City) and trains not directly serving the North Valley were not included in this modeling effort. These effects are accounted for separately in the stringline analysis described in the following section.

3.4.4.3 Timetable Refinement

To develop a refined timetable concept to be carried forward into subsequent phases of the planning effort, the Project Team extrapolated the modeling outputs provided by Caltrans and DB to the larger, combined ACE and *San Joaquin* systems using a simple stringline-based analysis.⁽⁶⁾ This ensures that the refined timetable concept adequately accounts for effects at the systemwide level, with the understanding that a full systemwide modeling effort is a time- and budget-intensive process well beyond the scope of the Strategic Plan alone.

Based on the modeling outputs, timepoints were adjusted and potential options for slot changes were identified and discussed internally within the Project Team as part of developing the refined timetable concept. The refined timetable concept and associated stringline charts were then transmitted to UP for their review and consideration.⁽⁷⁾

The refined timetable concept is shown in **Table 3-6**, and illustrates the basic service pattern and time of day of the proposed service. The exact timepoints once initial service begins operation would likely be different, as additional refinements will likely be incorporated as part of more detailed operations planning and modeling in later phases of the Project. Longer-lasting effects of the pandemic, for example, may include changes in commute and business travel patterns, which may warrant further changes to better align with passenger demand. Ultimately, the actual timetable for the service will need to be approved by UP, as the host railroad for the corridor.

As shown in **Table 3-6**, the timetable incorporates several key features intended to effectively capture the North Valley's ridership markets:

- **Commute market into Sacramento.** Two roundtrips/day via ACE to ensure attractive service for the commuter market from the North Valley into Sacramento. In the southbound direction, these correspond to trains W01 (to Union City) and D01 (to Stockton San Joaquin Street), with timepoints at Midtown Sacramento at 7:39 a.m. and 8:39 a.m., respectively. The return trips are D02 (from Stockton San Joaquin Street) and W02 (from Union City), with timepoints at Midtown Sacramento at 4:58 p.m. and 6:19 p.m., respectively. These trains also offer relatively attractive commute or day trips from Butte County to the Yuba–Sutter area, with arrivals into Marysville–Yuba City at 6:44 a.m. and 7:44 a.m. and return departures at 5:45 p.m. and 7:06 p.m.

(6) A stringline (or string) chart is a method of visualizing a train timetable or train operations along a defined section of track. Each train is plotted as a stringline—a curve that defines the train's location as a function of time. Stringlines are especially useful in service and operations planning, providing an easy tool to visualize and resolve train and track conflicts, such as train meets or passes in single-track sections.

(7) The initial intent of providing the refined timetable concept to UP was to allow them to conduct their own operations modeling and simulation analysis using the Rail Traffic Controller (RTC) software package, to allow for closer coordination and confirmation regarding initial list of track improvements along the Project corridor between Natomas and Chico. The results of UP's operations modeling analysis, including identification of potential infrastructure improvements, would also have informed further refinement of the conceptual timetable. In subsequent discussions with UP staff, however, they indicated that they would prefer to defer detailed operations modeling and identification of infrastructure improvements to the environmental phase of the Project.

Table 3-6: Refined Timetable Concept

Northbound					Southbound										
W01	D01	J04	J01	N06	C04	Station	C03	N01	J10	J07	D02	W02			
CIC	CIC	OKJ	MCDA	CIC	CIC	Train Origin	MCDA	MCDA	OKJ	MCDA	SKN	UNC			
UNC	SKN	MCDA	OKJ	MCDA	MCDA	Train Destination	CIC	CIC	MCDA	OKJ	CIC	CIC			
6:02	7:02			10:30	17:03	▼	Chico	CIC	▲	9:43	15:15		18:28	19:49	
6:26	7:26			10:54	17:27	▼	Gridley	GRD	▲	9:19	15:51		18:04	19:25	
6:44	7:44			11:11	17:45	▼	Marysville–Yuba City	MRV	▲	9:00	14:34		17:45	19:06	
6:54	7:54			11:21	17:55	▼	Plumas Lake	PLU	▲	8:51	14:24		17:36	18:57	
7:17	8:17			11:44	18:18	▼	Natomas	NAT	▲	8:28	14:02		17:13	18:34	
7:33	8:33			11:52	18:27	▼	Old North Sacramento	NSAC	▲	8:19	13:53		17:04	18:25	
7:39	8:39			11:58	18:33	▼	Midtown Sacramento	MDT	▲	8:13	13:48		16:58	18:19	
7:44	8:44			12:02	18:38	▼	Sacramento City College	SUT	▲	8:08	13:42		16:53	18:14	
7:54	8:54			12:12	18:48	▼	Elk Grove	EKGA	▲	7:59	13:33		16:44	18:05	
8:20	9:20			12:37	19:14	▼	Lodi (new)	LODA	▲	7:33	13:09		16:18	17:39	
8:34	9:34			12:51	19:28	▼	Downtown Stockton (Cabral)	SKT	▲	7:18	12:55		16:03	17:24	
	9:38 → 9:48 9:53					▼	Stockton San Joaquin Street	SKN	▲	1	1	15:48 15:53 → 15:58	1		
8:44		1	1	1	1	19:38	▼	North Lathrop	NLT	▲	7:07	1	1	1	17:13
8:51		1	1	1	1	1	▼	Lathrop–Manteca	LTM	▲	1	1	1	1	17:07
9:03		1	1	1	1	1	▼	Tracy	TRA	▲	1	1	1	1	16:48
9:32		1	1	1	1	1	▼	Vasco Road	VAS	▲	1	1	1	1	16:19
9:37		1	1	1	1	1	▼	Livermore	LIV	▲	1	1	1	1	16:14
9:45		1	1	1	1	1	▼	Pleasanton	PLS	▲	1	1	1	1	16:05
		1	1	1	1	1	▼	Fremont	FMT	▲	1	1	1	1	1
		1	1	1	1	1	▼	Great America	GAC	▲	1	1	1	1	1
		1	1	1	1	1	▼	Santa Clara	SCC	▲	1	1	1	1	1
		1	1	1	1	1	▼	San Jose (Diridon)	SJC	▲	1	1	1	1	1
10:09		1	1	1	1	1	▼	Union City	UNC	▲	1	1	1	1	15:40
		1	10:22	1	1	1	▼	Oakley	OKY	▲	1	1	15:21	1	
		1	10:54	1	1	1	▼	Martinez	MTZ	▲	1	1	14:51	1	
		1	11:23	1	1	1	▼	Richmond	RIC	▲	1	1	14:21	1	
		1	11:34	1	1	1	▼	Emeryville	EMY	▲	1	1	14:10	1	
		1	11:43	1	1	1	▼	Oakland (Jack London Square)	OKJ	▲	1	1	13:59	1	
		1		1	19:48	▼	Downtown Manteca	DMT	▲	6:58	1	1	1	1	
		1		1	19:57	▼	Ripon	RIP	▲	6:49	1	1	1	1	
		1		1	20:10	▼	Modesto (new)	MODA	▲	6:35	1	1	1	1	
		1		1	20:17	▼	Ceres	CRS	▲	6:28	1	1	1	1	
		1		1	20:27	▼	Turlock	TRKA	▲	6:18	1	1	1	1	
		1		1	20:40	▼	Livingston	LVG	▲	6:06	1	1	1	1	
		1		1	20:47	▼	Atwater	ATW	▲	5:58	1	1	1	1	
		10:20	13:20	1	1	▼	Modesto	MOD	▲	1	12:26		15:26		
		10:33	13:33	1	1	▼	Turlock–Denair	TRK	▲	1	12:13		15:13		
		11:00	14:00	20:56	1	▼	Merced (new)	MCDA	▲	5:50	11:46		14:46		
		11:08	14:08	21:08	1	▼	Merced		▲	5:42	11:42		14:42		
		11:30	14:30	21:30	1	▼	Madera		▲	5:21	11:21		14:21		
		11:41	14:41	21:41	1	▼	Fresno		▲	5:09	11:09		14:09		
		11:58	14:58	21:58	1	▼	Kings–Tulare		▲	10:53			13:53		
		12:30	15:30	22:30	1	▼	Bakersfield		▲	10:19			13:19		
		111	117	131				ST-2	110				116		

Source: AECOM.

- **San Francisco Bay Area service.** Two roundtrips/day connecting the North Valley with the San Francisco Bay Area, including one direct service to/from Union City via Stockton (W01 and W02) and one transfer at Stockton San Joaquin Street station to/from Oakland (D01+J01 and D02+J10). The one-seat service (W01 and W02) provides a 5½-hour window at the Union City end, or approximately 3–4 hours after deducting travel time on BART or other connecting modes, which would generally be sufficient to accommodate one to two business or lunch meetings. While travel time to/from the Bay Area may be longer than via the *Capitol Corridor* route, these trips provide an alternative route via Stockton that gives riders additional travel options to supplement the *Capitol Corridor*. The Union City service, in particular, offers better connectivity for the South Bay/Silicon Valley, in conjunction with a one-seat ride that avoids the hassle and penalties of transferring to/from the *Capitol Corridor* at Sacramento Valley Station.
- **HSR connections.** Three roundtrips/day connecting with HSR at Merced (1 of which requires a transfer in Stockton), with reasonable spacing throughout the day given the constraints imposed by running times (e.g., approximately 3 hours, 30 minutes by *San Joaquins* and 3 hours, 50 minutes by ACE between Chico and Merced).
- **Stockton San Joaquin Street transfers.** One roundtrip/day (D01 and D02) with a transfer to/from both directions of the *San Joaquins* (Merced for HSR or Oakland for the Bay Area) at Stockton San Joaquin Street Station. This approach strategically expands the areas that have access to/from the North Valley by providing a second Bay Area connection and a third HSR connection combined in one train, while keeping potential capital and operating costs down by maintaining service north of Natomas at 4 roundtrips/day.
- **North Valley inbound market.** One roundtrip/day (C03 and C04) that provides almost a full-day window for passengers inbound into the North Valley, such as commuters (e.g., students, faculty, or staff at Chico State) or tourists and other visitors.

3.4.5 Service to/from Sacramento Valley Station

Direct service to/from Sacramento Valley Station was also considered from the early stages of this initial planning process. Sacramento Valley Station is currently Sacramento's main regional and intercity transit hub, with direct connections to local and regional transit services, including the *Capitol Corridor* and the Sacramento Regional Transit ("SacRT") Gold Line light rail. Sacramento Valley Station is also closer to Capitol Mall and the major employment areas of Downtown Sacramento, which are easily accessible via the Gold Line or SacRT buses or on foot.

While the track connections and layout at Control Point (CP) West Haggin (where the UP Martinez Subdivision and UP Sacramento Subdivision cross) would allow for service to/from the station, this would likely require substantial additional coordination that would make North Valley Rail a longer-term endeavor. In particular, the Martinez Subdivision is an important corridor for both passenger and freight traffic, and UP may be averse to the idea of allowing additional slots for passenger trains—even on this relatively short segment to/from the station—without additional substantial investment in infrastructure. Extensive coordination would also likely be necessary with the Capitol Corridor Joint Powers Authority (CCJPA), both to ensure adequate schedule coordination for passengers transferring with the *Capitol Corridor* and to secure an open track and platform for North Valley trains that serve the station.

Additional operational considerations include whether to terminate the train at the station or to have it continue to/from other routes. Terminating the service at the station would require consideration of adequate layover capacity, which may entail expansion of an existing layover facility or construction of a new layover facility. Similarly, continuing the service beyond the station, whether to/from the *Capitol Corridor* route or to/from

Midtown Sacramento and Stockton, could also require substantial coordination and potential infrastructure investment that would increase scope and risk (and, likely, cost) for implementation of the North Valley service. The latter option, in particular, would introduce some additional operational complications without significant investment in new track connections to allow for through-running, as Valley Rail/North Valley Rail trains would enter Sacramento Valley Station to serve passengers and then be forced to reverse direction to continue their journey. This movement would likely result in additional dwell time at the station platform, increasing travel time for through passengers.

One alternative might consider planning North Valley Rail as a separate service isolated from the rest of the Valley Rail Program and operating strictly between Chico and Sacramento Valley Station. While this approach avoids the passenger delays due to train reversal described above, it requires additional slots on the Sacramento Subdivision between Natomas and Haggin beyond the 10 roundtrips/day already planned for as part of the expanded Valley Rail Program. This approach also does not capture the other benefits of North Valley Rail as an extension of the Valley Rail Program (including sharing of rolling stock and reduced O&M costs) as discussed in **Section 3.4.1**, and still does not address the issue of additional train slots on the Martinez Subdivision.

Given these considerations, it was deemed appropriate to focus on extension of the baseline ACE and *San Joaquin* service at Natomas for this mid-term effort, as opposed to introduction of a new service exclusively for the North Valley market. By building off the Sacramento Extension and other existing efforts, this approach offers substantial benefits in terms of getting the service up and running as quickly and efficiently as possible while still allowing a Sacramento Valley Station service to be explored in more depth as part of a longer-term effort.

Despite the various complications described above, a connection into Sacramento Valley Station would be very desirable in many ways by facilitating transfers with the *Capitol Corridor* and other existing rail services on the Martinez Subdivision, providing an additional connection with the SacRT light rail system and other local/regional transit services in the Sacramento area, and strengthening Sacramento Valley Station as a major transit hub. Caltrans, through the Rail Planning & Implementation Office of the Division of Transportation Planning, is currently leading a study—in coordination with BCAG, SJRRC, SJPPA, CCJPA, the City of Sacramento, and UP—to look at opportunities to provide direct service to the station and help determine what would be required to enable such service. This study is expected to be done in time to inform the upcoming environmental work for North Valley Rail and could alter the conclusions above regarding the timing for providing service between Chico and Sacramento Valley Station.

3.5 Rolling Stock

Similar to most other mainline rail operations elsewhere in California, the current fleets for both ACE and the *San Joaquin* consist of diesel locomotives operating in a push–pull configuration with a series of passenger coaches. With the various expansions to both systems currently underway, it is expected that SJRRC/SJPPA will need to expand both fleets, with funding and procurement assistance from the State. New trainsets for some of these expansions are already being secured through one or more joint procurement processes led by the State (via Caltrans), in conjunction with SJRRC/SJPPA.

The exact technologies for these new trainsets have not yet been determined but could include additional locomotives and passenger coaches for conventional locomotive-powered operations or higher-performance solutions such as zero-emissions multiple-unit (ZEMU) trains.

Aside from sharing a common technology (diesel locomotives with passenger coaches), the existing fleets for both ACE and the *San Joaquin* are quite different from each other, reflecting the fundamental differences between the two services and their key existing markets. As the various service expansions under the Valley Rail Program come online and the HSR EOS begins service out of Merced, however, ACE and the *San Joaquin* are

likely to become much more similar and complementary in nature. ACE and *San Joaquin* trains would both function as key feeder services for HSR sharing corridors, stations, and maintenance/layover facilities, and operating in an integrated fashion, whereby passengers may have the option of taking an ACE train in one direction and a *San Joaquin* train on the return trip.

The currently proposed service plan for North Valley Rail consists of 4 total daily roundtrips, including 3 "intercity" roundtrips (2 operated as ACE trains and 1 operated as a *San Joaquin* train) and 1 "commuter" roundtrip (operated as a *San Joaquin* train). Given that North Valley Rail is envisioned as an extension of services already planned under the expanded Valley Rail Program, it is not currently envisioned that new trainsets will be required expressly for North Valley Rail. Trains for North Valley Rail would already be operating as far north as Natomas under the expanded Valley Rail Program and would simply be extended north to Chico. As such, a detailed analysis of rolling stock options for North Valley Rail is part of a much larger discussion about the expanded Valley Rail Program regarding future rolling stock across the expanded ACE and *San Joaquin* systems.

ACE's current trains use Bombardier BiLevel passenger coaches, while the current fleet for the *San Joaquin* relies primarily on "California Car" bi-level coaches and a smaller set of "Comet Car" single-level coaches. New single-level Siemens Venture Car trainsets for the *San Joaquin* are in the process of being delivered and are expected to enter service soon. Both systems use a mix of locomotives, including newer Siemens Charger locomotives, and ACE is working with the State on the development of zero-emissions locomotives.

Separately, the California State Transportation Agency (CalSTA) and Caltrans have signed a Memorandum of Understanding with Stadler for the delivery of new hydrogen-powered ZEMU trainsets (based on Stadler's FLIRT model) for use on State-funded intercity services, which would potentially include both ACE and/or the *San Joaquin*.

Figure 3-8 shows three of the trainset types currently being considered (Bombardier BiLevel, Siemens Venture, and Stadler FLIRT).

An ultimate decision about the exact future rolling stock to be procured for the expanded Valley Rail Program, including North Valley Rail, is dependent on several competing factors and will likely not be made until more progress is made on overall systemwide fleet planning. Key considerations for rolling stock to be used include the following:

- **Types of markets served.** Intercity services typically warrant food and beverage options, more legroom, and baggage storage areas, which may be lower priorities for commuter services, which typically place more emphasis on maximizing seating capacity.
- **Availability of zero-emissions models.** Zero-emissions locomotives are still under development and testing, and available ZEMU models currently have limited operating ranges that may not be suited for some of the proposed North Valley Rail services.
- **Passenger capacity.** Single-level trainsets such as the Siemens Venture and Stadler FLIRT models have less capacity than bi-level trainsets. Some analysis of trainset capacity relative to the forecasted ridership demand can be found in **Section 5.3**.

The proposed equipment and technologies used for North Valley Rail and the rest of the expanded Valley Rail Program will also need to be approved by applicable Federal and State regulatory agencies and host railroads (e.g., UP, BNSF) for operation over their infrastructure.

Figure 3-8: Potential Future Rolling Stock



Bombardier BiLevel



Siemens Venture



Stadler FLIRT

3.6 Proposed Layover Facility

A layover facility is needed for North Valley Rail to facilitate midday or overnight storage of trains in the vicinity of the northern terminus station in Butte County (Chico), as well as potentially accommodate various light maintenance duties (e.g., restroom cleaning). Heavy maintenance duties would be accommodated at other maintenance facilities, such as existing facilities in Stockton (for ACE) and Oakland (for the *San Joaquin*s) or the planned facility in Merced (to be shared between ACE and the *San Joaquin*s).

3.6.1 Methodology and Approach

A layover facility would ideally be located near the terminal station in Chico in order to minimize deadhead (non-revenue) travel distance and time, which can have substantial effects on day-to-day operations and costs. Placing the layover facility and station in close proximity to each other may also have a significant benefit in terms of reducing capital investment and costs, particularly if UP requests construction of an additional main track between the terminal station and the layover facility. In the case of North Valley Rail, a layover facility located just north of the terminal station is also generally preferable from an operations perspective, as it eliminates the need to reverse the direction of the train when traveling between the station and the layover facility.

In terms of physical dimensions, the layover facility must be a sizeable site with sufficient aggregate track capacity to accommodate the required number of trains at their respective train lengths. The conceptual timetable in **Table 3-6**, for example, would generally require layover capacity for up to 3 trains simultaneously (W01, D01, and N06), with the fourth train (C04) operated as the return trip of C03 and based out of Merced.⁽⁸⁾ While the required dimensions for the facility have not been fully determined at this time and are somewhat flexible depending on the desired operations scheme, a conservative assumption in this early planning stage would assume up to 4 trains requiring layover space simultaneously.

Areas along the rail corridor near the proposed terminal locations were reviewed based on aerial imagery and field visits, focusing on those sites with sufficient size located on vacant or lightly utilized land (in order to minimize potential costs and impacts to surrounding neighborhoods).

3.6.2 Layover Facility Options

Two options for a layover facility in or near Chico were identified, as illustrated in **Figure 3-9**:

- **North Option.** The closest potential layover facility site north of the Chico station options is on agricultural land north of Muir Avenue, along the existing single main track. This option has two variants—an East Variant and a West Variant—depending on whether the layover facility is located on the east side or west side, respectively, of the UP mainline track.

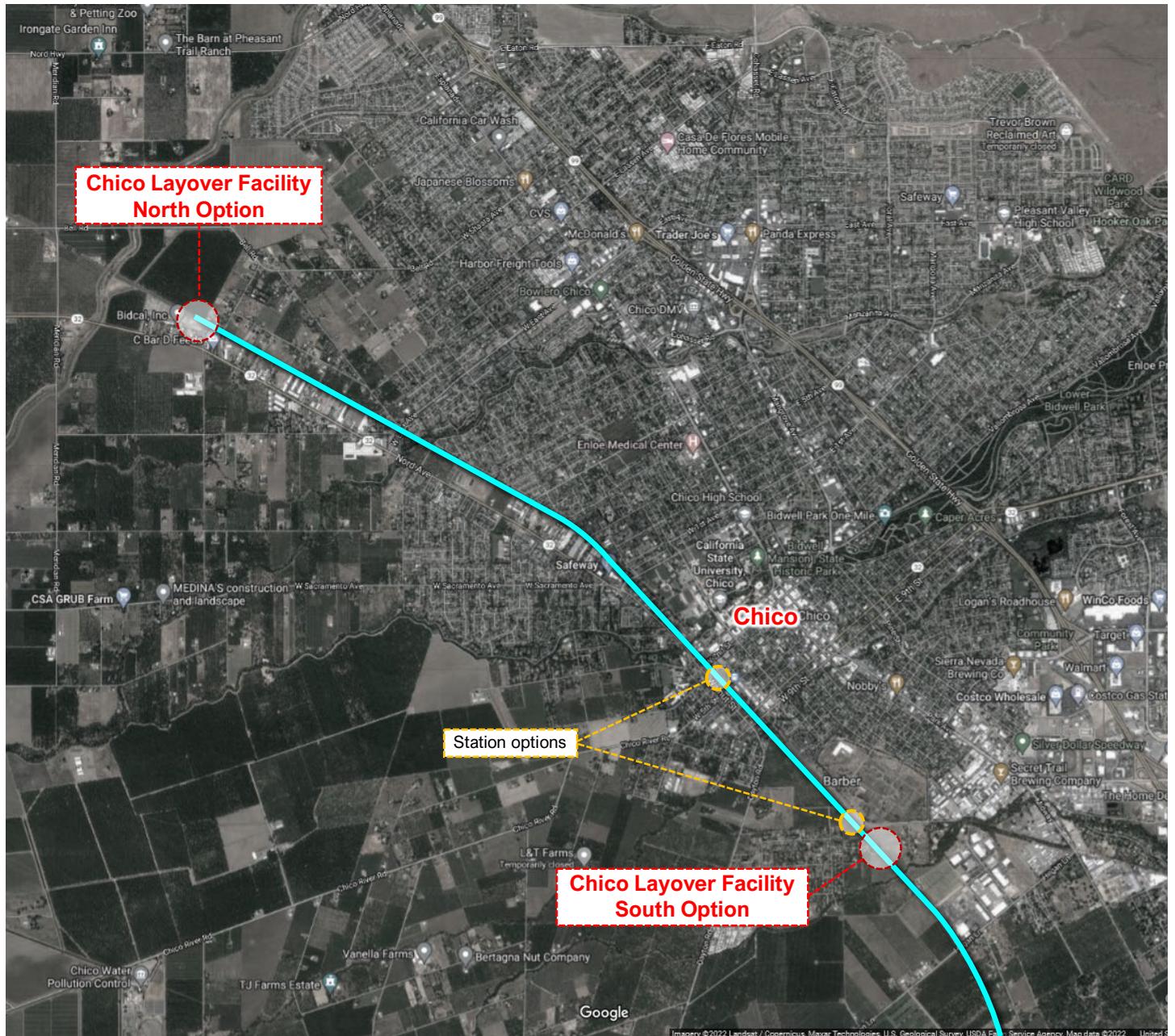
The location of the layover facility under this option is almost 4 miles from the existing Amtrak station in Downtown Chico and approximately 4½ to 5 miles from the Barber Yard station option. Areas to the south closer to the existing Amtrak station are already largely built up or in close proximity to residential neighborhoods, making them potentially less desirable for a layover facility with a mid-term service start by 2030–2033 due to costs, impacts to surrounding residents, and other potential risks. This option as

(8) If the “C” and “N” trains are operated in an integrated fashion, with northbound C03 returning as southbound N06 and northbound N01 returning as southbound C04, then the required layover capacity would be up to 2 trains simultaneously (the “W” and “D” trains). This would, however, require that the “C” and “N” trains be operated with the same general trainset type and configuration.

initially conceived would also result in the loss of existing agricultural land, although this loss would likely only be on the order of 1 to 2 acres.

- **South Option.** This site is co-located with the Chico station option at Barber Yard and is approximately 1¼ mile south of the existing Amtrak station. It is located on vacant undeveloped or under-utilized land south of Estes Road and is comparatively closer to both station options (the existing Amtrak station in Downtown Chico or a Barber Yard station) than the North Option. Depending on the final siting within the Barber Yard area, this location may be slightly closer to existing and/or future residential uses, however, and may therefore have a larger impact to surrounding residents than the North Option.

Figure 3-9: Chico Layover Facility Sites



Source: Google Earth. Annotations by AECOM.

Aerial imagery from Landsat/Copernicus, Maxar Technologies, USGS, USDA Farm Service Agency.

While both layover facility options are being carried forward for further analysis, the North Option would only be used for the Downtown Chico station option, while the South Option could be utilized with either Chico station option. If the South Option is used in conjunction with the Downtown Chico station option, additional coordination with UPRR would be needed to evaluate the effects of holding the train at the platform long enough to reverse direction, as the layover facility would be located south of the station.

3.7 Bus Connections

This section describes potential improvements to local/regional bus connections that could be explored in conjunction with implementation of North Valley Rail. These recommendations are preliminary at this stage and reflect bus service as it was in early 2022. Since then, BCAG, as the owner and operator of B-Line, has completed a routing study for the system to optimize ridership and service, and many more iterations of service changes will likely take effect before North Valley Rail is in service. The concepts identified here should be used as a general guideline to explore potential ways to enhance local/regional bus connections at stations and expand the geographic reach of North Valley Rail in closer coordination with relevant local agencies and transit operators.

3.7.1 Plumas Lake

Currently, there are no local bus routes serving Plumas Lake, but regional commuter express buses operated by Yuba–Sutter Transit stop at a park-and-ride facility at the southeast quadrant of the SR 70 Feather River Boulevard interchange. These buses are primarily designed to get commuters to/from Sacramento, although some trips also allow for travel to/from Marysville and Yuba City.

As only a portion of Plumas Lake is currently built out, it is likely that bus service will warrant expansion in the future as the rest of the overall development is completed. This would likely include expanded regional/commuter service connecting to Sacramento and Marysville/Yuba City, as well as perhaps new regional service to/from Wheatland and local service within Plumas Lake. As development progresses, BCAG should coordinate with Yuba–Sutter Transit and other partners to consider potential improvements to bus service:

- **Park-and-ride facility relocation.** Relocate the Plumas Lake park-and-ride facility to the train station to provide a consolidated local and regional transit hub.
- **Plumas Lake circulator route.** Establish a local circulator route through Plumas Lake, with a terminal at the Plumas Lake station to provide good connections to/from trains and other bus routes.
- **Wheatland connection.** Establish a new regional bus connection between the Plumas Lake station and Wheatland. This could be operated as an all-new service or as a realignment of the existing Wheatland–Marysville service from SR 65 to SR 70.
- **Olivehurst and Linda connection.** Establish a new regional bus connection between the Plumas Lake station, Olivehurst, and Linda. This could be operated as an all-new service, with a potential extension north to Marysville, or as a realignment of the existing Wheatland–Marysville service from SR 65 to SR 70.
- **Toyota Amphitheatre and Hard Rock Hotel and Casino shuttles.** Provide shuttle services connecting the Plumas Lake station with the Toyota Amphitheatre and the Hard Rock Hotel and Casino. This could include dedicated pre- and post-event shuttles (dependent on event time of day and alignment with train schedules). SJRRC/SJJPA have already reached out to key stakeholders in the Plumas Lake area to explore opportunities for new transit services connecting the station there with key nearby destinations.
- **Weekend and holiday service.** Expand bus service to weekends and holidays to ensure connections with train service are available outside of weekdays.

3.7.2 Marysville–Yuba City

The North Option for the Marysville–Yuba City station would be located within short walking distance of the Yuba County Government Center (I Street at 9th Street in Marysville), which is a major transfer point for Yuba–Sutter Transit local and regional buses. This stop is served by two local routes, as well as multiple regional routes, including commuter buses to/from Sacramento (both via SR 70 and via Yuba City and SR 99) and all three of Yuba–Sutter Transit’s “rural” routes.

As the existing bus coverage for Marysville, Yuba City, and surrounding communities is quite good given the largely suburban and rural context of the Yuba–Sutter area, it is recommended that BCAG coordinate with Yuba–Sutter Transit on potential improvements to bus service that focus on enhancing the existing system:

- **Route extension to station.** Extend bus service closer to the train station to reduce walking distance and strengthen the train station’s role as a local and regional transit hub. In the short-term timeframe, this could include a simple extension of selected bus trips to the station (based on alignment with train timetables), but could be expanded to include a relocation of the Yuba County Government Center transfer point, with expanded amenities (e.g., bus shelters, seating, real-time information). In the long-term timeframe, the relocation could be combined with a larger transit-oriented redevelopment of the adjoining retail center.
- **Expanded service days and hours.** Expand service days and hours for local buses (Route 1 and Route 4) to ensure connecting service is available every day (7 days a week, including holidays) and for all scheduled trains. For the 3 rural routes that currently operate 1–2 roundtrips/day, this could be a focused expansion that only adds trips that are appropriately timed for train connections and keyed to the communities and travel patterns that would need to be served.

If the South Option for the station is selected, extension of bus routes to the station will be somewhat more critical to ensure adequate connecting transit, as there are only two bus routes that pass in the vicinity of the station under this option (along 3rd Street and H Street), and the Yuba County Government Center is 12–15 minutes away from the station on foot.

3.7.3 Gridley

Gridley is served by two B-Line bus routes, but these routes currently travel along SR 99 and Spruce Street through Gridley and do not directly serve the proposed station location, although the closest stops—Spruce Street at Kentucky Street (Gridley City Hall) and East Gridley Road at SR 99—are within short walking distance. The following improvements to bus service are recommended:

- **Route extension to station.** Extend existing bus service closer to the train station. Route 30 can be extended by incorporating a branch of the route that loops to and from the station via Magnolia Street, between the existing stops at East Gridley Road at SR 99 and at Spruce Street at SR 99 (Orchard Hospital). Route 32 can be extended by adding a detour south to Laurel Street between the existing stops at Spruce Street at Kentucky Street and at Spruce Street at SR 99.

As shown in **Figure 3-1**, Gridley would be the closest station to Oroville on the proposed route alignment and buses here would provide convenient connections for passengers making continuing journeys to/from the Oroville area. This could be accomplished through the extension of Route 30 directly to the station in Gridley, as suggested above, which would provide good access to/from Oroville proper, as well as surrounding unincorporated areas including Thermalito, South Oroville, Oroville East, Palermo, and the Mooretown Rancheria (Feather Falls) area. Alternatively, the Gridley–Oroville bus connection could be provided by a new B-Line route.

3.7.4 Chico

3.7.4.1 Downtown Chico Option

Downtown Chico is served well by existing B-Line system, and while the existing Amtrak station is not directly served by B-Line buses, many B-Line routes travel along West 2nd Street (within a block of the station). Additional B-Line service is available at the Chico Transit Center, 5–6 blocks east of the station at the West 2nd Street/Normal Avenue intersection.

Existing transit service is fairly robust, but is tailored to existing demand markets (e.g., Chico State) and the Chico Transit Center. In particular, routes terminating at the Chico Transit Center and serving areas to the northeast, east, or southeast would, at first glance, appear to be candidates for extension to the station, but are actually interlined with other routes and would require substantial detours to serve the station.

Given these considerations, the following potential improvements to bus service are recommended under the existing (Downtown Chico) station option:

- **Pedestrian connection to West 2nd Street bus stops.** Coordinate with City of Chico to provide proper wayfinding and an attractive pedestrian connection between the station and the existing bus stops at West 2nd Street at Cedar Street. This could include treatments such as sidewalk widening, crosswalk enhancements (e.g., striping or pavement treatments, corner bulb-outs, installation of traffic signals or other traffic control devices, crosswalk daylighting, etc.), or pedestrian realm activation (e.g., street trees or landscaping, street furnishings, etc.).
- **Extension of local B-Line routes to station.** Extend local bus routes within Chico to the station to provide better first-mile/last-mile connections. Based on initial analysis and input from BCAG staff, Route 9, which has a portion of its west loop running along Oak Street, could be shifted closer to the station by continuing east along West 7th Street, and appears to be the best candidate for such an extension. Route 9 already has good on-time performance and could be extended to the station without major deviations from the existing route, resulting in the least impact to existing service and existing riders. Route 2 would also appear to be a potential candidate because it is not interlined with any other routes at the Chico Transit Center, but it already suffers from poor on-time performance and is therefore not recommended for extension to the station.

If extension of local bus routes is deemed infeasible, an alternative solution for consideration could involve establishing a new route to connect the train station and Transit Center. This alternative could be combined with a “circulator shuttle” concept, operating the connection as a one-way (or potentially two-way) loop through Downtown Chico. One potential loop route could be via West 2nd Street, Cedar Street or Orange Street, West 8th Street or West 9th Street, and Broadway Street or Main Street.

- **Extension of regional/rural B-Line routes to station.** In addition to local B-Line routes, extend regional/rural B-Line routes to the station. Based on initial analysis, Route 20 (Chico–Oroville) appears to be a promising candidate for such an extension, as it is one of B-Line’s best-performing routes in terms of ridership. While connections to/from Oroville would already be provided at the Gridley station, Route 20 serves multiple stops within Chico proper, and extending it to the station significantly improves local access to/from the Downtown Chico station (given the complications of extending the local B-Line routes operating within Chico).

Based on input from BCAG staff, however, Route 32 (Chico–Gridley) and Route 40/41 (Chico–Paradise–Magalia) would be more likely candidates despite low ridership, as Route 20 has some issues with on-

time performance. Route 40/41 would also be a potentially good candidate in terms of better connecting the foothill communities (Paradise and Magalia) with the Downtown Chico station.

3.7.4.2 Barber Yard Option

The Barber Yard site is largely vacant or unoccupied and is currently not well-served by transit, thus creating challenges with any proposed B-Line deviations to the site. The closest bus service is along Park Avenue to the northeast of the site (Routes 14, 17, and 32) and along the West 8th Street/West 9th Street couplet to the northwest of the site (Route 5). While an exact station location has not been identified, the walking distance to/from these stops would likely be over one half-mile. Eventual redevelopment of the Barber Yard site could, however, warrant new bus service that could directly serve both the station and the surrounding neighborhoods.

Given these considerations, the following potential improvements to bus service are recommended under the Barber Yard option:

- **Extension of local B-Line routes to station.** Extend local bus routes within Chico to the station to provide better first-mile/last-mile connections. Route 2, which is not interlined with any other route at the Chico Transit Center, could be a candidate for such an extension (e.g., via Broadway Street/Main Street, Park Avenue, and West 16th Street).

If extension of local bus routes is deemed infeasible, an alternative solution for consideration could involve establishing one or more new routes that would provide direct connections with the train station. This could be considered in conjunction with bus service improvements for the larger redevelopment of the entire Barber Yard site, which may warrant entirely new routes that could then be easily extended to the station without substantial disruptions to existing B-Line operations.

- **Ensure a high-quality connection with the Chico Transit Center to allow for transfers to/from regional/rural B-Line routes.** Given the location of the Barber Yard site, extension of Chico's existing regional/rural B-Line routes—namely, Route 20 (Chico–Oroville), Route 32 (Chico–Gridley), and Route 40/41 (Chico–Paradise–Magalia)—is likely infeasible due to substantial out-of-direction movement and added running time, which would likely have a substantial impact on operations and on-time performance. Therefore, an alternative solution should focus on ensuring a high-quality connection with the Transit Center, where passengers would then have the option of continuing their journey on other B-Line routes to/from the foothills or other parts of the county. As mentioned above, this connection could be provided by existing local B-Line routes or by new routes serving the larger Barber Yard development.

3.7.5 Other Bus Connections

In addition to the local/regional bus connections described above, additional bus service improvements are recommended:

- **Glenn Ride improvements.** Work with County of Glenn on adjustments to the existing Glenn Ride service connecting Willows, Orland, and Chico, which currently provides 7 roundtrips/day Mondays through Fridays and 3 roundtrips/day on Saturdays and holidays. The route currently terminates at Chico Transit Center and could be extended relatively easily to either the Downtown Chico station or the Barber Yard station. Train connections should be provided every day and for all scheduled trains.

- **Red Bluff and Redding connection.** Work with the Redding Area Bus Authority (RABA), SRTA, and other partners on bus connections between Oroville, Chico, Red Bluff, and Redding. As illustrated in **Figure 3-10** to the right, the planned *Salmon Runner* service would run along Interstate 5 (I-5) between Redding and Sacramento, with intermediate stops at Red Bluff, Orland, Williams, and Sacramento International Airport. The *Salmon Runner* also includes proposed feeder service at Orland to provide connections for Chico, Corning, and Willows.

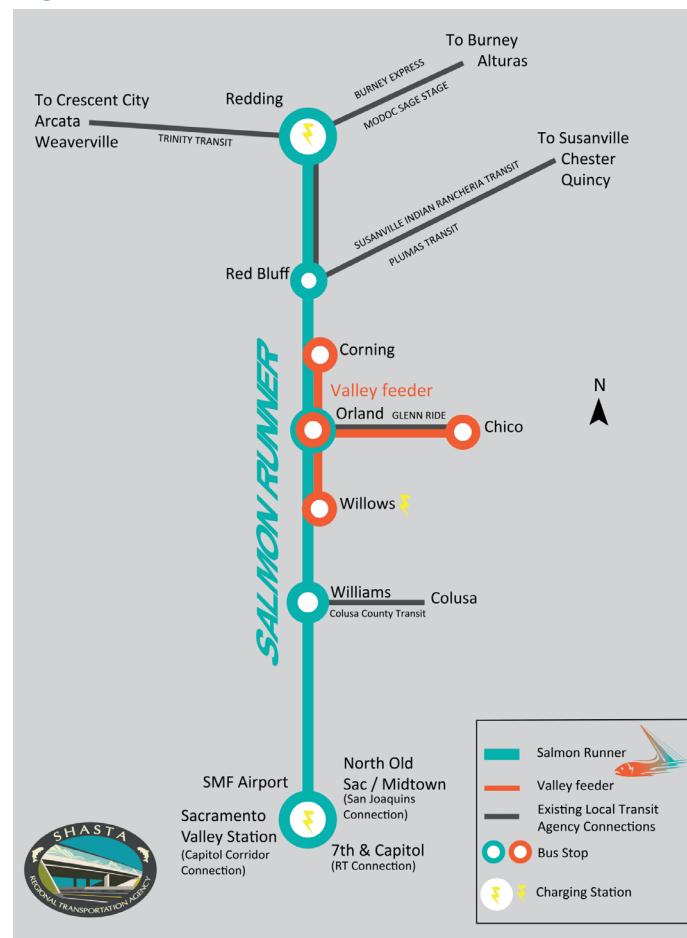
With the extension of trains north of Natomas, there would be partial overlap in ridership markets between bus and rail services, and the goal should be to ensure that the two services are complementary and synergistic, as opposed to duplicative and competitive. This may ultimately mean that the *Salmon Runner* remains separate from North Valley Rail, retaining its connections with ACE and the *San Joaquin*s at the planned station in Old North Sacramento (in lieu of any of the new North Valley Rail stations). In that case, separate bus service out of Chico could be desirable to provide connections to/from Redding and Red Bluff.

- **Supplementary parallel bus service.** BCAG recently studied an enhanced intercity bus service within the North Valley Rail corridor as a possible replacement and expansion of the existing Amtrak Thruway Route 3 bus service. The basic parameters for this initial bus service were developed by BCAG (in partnership with SJPPA and Caltrans) as part of the *Chico to Sacramento Inter-City Transit Strategic Plan* (January 4, 2022).

The plan calls for 9 intercity bus roundtrips/day on weekdays and 8 intercity bus roundtrips/day on weekends on a route linking Chico, Oroville, Marysville, and Sacramento, with selected bus trips continuing to/from Stockton, as shown in **Figure 3-11**. Stakeholders representing the Plumas Lake area have also expressed interest in having these intercity buses stop in Plumas Lake. All trips would connect with the Capitol Corridor at Sacramento Valley Station, with some also serving Midtown Sacramento Station (some trips could skip Midtown Sacramento Station if there is no train connection possible at the scheduled time).

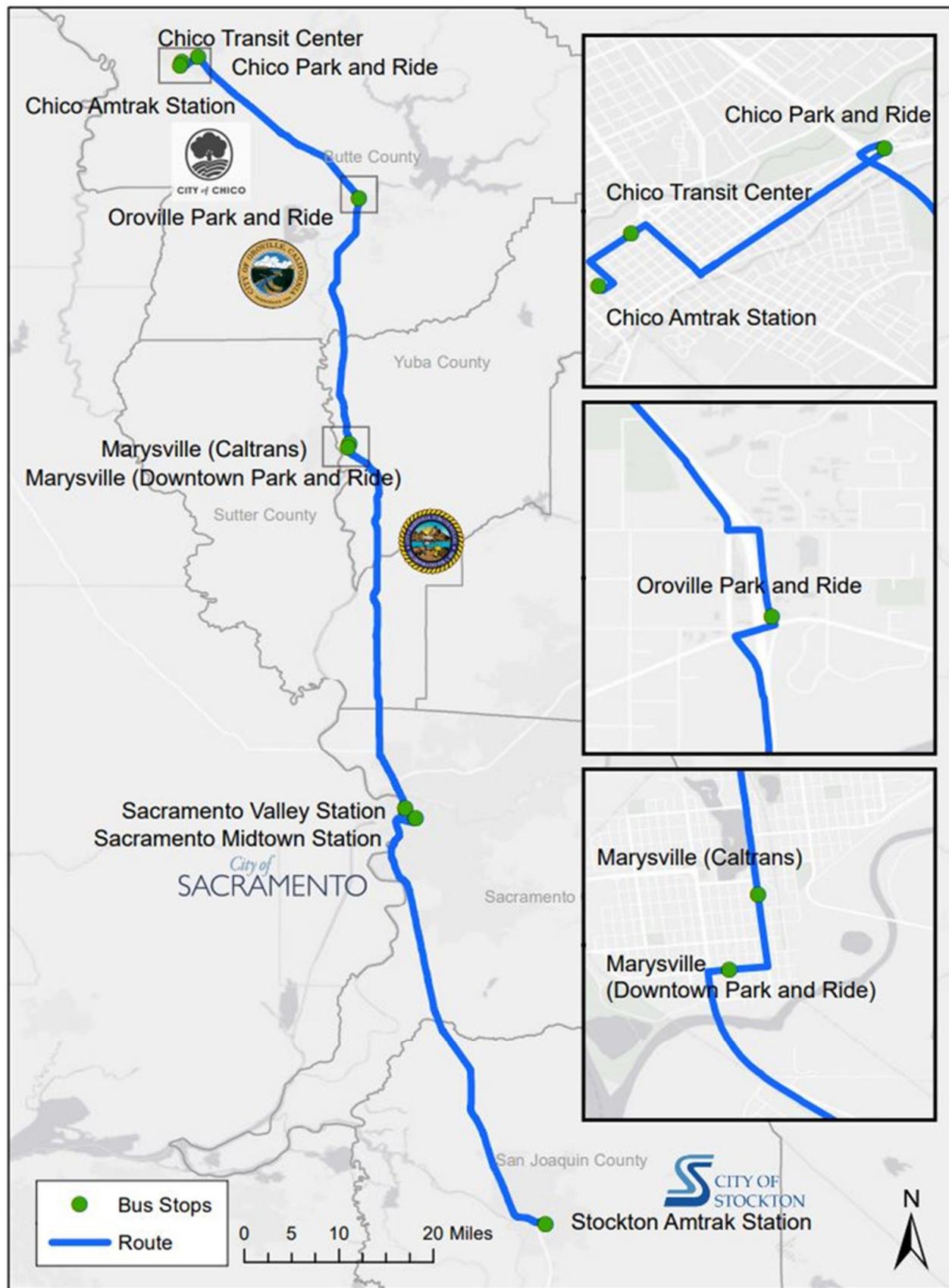
As North Valley Rail only proposes to extend 4 roundtrips/day north of Natomas in the mid-term timeframe (as early as 2030), the remaining 6 Valley Rail train roundtrips/day (3 roundtrips/day each for ACE and the *San Joaquin*s) on the Sacramento Extension would continue to terminate at Natomas after the opening of North Valley Rail. Therefore, the Chico–Sacramento bus service could be retained (with modifications as needed) after the start of North Valley Rail service to provide connecting bus service for the train slots terminating at Natomas.

Figure 3-10: Salmon Runner Schematic Route



Source: Shasta Regional Transportation Agency.

Figure 3-11: Chico–Sacramento Intercity Bus Route



Source: Chico to Sacramento Inter-City Transit Strategic Plan (January 4, 2022).

- **Sacramento International Airport connection.** When the Valley Rail Program extends train service from Stockton up to Natomas via the UP Sacramento Subdivision, new bus service at the Natomas terminal would provide a first-mile/last-mile connection to/from Sacramento International Airport (“SMF”) for airport users and workers. With North Valley Rail, some of the Natomas trains would be extended further north into the North Valley, resulting in new southbound train arrivals and northbound train departures at Natomas. To serve North Valley passengers on these trains, the SMF bus service could therefore be adjusted and/or expanded to provide better connections to SMF for southbound trains and from SMF for northbound trains.

3.7.6 Sacramento Valley Station and Downtown Sacramento

As discussed in **Section 3.4.5**, Caltrans is currently leading a study to evaluate a potential direct connection to Sacramento Valley Station. Before such a connection is established, North Valley passengers would still have two primary options for making connections to/from Sacramento Valley Station, the various transit services available there, and the surrounding areas of Downtown Sacramento:

- **Old North Sacramento Station.** The planned Valley Rail station in Old North Sacramento would be located in proximity to an existing light rail station (Globe Avenue) on the SacRT Blue Line, with a platform-to-platform walking distance of approximately 1,000–1,250 feet. The Blue Line would take passengers directly to/from the heart of Downtown Sacramento, including key destinations such as Golden 1 Center and Capitol Mall. Passengers coming from or headed to Sacramento Valley Station would be able to do so through a second transfer via the Gold Line or Green Line anywhere along the shared light rail corridor through Downtown along 7th Street/8th Street, O Street, and Quill Alley.
- **Midtown Sacramento Station.** The planned Valley Rail station in Midtown Sacramento would be within 1–2 blocks of SacRT bus service on Route 62, which provides a direct connection to/from Downtown Sacramento and Sacramento Valley Station. Walking distances would be on the order of 750 feet or less between platform and bus stop, and SacRT has also indicated the possibility of enhanced peak-period frequency on this route (e.g., every 15 minutes) to better facilitate transfers.

3.8 Estimated Operations and Maintenance Costs

The mid-term service vision illustrated in **Figure 3-7** shows a daily service for North Valley Rail consisting of 3 intercity roundtrips and 1 commuter roundtrip. The commuter roundtrip and 2 of the intercity roundtrips—the one between Chico and Stockton San Joaquin Street and the one between Chico and Union City—would be operated as ACE trains, while the remaining intercity roundtrip would be operated as a *San Joaquin* train. CalSTA has requested that all existing and new passenger rail service employ cost reduction strategies for operations. For planning purposes, the current O&M cost model for the ACE service was used as a baseline to establish the O&M estimates for the expansion of service from Natomas to Chico.

The methodology for estimating future O&M costs does not represent a detailed financial analysis of fixed and variable costs; however, an effort has been made to develop a preliminary evaluation of fixed and variable costs that are likely to increase as a result of the service expansion to Chico. The general approach involves first establishing the current O&M costs. For ACE, the existing service reflects 4 weekday-only daily roundtrips between Stockton and San Jose.

After establishing the existing costs, adjustments are applied as needed to the fixed and variable cost elements in each cost model to reflect future service expansions. Future costs are estimated for both a “Future Baseline” scenario (without the Project) and “Future with Project” scenario to isolate the incremental effect of the project

(i.e., North Valley Rail). The Future Baseline scenario includes the two extensions currently being implemented—the Merced Extension (Lathrop to Merced) and Sacramento Extension (Stockton to Natomas)—and the planned service to/from Union City. For the future ACE scenarios, all roundtrips are assumed to operate daily (i.e., 365 days/year).

In terms of the types of adjustments applied to the existing costs, most fixed costs were increased by 22 percent for the Future Baseline scenario and by 24 percent for the Future with Project scenario to reflect the expanded future operations. In the case of the Future with Project scenario, the slightly larger increase (2 percent) in fixed costs over the Future Baseline scenario covers the expansion from Natomas north into the North Valley.

Variable costs related to train operations and bus shuttles were increased proportionate to the increase in train-miles.⁽⁹⁾ Assumptions were made regarding new management personnel required to staff the expanded operations. Station maintenance costs were increased by the number of stations, and insurance costs were boosted in relation to ridership, reflecting the greater exposure to risk. Rail maintenance facility expenses were grown to account for the costs of maintaining more trainsets and, for the Future with Project scenario, to accommodate a new layover facility in Chico.

Annual train-miles and O&M costs (in 2023 dollars) for the existing service and in the future are summarized in **Table 3-7**. North Valley Rail would result in an increase of 221,900 annual train-miles and \$24.0 million in annual O&M costs over the Future Baseline scenario.

More information on the O&M cost estimates is provided in [Appendix C](#) for reference.

Table 3-7: O&M Cost Estimate Summary

Metric	North Valley Rail		
	Existing	Future Baseline	Future with Project
Annual train-miles	174,100	862,500	1,084,400
Increment over Existing	—	688,400	910,300
Increment over Future Baseline	—	—	221,900
Annual O&M costs (millions, 2023 dollars)	\$45.5	\$149.9	\$173.9
Increment over Existing	—	\$104.4	\$128.4
Increment over Future Baseline	—	—	\$24.0

Source: AECOM.

(9) A train-mile represents a train moving one mile. A train running 200 miles, for example, generates 200 train-miles.

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Chapter 4

Infrastructure Improvements

This chapter describes the infrastructure improvements specifically required for the passenger service, including the stations and layover facility, as well as a preliminary set of potential track improvements within the corridor identified by the Project Team. The estimated capital costs associated with these infrastructure improvements is also discussed in this chapter.

- **4.1 Station and Layover Facility Improvements**
- **4.2 Corridor Improvements**
- **4.3 Cost Estimate**

4.1 Station and Layover Facility Improvements

This subsection describes the initial design concepts for each of the four proposed stations. While each of the stations is unique, the main improvements at each station are consistent across the Project and include a passenger loading platform, passenger access facilities, station area parking, a passenger pick-up/drop-off area, and connecting transit facilities (e.g., bus stops). Each station includes track improvements for train access to/from the platform, and for stations with a center (island) platform, grade-separated pedestrian access is also included. All stations will be designed in accordance with the current version of the SJRRC Valley Rail Station Design Guidelines, including station access priority for active transportation (walking/biking) and connecting transit services.

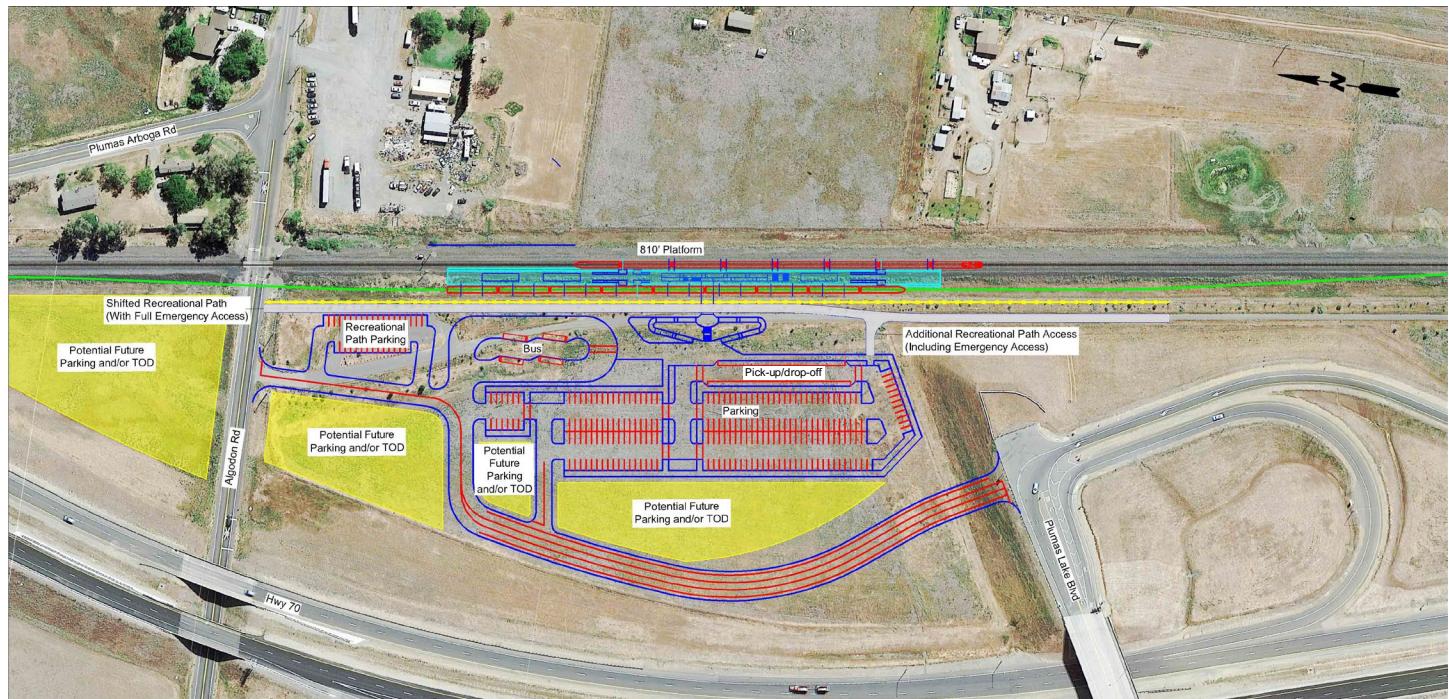
This subsection also describes the proposed layover facility in Chico and the proposed improvements at the planned Natomas Station.

4.1.1 Plumas Lake Station

An initial site plan and visual simulations of the proposed Plumas Lake station are provided in **Figure 4-1** and **Figure 4-2**.

The station would be located in unincorporated Yuba County at the northern end of the currently built-out portion of the Plumas Lake community, along the east side of SR 70 just north of the Plumas Lake Boulevard interchange. Significantly more development in the Plumas Lake community is planned north of the station location, which would result in the station being more centrally located within the overall development. An 810-foot-long center loading platform would be constructed along the west edge of the existing single main track, and a new station siding would be constructed for the west platform face. Ancillary facilities (bus station, parking, and passenger pick-up/drop-off areas) would be provided on the west side of the station, between the platform and SR 70. Access to/from the platform would be provided by an underground pedestrian tunnel linking the west-side station plaza with the platform.

Figure 4-1: Plumas Lake Station – Site Plan Concept



Source: AECOM.

Figure 4-2: Plumas Lake Station – Visual Simulations



Source: AECOM.

Station access would primarily be provided via a new access road tying into Plumas Lake Boulevard opposite the existing on- and off-ramps for northbound SR 70. This access road would continue north and tie into Algodon Road/Plumas–Arboga Road for alternative local access to/from the north.

The Bear River Habitat Trail, a shared-use recreational path running along the west side of the UP ROW between Algodon Road/Plumas–Arboga Road in the north and the southern edge of the Plumas Lake community in the south, will be realigned at its northern terminus adjacent to the station, as indicated in [Figure 4-1](#). Trail access to/from Algodon Road/Plumas–Arboga Road would continue to be provided and the potential use of the trail for emergency evacuations for the residential portion of Plumas Lake to the south would continue to be maintained. As shown in [Figure 4-1](#), an additional spur would be constructed to connect the main trail with the proposed station parking area to further enhance the trail's function as a potential emergency evacuation route.

4.1.2 Marysville–Yuba City Station

4.1.2.1 North Option

Initial site plans and visual simulations of the North Option for the proposed Marysville–Yuba City Station are provided in [Figure 4-3](#) and [Figure 4-4](#).

The station would be located on the western side of central Marysville between 5th Street and 10th Street, atop the existing levee and embankment carrying the UP Sacramento Subdivision through Marysville. There are three variants for this option currently under consideration, pending further structural analysis of the levee and embankment as described in more detail below:

- **Single Side Platform Variant.** This variant would involve construction of a single, 705-foot-long side platform, served by the existing eastern track.⁽¹⁰⁾ Platform access would be provided directly to/from the east edge of the platform.
- **Center Platform Variant.** This variant would involve construction of a 600-foot-long center platform⁽¹¹⁾ between the existing western track and a realigned eastern track. Platform access would be provided by a pedestrian bridge over the eastern track, tying in at the north end of the platform.
- **Two Side Platforms Variant.** This variant would be similar to the Single-Side Platform Variant, but would also include construction of a second 705-foot-long side platform for the existing western track. This variant would also provide platform access via a pedestrian bridge over the eastern track, tying in at the north end of the platform.

Access for all variants of the Marysville–Yuba City Station North Option would be provided through the existing retail center and surface parking adjacent to the proposed station site. Further analysis is needed for ancillary facilities, including station parking.

(10) As only one station track would be provided under this variant, adjustments to the conceptual timetable would be needed to avoid the meet between passenger trains at this station.

(11) Because of limited space between the northern (10th Street) and southern (5th Street) overpass structures, the platform would be shorter (600 feet) in this variant than in the side platform variants. This would prevent one or more passenger coaches from having platform access at the station, depending on the location of the locomotive within the consist. In this situation, alighting passengers would be directed to move to the nearest unaffected cars when the train approaches the station.

Figure 4-3: Marysville–Yuba City Station (North Option) – Site Plan Concepts

Source: AECOM.

Figure 4-4: Marysville–Yuba City Station (North Option) – Visual Simulations



Source: AECOM.

Note:

Visual simulations only show the Single Side Platform Variant.

4.1.2.2 South Option

An initial site plan of the South Option for the proposed Marysville–Yuba City Station is provided in **Figure 4-5**.

The station would be located on the southwestern side of central Marysville in close proximity to 3rd Street. As with the North Option discussed above, this option sits atop the existing levee and embankment carrying the UP Sacramento Subdivision through Marysville. This option was recently identified and therefore no variants have been developed to-date, but there is the possibility that variants may be developed prior to the initiation of the Project Approval and Environmental Document/Preliminary Engineering (“PA&ED/PE”) phase, pending further site analysis and structural analysis of the levee and embankment.

An initial layout of this option would involve construction of a single, 705-foot-long side platform served by the existing eastern track. Platform access would be provided directly to/from the east edge of the platform. Further site planning will be undertaken to refine details such as platform placement, location of parking, access facilities, etc.

As the South Option was developed later in the planning process than the North Option, subsequent to the decision to reduce trainset lengths, visual simulations are not available for this option.

Figure 4-5: Marysville–Yuba City Station (South Option) – Site Plan Concept



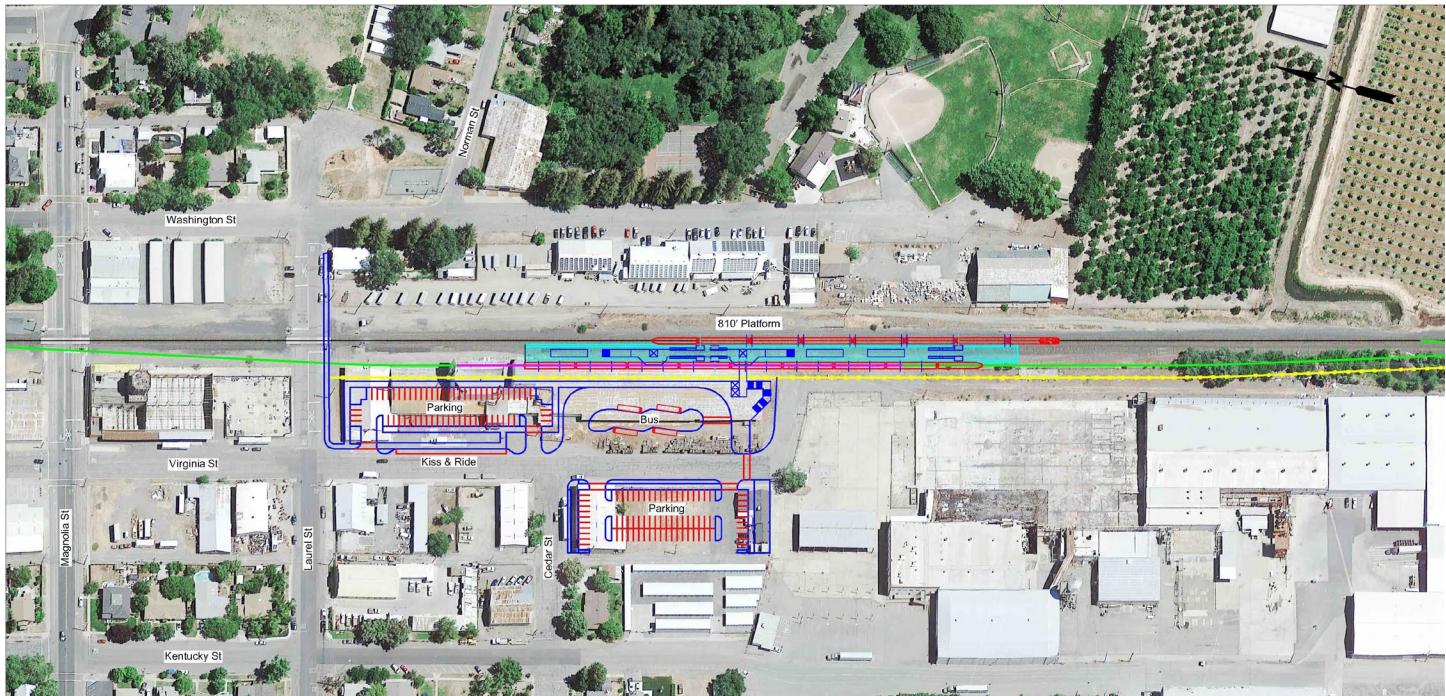
Source: AECOM.

4.1.3 Gridley Station

An initial site plan and visual simulations of the proposed Gridley Station are provided in **Figure 4-6** and **Figure 4-7**.

The station would be located just south of Laurel Street in Downtown Gridley. An 810-foot-long center loading platform would be constructed along the west edge of the existing single main track, and a new station siding would be constructed for the west platform face. Ancillary facilities would be provided on the west side of the station, with access to/from the platform provided by a pedestrian bridge over the western track, tying in near the center of the platform. Station access would be provided by existing local streets, including Virginia Street and Cedar Street.

Figure 4-6: Gridley Station – Site Plan Concept



Source: AECOM.

Figure 4-7: Gridley Station – Visual Simulations



Source: AECOM.

4.1.4 Chico Station

4.1.4.1 Downtown Option

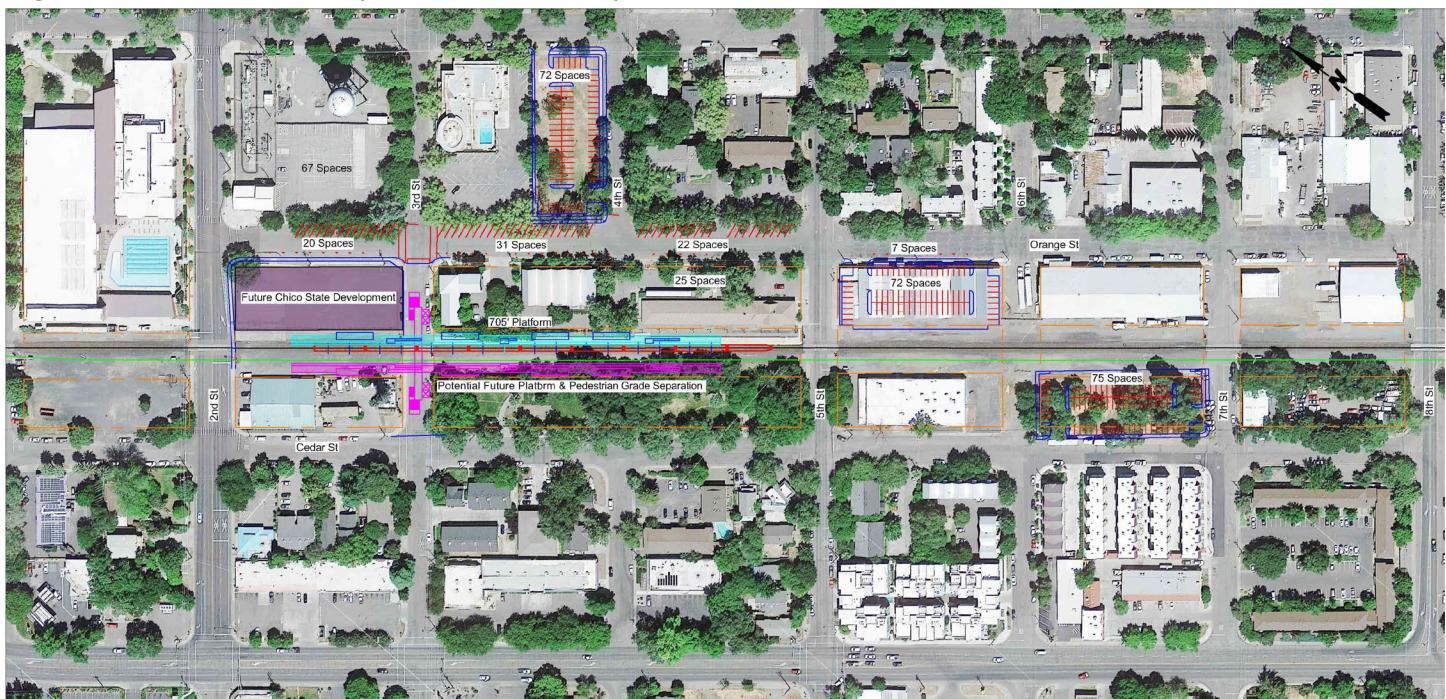
An initial site plan and visual simulations of the Downtown Option for the proposed Chico Station are provided in **Figure 4-8** and **Figure 4-9**.

The station would be located in Downtown Chico between West 2nd Street and West 5th Street. The existing Chico Amtrak Station, which is located at the southern portion of the proposed station footprint, would be utilized and integrated into the expanded station. A 705-foot-long side platform would be constructed along the east side of the existing single main track, partially replacing and extending the existing station platform. A new siding would also be constructed west of the main track to allow freight trains to bypass passenger trains stopped at the station. A potential second side platform could be constructed for the siding track in a future phase, together with a potential pedestrian grade separation at West 3rd Street to provide access to/from both platforms. Station access would be provided by local streets.

This option would require the closure of West 3rd Street at the UP ROW. The western segment of West 3rd Street would dead-end immediately west of the UP ROW, while the eastern segment from immediately east of the UP ROW to Orange Street would be converted into a station entrance plaza. Further analysis is needed for ancillary facilities, although some potential areas for station parking have been identified at this preliminary stage.

Figure 4-10 shows the station in relation to the adjacent parcel along the east side of the UP ROW between West 2nd Street and West 3rd Street that is owned by Chico State. The university's 2030 Campus Master Plan published in Spring 2020 has identified this parcels and the adjacent block to the east for a future Wildcat Recreation Center ("WREC") expansion and health center.

Figure 4-8: Chico Station (Downtown Option) – Site Plan Concept



Source: AECOM.

Figure 4-9: Chico Station (Downtown Option) – Visual Simulations



Source: AECOM.

Figure 4-10: Chico Station (Downtown Option) – Adjacent Development

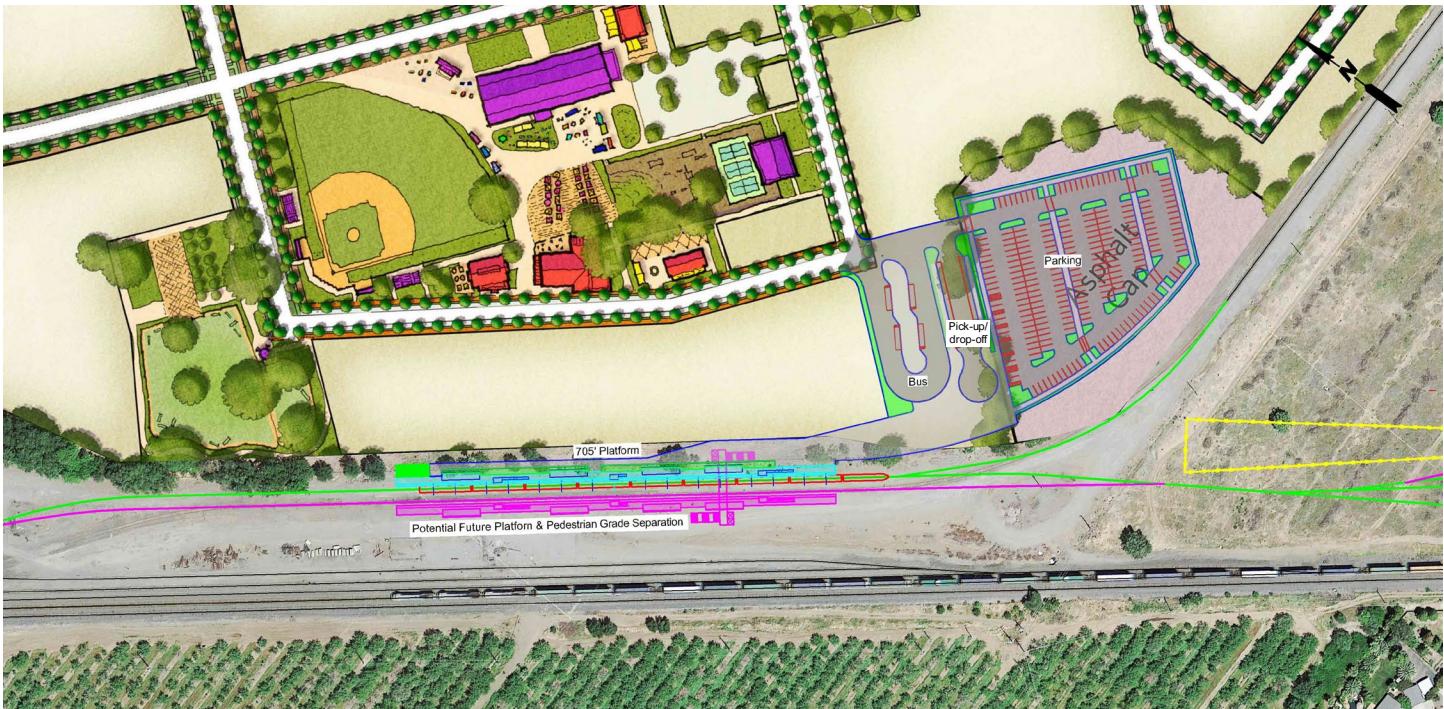


Source: AECOM.

4.1.4.2 Barber Yard Option

An initial site plan and visual simulations of the Barber Yard Option for the proposed Chico Station are provided in **Figure 4-11** and **Figure 4-12**.

Figure 4-11: Chico Station (Barber Yard Option) – Site Plan Concept



Source: AECOM.

Figure 4-12: Chico Station (Barber Yard Option) – Visual Simulations



Source: AECOM.

In this option, the station would be located adjacent to the Barber Yard development site in Chico approximately 1½ miles southeast of Downtown. A single, 705-foot-long side platform would be constructed on the east side of UP's existing Chico Yard, and the existing spur track towards Estes Road would be realigned to serve the new platform. New turnouts would be constructed to allow the realigned spur track to function as a station siding track. Platform access would be provided directly to/from the east edge of the platform. A potential second side platform and associated siding track could be constructed to the west as part of a future phase, with access to/from the second platform provided by a pedestrian grade separation.

Ancillary facilities would be provided on the east side of the station within the Barber Yard development site, including potential parking on top of an existing asphalt cap. Station access would be provided by local streets within the future Barber Yard development site.

4.1.5 Chico Layover Facility

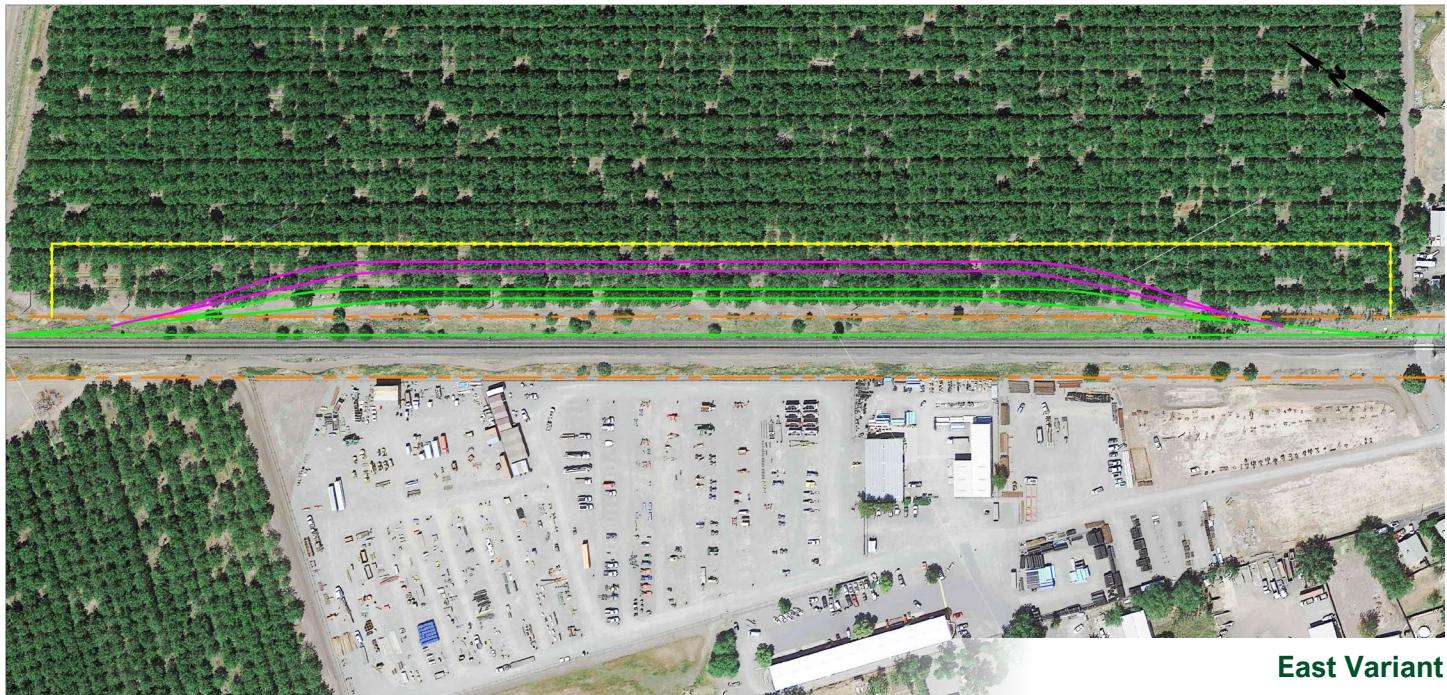
The proposed layover facility is intended for both train layover/storage and general light maintenance activities. As such, the facility includes not only the layover/storage tracks but also various support facilities, including a modular building to support operations staff and access roads along the tracks to perform cleaning, light maintenance, and potential fueling.

4.1.5.1 North Option

Initial site plans of the North Option for the proposed Chico Layover Facility are provided in **Figure 4-13**.

Two variants are proposed—the East Variant and West Variant—depending on which side of the UP ROW is used, but the two are functionally identical. The East Variant would be located on land that is currently used for agriculture, while the West Variant would be located on land that is currently primarily used for industrial support uses. Under both variants, security fencing would be provided around the perimeter of the site.

Both variants would be designed for potential segmentation, with an initial phase of two layover tracks (shown in green) and a subsequent phase with two additional layover tracks (shown in purple). This would accommodate a potential accelerated implementation of 2 daily roundtrips as a first phase of service, if desired. Both variants would tie into the mainline at both the north and south ends.

Figure 4-13: Chico Layover Facility (North Option) – Site Plan Concepts

Source: AECOM.

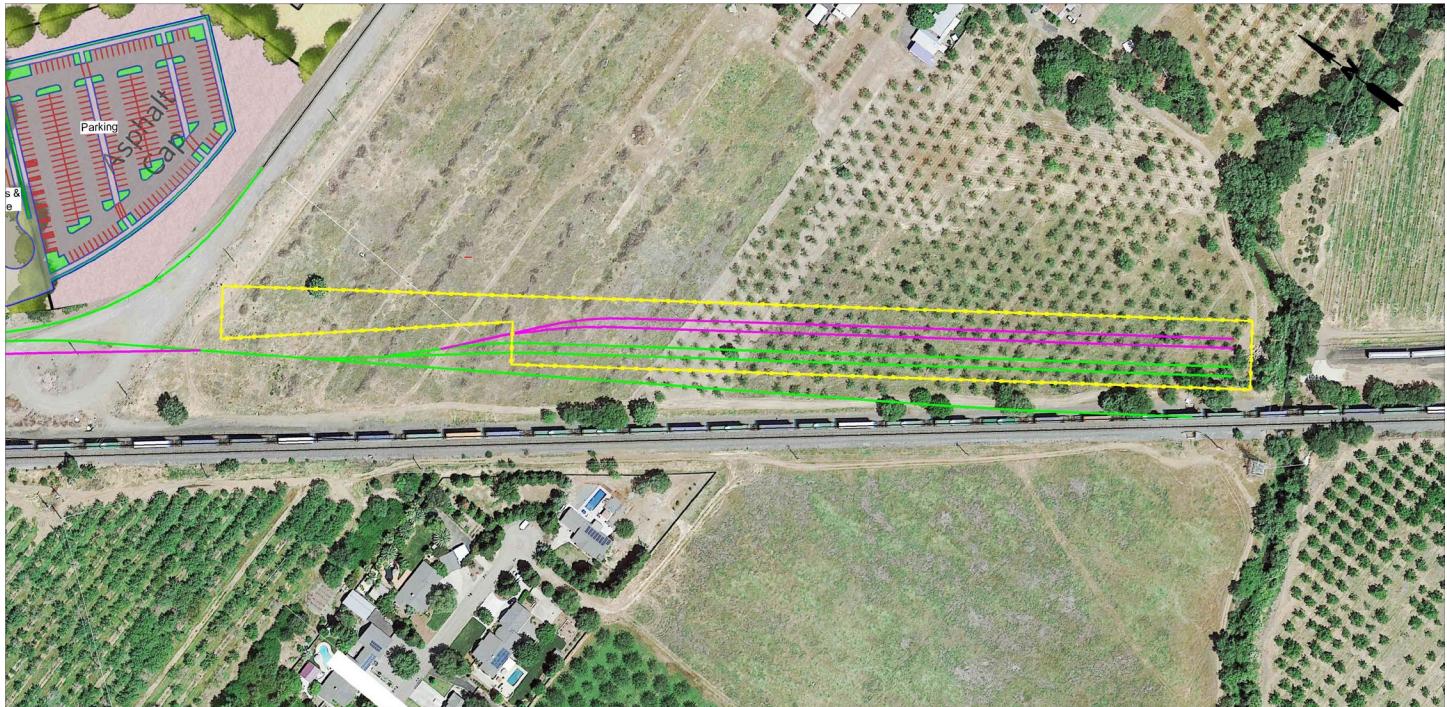
4.1.5.2 South Option

Initial site plans of the South Option for the proposed Chico Layover Facility are provided in **Figure 4-14**.

The layover facility would be located on land that is currently used for agriculture and a portion of which is associated with the Barber Yard development project. Security fencing would be provided around the perimeter of the site. Like the North Option, the South Option would be designed for potential segmentation, with an initial phase of two layover tracks (shown in green) and a subsequent phase with two additional layover tracks (shown in purple).

The only track connection for the layover facility would be at the northern end, where the layover facility lead would tie into the existing spur track along Estes Road. The southern end of the layover facility would abut Comanche Creek, and a tie-in at the southern end into the existing UP tracks is not proposed. The opposite (southern) bank of the creek is already occupied by existing spur tracks used by Sierra Nevada Brewing Company.

Figure 4-14: Chico Layover Facility (South Option) – Site Plan Concept

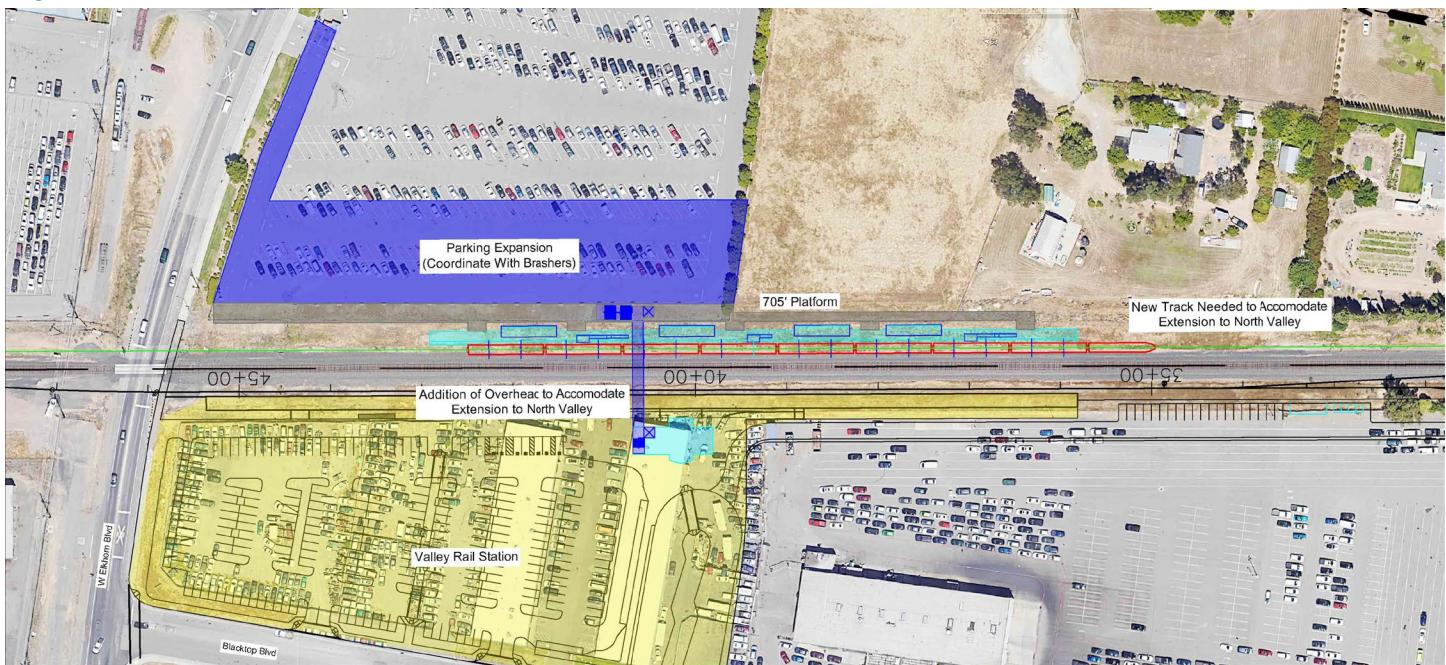


Source: AECOM.

4.1.6 Natomas Station Improvements

An initial site plan of the proposed improvements at the planned Natomas Station (part of the Valley Rail Sacramento Extension) is provided in **Figure 4-15**.

The proposed improvements are designed to allow the station to function as a proper through station (instead of just a terminus station for the Sacramento Extension) and include construction of an additional 705-foot-long side platform and associated platform track along the east side of the existing main track, opposite the initial portion of the station that will be constructed for Valley Rail. A new pedestrian overpass would be constructed to link the two platforms and two sides of the station, and expansion parking would be provided on the east side of the station, pending coordination with current property owners.

Figure 4-15: Natomas Station Improvements – Site Plan Concept

Source: AECOM.

4.2 Corridor Improvements

In order to facilitate passenger rail operations on an existing freight rail corridor, improvements are typically required to allow for train passing and to increase the overall capacity of the corridor to make up for the reduction in the corridor's freight capacity as a result of the addition of passenger trains. In particular, freight trains are typically slower and take longer to accelerate than passenger trains, and improvements such as new or extended sidings allow the corridor to efficiently handle shared use by the two operations (freight and passenger).

The proposed route includes approximately 34 miles along the UP Sacramento Subdivision and 42 miles along the UP Valley Subdivision. While the UP Valley Subdivision carries more freight than the UP Sacramento Subdivision, neither are as busy as the UP Fresno Subdivision. As such, it is anticipated that the infrastructure improvements needed along the extension corridor would be similar to what has been required for the UP Sacramento Subdivision for the current Valley Rail Program (specifically, the Sacramento Extension in terms of new and extended sidings).

The timetable modeling conducted by Caltrans and DB (see [Section 3.4.4](#)) verified that the timetable concept only results in one “meet” of passenger trains at the Marysville–Yuba City station. As such, no additional track infrastructure would be required to facilitate passenger train meets between Natomas and Chico. The timetable modeling was also helpful in identifying train meet locations south of Natomas under the expanded Valley Rail Program, which envisioned 10 roundtrip passenger trains serving Natomas by 2030–2033.

However, a set of potential track improvements at logical locations along the corridor was developed by the Project Team based on the proposed service plan and previous experience working with UP on the Valley Rail Program. These potential improvements are summarized in [Table 4-1](#) and detailed in [Appendix B](#).

This package of improvements has not been endorsed by UP and should only be used as a guide for understanding the magnitude of potential track improvements that may be required for the Project. UP expects to conduct detailed operations modeling of the corridor to identify infrastructure improvements required for the

Project later, in conjunction with the Project's environmental clearance and preliminary design phase. As such, the potential track improvements identified here are preliminary and subject to change.

Table 4-1: Corridor Improvements

Siding name (subdivision)	Existing location (MP)	Existing length (miles)	Proposed improvements			Pro- posed siding length (feet)
			Type and description	Location (MP)	Distance (miles)	
Pleasant Grove (UP Sacramento)	155.9 – 157.1	1.2	Siding extension (south) Three new bridges Upgraded turnout at MP 157.2	154.2 – 155.9	1.7	15,000
Mounkes (UP Sacramento)	172.1 – 173.6	1.5	Siding extension (south) Upgraded turnout at MP 173.6 Also serves Plumas Lake station	169.7 – 172.1	2.4	19,800
Berg (UP Valley)	144.3 – 146.0	1.7	Siding extension (north) Upgraded turnout at MP 144.3	146.0 – 147.3	1.3	15,000
Fagan (UP Valley)	154.1 – 155.7	1.6	Siding extension (north) Upgraded turnout at MP 154.1 Also serves Gridley station	155.7 – 157.8	2.1	19,400
Richvale (UP Valley)	167.2 – 168.8	1.6	Siding extension (north + south) One culvert extension	166.4 – 167.2 168.8 – 169.4	0.8 0.6	15,000
Durham (UP Valley)	—	—	New siding	176.5 – 179.4	2.9	15,000

Source: AECOM.

In addition to the corridor improvements above, selected track improvements are also proposed in conjunction with the station improvements described in [Section 4.1](#). These particular improvements are summarized in [Table 4-2](#).

Table 4-2: Station Track Improvements

Station or siding (subdivision)	Existing location (MP)	Existing length (miles)	Proposed improvements			Pro- posed siding length (feet)
			Type and description	Location (MP)	Distance (miles)	
Natomas (UP Sacramento)	—	—	New station siding	146.0 – 146.3	0.3	1,500
Marysville–Yuba City (UP Sacramento)	178.4 – 179.4	1.0	Shift mainline track east	178.8 – 179.1	0.3	5,150 (no change)
Chico: Downtown (UP Valley)	—	—	New station bypass track	184.0 – 184.4	0.4	1,700
Chico: Barber Yard (UP Valley)	—	—	Station siding using new and upgraded track	183.0 – 183.5	0.4	2,500

Source: AECOM.

4.2.1 Capital Access Fees

One potential alternative to constructing track improvements, either used partially in combination with some infrastructure improvements or used entirely in lieu of all infrastructure improvements, is the use of capital access fees (CAFs). Under this structure, a fee is paid regularly to the host railroad—in this case, UP—for use of (i.e., “access” to) the existing infrastructure (i.e., “capital”) along the corridor. The host railroad can then use these fees to implement capacity improvements within the corridor or elsewhere throughout their system, at their discretion. Use of CAFs in lieu of infrastructure improvements can substantially lower upfront capital costs and accelerate the timeline for project implementation.

The State prefers to incorporate CAFs where possible, and UP has indicated an openness to consider their use for passenger rail projects, where application of CAFs can be determined to be feasible. The State is currently in discussions with UP separately on exploring CAFs for track improvements associated with rail projects. Determining the feasibility of CAFs for North Valley Rail will require further capacity analysis, engineering evaluation, and detailed rail network operations modeling. In the absence of CAFs, there will be a need to implement some track improvements for North Valley Rail.

4.3 Cost Estimate

Preliminary capital cost estimates were developed for the improvements described in **Section 4.1** and **Section 4.2** using the following basic unit costs (in 2022 dollars):

- New track at \$15.0 million per mile
- New stations at \$33.6 million per station
- New layover facilities at \$30.0 million per facility

As discussed in **Section 3.5**, North Valley Rail is envisioned as an extension of services already planned under the expanded Valley Rail Program, new trainsets are not required for the service. Trains for North Valley Rail would already be operating as far north as Natomas under the expanded Valley Rail Program and would simply be extended north to Chico. As such, the preliminary cost estimates provided here do not include costs for rolling stock.

An escalation range was then applied to the initial estimates in 2022 dollars to bring the estimates to year-of-expenditure (YOE) dollars.

Table 4-3 summarizes the resulting preliminary capital cost estimates for the Project, which assumes no applications of CAFs. If UP determines that CAFs are a feasible option, the full application of CAFs (in lieu of all corridor improvements) would reduce total upfront capital costs to the range of \$270.0 million to \$285.5 million, instead of \$500.0 million to \$530.0 million. A partial application of CAFs (i.e., a combination of some CAFs and some corridor improvements) would have costs land in a range somewhere between \$270 million and \$530 million. It should be noted that costs for the station track improvements in **Table 4-2** are estimated using the track unit cost but are grouped under station costs, as they are considered necessary costs for station operation.

Table 4-3: Preliminary Capital Cost Estimate by Project Component

Project component	Estimated cost (millions, 2022 dollars)	Escalation range (millions)	Total cost range (millions, YOE dollars)
Stations and layover facility	\$205.0	\$65.0 – \$80.0	\$270.0 – \$285.0
Stations	\$151.2	\$48.0 – \$59.0	\$199.2 – \$210.2
Station track improvements	\$23.8	\$7.5 – \$9.3	\$31.3 – \$33.1
Layover facility	\$30.0	\$9.5 – \$11.7	\$39.5 – \$41.7
Corridor improvements	\$177.0	\$53.0 – \$68.0	\$230.0 – \$245.0
Total	\$382.0	\$118.0 – \$148.0	\$500.0 – \$530.0

Source: AECOM.

For reference, a breakdown by Project phase for the upper limit of the preliminary capital cost estimate (\$530.0 million) is also provided in **Table 4-4**. The overwhelming majority (\$462 million) of Project costs would be for construction, followed by \$30 million for ROW acquisition and \$38 million in other pre-construction costs.

In terms of ROW acquisition, it is anticipated that corridor improvements, as well as station-related track improvements, would fall entirely within the UP ROW and therefore require no ROW acquisition. However, ROW acquisition outside of the UP ROW will be required to construct ancillary station facilities, including walkways, pedestrian ramps, pedestrian overpasses and underpasses, parking lots, bus loops and depots, bicycle lockers and parking, and plaza spaces. The proposed layover facility will also require ROW acquisition outside of UP ROW.

More information on the capital cost estimates is provided in **Appendix C** for reference.

Table 4-4: Preliminary Capital Cost Estimate by Project Phase

Project phase	Activities	Cost estimate (2022 dollars)
Project Approval and Environmental Document (PA&ED)/Preliminary Engineering (PE) (30%)	Conduct Environmental Impact Report/Environmental Impact Statement (EIR/EIS) process, including preliminary engineering at a 30% level of design	\$11.6 million
Plans, Specifications, and Estimates (PS&E)	Develop, plans, specifications, and estimates (PS&E) package for construction	\$26.4 million
Right-of-way (ROW)	Purchase ROW	\$30.0 million
Construction	Construct project	\$462.0 million
Total		\$530.0 million

Source: AECOM.

Chapter 5

Ridership Forecasts

A key component of the Strategic Plan was a comprehensive ridership modeling effort to estimate the Project's ridership benefits and assist in preliminary operations planning for the new service, including refining proposed trainset and platform lengths. This effort is described in more detail in this chapter.

- **5.1 Methodology**
- **5.2 Results**
- **5.3 Train Capacity Analysis**

5.1 Methodology

Ridership forecasting for the Strategic Plan was conducted concurrently with ridership forecasting for the following two planning efforts:

- Southern Alameda County Integrated Rail Analysis (“SoCo Rail Study”), a planning-level study led by the Metropolitan Transportation Commission (MTC) to support a proposed extension of ACE service to a second Bay Area terminus at the Union City Intermodal Station, where ACE would connect with the BART system, Dumbarton Corridor buses to/from the Peninsula, and other local transit services.
- Service planning related to the expanded Valley Rail Program providing connectivity to the California High-Speed Rail system’s EOS between Merced and Bakersfield.

The ridership forecasts were developed by combining and synthesizing results from two independent models in a joint-model approach that allows the ridership forecasting effort to take advantage of each individual model’s strengths:

- The AECOM-created ACE Passenger Rail Forecasting Model (“ACE Model”), which is focused on ACE, the *San Joaquin*, Valley Link, and passenger rail in general, and encompasses a larger, megaregional and interregional geography for the expanded ACE and Amtrak *San Joaquin* systems.
- The Alameda County Transportation Commission (ACTC) travel demand forecasting model (“ACTC Model”), which provides finer modeling detail at the (future) Union City end of the combined ACE and *San Joaquin* system.

The ACE Model covers a geographic extent that is well beyond any of the individual urban travel demand models used by MPOs such as BCAG, SACOG, the San Joaquin Council of Governments (SJCOC), or MTC. Those models are typically used within individual metropolitan areas but are not designed to look at large interregional travel spanning multiple metropolitan areas. In the San Francisco Bay Area (specifically, at the future Union City terminus), the joint-modeling approach takes advantage of the ACTC Model’s network assignment procedures to allow for better reporting of transfers (e.g., to/from BART) and other ridership statistics.

Demographic forecasts for the two models were updated to the most recent datasets available from Caltrans’s Transportation Economics Branch (for the ACE Model) and from Plan Bay Area 2040 and SJCOC’s 2018 Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) (for the ACTC Model).

The base-year ACE Model was first calibrated to pre-pandemic (2019) conditions, followed by application of an adjustment factor to account for the long-term effects of the pandemic on ridership (e.g., increase in work-from-home activity). Trendlines were extrapolated out to the horizon year (2030)⁽¹²⁾ by observing actual ridership performance for ACE and the *San Joaquin* during the pre-pandemic and pandemic recovery phases, from 2019 through to early 2023.

Based on these trendlines, adjustment factors for long-term post-pandemic ridership recovery were developed separately for intercity rail (0.84) and commuter rail (0.52). These long-term ridership recovery factors reflect the percentage (84 percent and 52 percent, respectively) of annual ridership recovery for the forecast year (2030) compared to pre-pandemic (2019) levels. Since the development of these adjustment factors, ridership has continued to improve, with the *San Joaquin* at 75 percent of the FY19 level for the first four months of FY23 (while still running one less roundtrip than before the pandemic) and ACE ridership recovery accelerating

(12) The horizon year of 2030 was selected for planning purposes only, to maximize consistency with ridership modeling conducted for the expanded Valley Rail Program and other related projects. Ridership forecasts for a horizon year of 2031 (reflecting the actual expected start of service for the Project) would be very similar to the results presented here for 2030.

considerably since March 2023. These adjustment factors and the resulting ridership forecasts presented here can therefore be considered conservative.

The ridership forecasts for the Strategic Plan are preliminary and intended only for the purposes of informing project planning and development. Further ridership analysis will be conducted as part of subsequent environmental clearance for North Valley Rail.

More information on the joint-model approach, base-year model development and validation, post-pandemic ridership trends, and demographic assumptions can be found in [Appendix D](#).

5.2 Results

Forecasted annual ridership in 2030 with and without the Project is summarized in [Table 5-1](#). Overall, the forecasts show strong ridership potential for the new North Valley Rail service, with ridership increasing by 8 percent (592,100 passengers annually, or approximately 1,622 passengers daily) across the combined ACE and *San Joaquin*s network as a result of the extension of the four roundtrips north of Natomas into the North Valley.

Table 5-1: Forecasted Annual Ridership (2030) – Systemwide Summary

	2030 No Build	2030 Build	
		Total	Change (relative to No Build)
Annual ridership	7,883,100	8,475,200	592,100
Train-only (non-transfers)	5,777,600	6,204,200	426,600
Transfers with HSR	1,984,500	2,056,900	72,400
Transfers between ACE and <i>San Joaquin</i> s	91,100	108,200	17,100
Transfers with Thruway bus	29,900	105,900	76,000
Average daily ridership	21,598	23,220	1,622

Source: AECOM.

Annual boardings and alightings at each of the four North Valley Rail stations and at the future Natomas Station in 2030 with and without the Project are summarized in [Table 5-2](#). Marysville–Yuba City and Chico would each see approximately 200,000 annual passengers, followed by Plumas Lake and Gridley at around 100,000 annual passengers each.

Table 5-2: Forecasted Annual Ridership (2030) – Station-Level Detail

Station	2030 No Build	2030 Build
Chico	—	198,400
Gridley	—	91,900 (a)
Marysville–Yuba City	—	201,700
Plumas Lake	—	113,900
Natomas	503,100	541,100

Source: AECOM.

Notes:

(a) Includes Thruway bus transfers to/from Oroville.

To help characterize general ridership trends at the regional level for the North Valley Rail trains, a market-level flow summary was also prepared by aggregating station-pair ridership into discrete markets based on geography (e.g., Tri-Valley, Sacramento Area, etc.). While [Table 5-1](#) and [Table 5-2](#) show how ridership across the combined

ACE and *San Joaquin* system changes as a result of North Valley Rail, the market flow summary helps characterize where riders in the North Valley are heading to or from at the interregional level. The market-level flow summary is provided below in **Table 5-3**.

Table 5-3: Forecasted Annual Ridership (2030) – Market Flow Summary

Market	Annual passengers (trips)
Internal (within North Valley)	91,000
External (North Valley to/from)	
Sacramento Area	258,000
San Joaquin Valley (North and Central)	96,600
San Francisco Bay Area	67,700
HSR: San Joaquin Valley (South) and Southern California	72,400

Source: AECOM.

As shown in **Table 5-3**, the largest single market flow is associated with the Sacramento Area. Internal trips within the North Valley and trips to/from the Sacramento Area represent shorter-distance trips that are able to capture a wide variety of demand, including commuters, day-trip (e.g., business or leisure) travelers, and other passengers. For most markets beyond Sacramento—such as the northern and central San Joaquin Valley and the Bay Area—demand is strong but lower than for the Sacramento Area, reflecting longer travel distances, less frequent service, and/or the added inconvenience of transfers.

5.3 Train Capacity Analysis

In addition to the ridership forecasts, the ridership modeling effort included an analysis of passenger load between adjacent stations served by North Valley Rail trains to identify potential capacity issues related to using different trainset equipment. In order to minimize capital costs for the new service, it is worthwhile to consider designing any new infrastructure, at least in the initial stages, for trainsets shorter than the design standard being used elsewhere in the Valley Rail Program. If desired and warranted by ridership demand, the infrastructure can then be expanded at a later time to the full design standard.

BCAG and SJRRC have already indicated their preliminary intention to move forward with a design for North Valley Rail based on a Bombardier BiLevel trainset with 8 passenger coaches, which is shorter than the maximum length of 10 passenger coaches being assumed at most of the new Valley Rail stations. Based on specific design considerations at each station, the platform length to accommodate an 8-car BiLevel trainset ranges from 705 feet to 810 feet. This decision is consistent with the strategy to accommodate an 8-car BiLevel trainset for the planned platform at the Union City Intermodal Station (that platform is specified to be 745 feet in length).

The exact type of trainset(s) to be used on North Valley Rail is not known at this time, but could consist of one or more models that are currently being considered across the future ACE and *San Joaquin* systems. For the purposes of this train capacity analysis, three trainset types have been evaluated: Bombardier BiLevel (8-car) train with a total capacity of 1,056 passengers; Siemens Venture (7-car) train with a total capacity of 456 passengers; and Stadler FLIRT (3-unit) train with a total capacity of 672 passengers.

A focused link load analysis was conducted for the eight North Valley Rail single-direction trains to quantify potential crowding levels inside trains. For this analysis, screenlines were placed between each adjacent station pair on a given train's route. A screenline represents an imaginary cordon placed at a given location along a transit route, usually for the purpose of evaluating passenger loads and capacity inside transit vehicles as they pass through the screenline.

For example, if a train serves four stations (A, B, C, and D, in that order) and the passenger load (“link load”) is desired for the segment of the line between Station B and Station C, a screenline is placed at that location and the ridership is aggregated between the relevant station pairs passing through the screenline. In this case, the link load would consist of passengers going from A to C, from A to D, from B to C, and from B to D. Passengers going from A to B or from C to D do not pass through the screenline and are therefore not counted.

This process can then be repeated by placing screenlines between the remaining adjacent station pairs for the train (i.e., between A and B and between C and D) to calculate the respective link loads at those locations. Taking the highest passenger load across all of the screenlines yields the maximum link load for that train. When planning a transit service, it is useful to compare the maximum link load to the actual capacity of the transit vehicle to quantify the level of crowding inside the vehicle and confirm that there is sufficient capacity to accommodate the load.

The results of this analysis for the eight North Valley Rail trains (four trains in each direction) are summarized in **Table 5-4**.

Table 5-4: Link Load Analysis

Direction / Train	Origin (northbound) Destination (southbound)	Maximum link load	Maximum load point (a)	Capacity utilization at maximum link load		
				Bombardier BiLevel (8-car)	Siemens Venture (7-car)	Stadler FLIRT (3-unit)
Northbound						
C03	Merced (new)	261	Downtown Manteca → North Lathrop	25%	57%	39%
N01	Merced (new)	247	Sacramento City College → Midtown Sacramento	23%	54%	37%
D02	Stockton San Joaquin Street	339	Elk Grove → Sacramento City College	32%	74%	50%
W02	Union City	534	Vasco Road → Tracy	51%	117%	79%
Southbound						
W01	Union City	699	Tracy → Vasco Road	66%	153%	104%
D01	Stockton San Joaquin Street	387	Midtown Sacramento → Sacramento City College	37%	85%	58%
N06	Merced (new)	273	Midtown Sacramento → Sacramento City College	26%	60%	41%
C04	Merced (new)	355	North Lathrop → Downtown Manteca	34%	78%	53%

Source: AECOM.

Notes:

(a) Because the maximum link load reflects an average daily value, the actual load on a given day may be higher or lower due to day-to-day variability and other factors. The maximum link load for most of the eight trains is based on weekend daily ridership, which is forecasted to generally be higher than weekday ridership for the North Valley Rail trains.

As shown in **Table 5-4**, none of the proposed North Valley Rail trains would reach their maximum loads within the North Valley section (i.e., anywhere between Chico and Natomas), although 4 of the trains (N01 and D02 in the northbound direction and D01 and N06 in the southbound direction) would have maximum load points slightly south of Natomas in or near Midtown Sacramento. The other 4 trains would have maximum load points on ACE’s

Merced branch between Downtown Manteca and North Lathrop (C03 and C04) or on the ACE trunk over the Altamont Pass between Tracy and Vasco Road (W01 and W02). Barring the coupling or decoupling of additional cars or units mid-run while in revenue service, however, the trainset length is ultimately determined by the maximum load point over the entire length of the route, even if that load is not reached within the North Valley segment of the route.

Overall, capacity utilization would be highest on the Siemens Venture trainsets due to lower passenger capacity, with two of the eight trains well above the trainset capacity. With the 3-unit Stadler FLIRT trainsets, one of the trains would exceed the trainset capacity. The capacity utilization for the Bombardier BiLevel trainsets would range from 23 percent to 66 percent, but none of the eight trains would exceed the trainset capacity. Based on the results shown in **Table 5-4**, a trainset with 8 Bombardier BiLevel passenger coaches or an alternative trainset type of similar length is sufficient to accommodate the maximum loads of any of the proposed trains.

Chapter 6

Funding and Implementation Strategy

Perhaps the most important result of this Strategic Plan process is the identification of an actionable approach to realize the Project as proposed. This effort includes defining a strategy for funding and executing the Project through the various phases to completion. This strategy is described in more detail in this chapter.

- **6.1 Funding Strategy**
- **6.2 Implementation**
- **6.3 Immediate Next Steps**

6.1 Funding Strategy

The overall approach to identifying funding sources is based on the estimated “upper-limit” preliminary capital cost estimate of \$530 million, as described in **Section 4.3**, with the goal of the funding strategy being to produce an approach that can fully fund this capital budget. However, it is the goal of the Project Team and the State to look at the opportunity to reduce the upfront costs of the Project and accelerate project implementation by exploring the use of CAFs with UP, as discussed in **Section 4.2.1**. If CAFs can be used in lieu of all corridor improvements, the Project’s upfront capital costs could be reduced to \$285 million or less, but further coordination with UP is required to understand if CAFs can be used in lieu of some or all of the corridor improvements. As previously mentioned, determining the feasibility of CAFs for North Valley Rail will require further capacity analysis, engineering evaluation, and detailed rail network operations modeling by UP. Given the uncertainty of this situation, the funding strategy assumes the worst-case scenario of a funding need of \$530 million to fully implement the Project.

While a funding strategy for the entire project is still being explored and refined, a funding strategy for the next Project phase (PA&ED/PE) is well-developed and described further in this subsection. This funding strategy relies on a combination of regional and State-based funding sources for the PA&ED/PE phase so work can continue rapidly following the completion of planning, while then seeking additional State funds plus Federal funds for PS&E, permitting and ROW acquisition, and construction. For these latter phases, the overall split envisioned between State and Federal funding sources is approximately 75% State funds and 25% Federal funds.

In terms of committed funding to-date, no specific funding has been fully committed to the Project beyond State grant funds and other local/regional funds for the planning phase, involving the development of this Strategic Plan. Looking forward, BCAG and its partners are working to identify candidate funding sources for the PA&ED/PE, PS&E, permitting/ROW acquisition, and construction phases, with a solid plan for the full funding already in place for the PA&ED/PE phase, as described above.

The funding strategy and potential funding sources for each remaining Project phase are discussed in more detail in the following subsections.

6.1.1 PA&ED Phase

The next phase of project development is PA&ED, which involves preparation of the requisite environmental documents in accordance with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) and National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), as well as supporting preliminary engineering work at a 30% level of design. BCAG is pursuing the full funding for the estimated \$11.6 million for this phase through two primary funding sources:

- **State Rail Assistance (SRA) Program funds.** In regards to this funding program, North Valley Rail will be identified as an “aspiring corridor.”
- **SB 125 Formula Funds.** BCAG will draw upon a portion of their regional formula funds allocated by SB 125 for transit. These funds were authorized by SB 125 in 2023 and are being distributed to MPOs around the state.

6.1.2 PS&E Phase

For the PS&E phase (currently estimated at a cost of \$26.4 million), further utilization of SB 125 regional formula funds is being considered along with State funding sources, including SRA, the Solutions for Congested Corridors Program (SCCP), the Trade Corridor Enhancement Program (TCEP), and State Transportation Improvement Program (STIP) funds.

With the completion of a NEPA environmental document during the PA&ED phase, Federal funding sources would also enter the potential funding mix during the PS&E phase. BCAG is specifically targeting the RAISE (Rebuilding American Infrastructure with Sustainability and Equity) discretionary grant program as a potential source given that BCAG has already submitted a previous RAISE grant application for the Project. While their first attempt at RAISE funding was not successful, the Project performed well and has been encouraged to re-apply by officials at the United States Department of Transportation.

Other federal funding sources that may be considered are the Consolidated Rail Infrastructure and Safety Improvements (CRISI) Program, Multimodal Project Discretionary Grant (MPDG) Program, the Federal–State Partnership (FSP) for Intercity Passenger Rail Grant Program, and the Corridor Identification and Development (“Corridor ID”) Program.

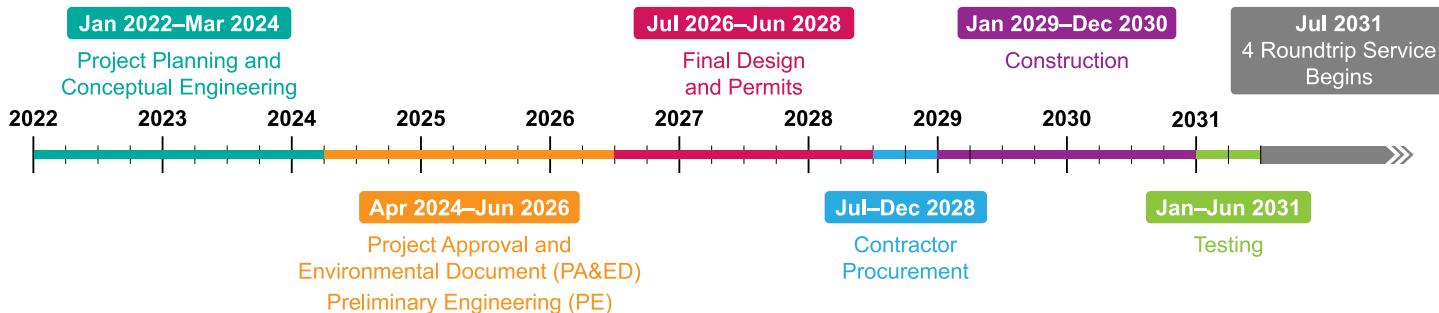
6.1.3 Permitting/ROW Acquisition and Construction Phases

Following the PS&E phase, the remaining phases of the Project include permitting/ROW acquisition and construction. Taken together the capital costs for these phases are estimated at \$492 million. In terms of State funding, applying for a statewide Transit and Intercity Rail Capital Program (TIRCP) grant will be pursued. Other State funds to be considered during these phases include SRA, TCEP, SCCP, and STIP, while Federal funds could include RAISE, CRISI, and, if still available at the time, funds from the MPDG, FSP, and Corridor ID programs. Additionally, FTA’s Capital Investment Grants (CIG) Small Starts program could also be considered if CAFs can bring the upfront cost down under the \$400 million project cost cap for that program. Additionally, if SB 125 regional formula funds are renewed beyond the current allocations, this source will also be considered.

6.2 Implementation

Figure 6-1 shows the overall schedule for project implementation by major phase. Confirmation of schedule durations and milestones is subject to additional coordination with project stakeholders during project development. Based on current knowledge, the expected service start date is sometime around July 2031.

Figure 6-1: Project Schedule by Phase



Source: AECOM.

The immediate next phase for the Project is PA&ED, which is expected to commence in the Spring of 2024 and involves preparing the project’s environmental document (EIR/EIS) and conducting preliminary engineering to support the environmental document. For this phase, SJRRC will serve as the lead agency, with SJPPA participating as a Responsible Agency under CEQA (i.e., with discretionary approval authority over relevant portions of the project). This approach is similar to the approach being undertaken elsewhere for other components of the larger Valley Rail Program.

BCAG will continue to participate by managing the funds utilized for the PA&ED phase, including conducting the procurement for the consultants, as well as conducting the day-to-day management of the work being produced.

Other specific areas of project implementation are discussed in more detail below.

6.2.1 Governance and Operations

SJRRRC serves as the owner, operator, and policy-making body for the ACE service. SJRRRC was created in 1995 through a joint powers agreement between San Joaquin County and the county's seven cities (Escalon, Lathrop, Lodi, Manteca, Ripon, Stockton, and Tracy), with the express purpose of improving existing rail service, establishing a rail system in San Joaquin County, and pursuing agreements for commuter rail service with Alameda County and Santa Clara County. SJRRRC subsequently pursued a separate joint powers agreement with the Alameda County Congestion Management Agency (ACCMA) and the Santa Clara Valley Transportation Authority (VTA) in 1997 to establish the Altamont Commuter Express Joint Powers Authority ("ACE JPA"). ACE service then commenced a year later in 1998.

Since 2013, SJRRRC has also served as the managing agency for SJJPA, which manages the Amtrak *San Joaquin* service (since June 2015). The SJJPA itself was established in 2012 to take over administration and management of the *San Joaquin* service from the State, following the passage of Assembly Bill (AB) 1779 with the sponsorship and support of local and regional agencies throughout the *San Joaquin* corridor. AB 1779 defined the composition of the SJJPA, extended the time for executing an interagency transfer agreement with Caltrans to 2015, and required that the transfer result in administrative or operating cost reductions. Governance and management of the *San Joaquin* was transferred to the SJJPA on July 1, 2015.

Currently, SJRRRC's Board of Directors consists of six full-voting members from San Joaquin County and two special-voting members from Alameda County. SJJPA's Board of Directors consists of 10 members—one from each of the member agencies: Alameda County, Contra Costa Transportation Authority (CCTA), Fresno Council of Governments ("Fresno COG"), Kings County Association of Governments (KCAG), Madera County Transportation Commission ("Madera CTC"), Merced County Association of Governments (MCAG), Sacramento Regional Transit, SJRRRC, Stanislaus Council of Governments ("StanCOG"), and Tulare County Association of Governments (TCAG).

Current operations for ACE and the *San Joaquin* are contracted out to Herzog Transit Services, Inc. and to Amtrak, respectively.

As ACE and the *San Joaquin* expand into new geographies as part of the larger Valley Rail program—including the North Valley—it may be necessary to consider restructuring the SJRRRC and SJJPA Boards of Directors by adding or reallocating seats to improve committee representation for these new service areas, particularly if the program relies on local sales taxes or other local funding sources from these areas to support the capital or operating budgets for the new service.

6.2.2 Fleet Considerations

As discussed in **Section 3.5**, the exact fleet to be used for North Valley Rail will depend on several factors and is not yet known at this time with certainty. Because North Valley Rail is being planned as an extension of Valley Rail service north from Natomas, the trainsets required to operate the service would already be operating as part of Valley Rail. Future fleet planning for the expanded Valley Rail Program is currently being led by the State (via CalSTA and Caltrans), including both funding and procuring of new trainsets. SJRRRC/SJJPA will continue to play an important role as an agency partner and a recipient of new rolling stock from that process, and both BCAG and SJRRRC/SJJPA should continue close coordination efforts with the State on outlining an overarching fleet strategy that includes North Valley Rail and the rest of the future service expansions.

For reference, a fleet based on locomotive-hauled passenger coaches would cost approximately \$48 million per trainset, including \$40 million for the passenger cars (at \$5 million per car) and \$8 million for the locomotive. On an individual basis, some of the expansions within the expanded Valley Rail Program may require several trainsets for revenue operations, or an investment on the order of \$200 million or more. Given these costs, a joint procurement process spearheaded at the State level, whereby trainsets are procured jointly as part of a single, larger contract (e.g., one that covers the overall Valley Rail program or includes other service expansions elsewhere in the state), could offer a major opportunity for cost efficiencies over individual (agency-driven) procurement due to economies of scale.

6.2.3 Permits and Approvals

In addition to environmental clearance, various permits and other approvals will be required for the project, typically from State and Federal agencies with jurisdiction in areas such as the following:

- Biological environment, such as the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), the National Marine Fisheries Service, and the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW)
- Natural waterways and other State lands, such as the California State Lands Commission (SLC)
- Civil infrastructure and systems, such as the United States Army Corps of Engineers (USACE), the United States Department of Defense, the United States Coast Guard (USCG), the California Department of Water Resources (DWR), the State Water Resources Control Board (SWRCB), and the Central Valley Flood Protection Board (CVFPB)
- Historic resources, such as the California Office of Historic Preservation (OHP)
- Tribal resources, such as the Native American Heritage Commission (NAHC)
- Railroads and utilities, such as the California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC)
- Roadways and highways, such as Caltrans
- Environmental remediation, such as the California Department of Toxic Substances Control (DTSC)

Similar permits and approvals will likely be required at the local/regional levels (e.g., from counties and municipalities for encroachment permits), as well as from other parties such as UP and various private and public utilities (e.g., for utility relocation). These permits and approvals will be identified during the PA&ED phase as part of preparation of the environmental document.

6.3 Immediate Next Steps

A fundamental step in moving the North Valley Rail project forward is ensuring that the project is identified within key planning documents. Throughout the development of this Strategic Plan, the Project Team coordinated closely with the State to ensure that the project was identified in the Draft 2023 CSRP. Coordination will continue with the State to ensure consistency between this Strategic Plan and the Final CSRP.

In terms of funding, BCAG, in coordination with SJRRC, SJJPA, and other project partners, has begun working to secure funds for the PA&ED phase. Securing funding in the near-term is a high-priority so the project can maintain its momentum. Approximately \$11.6 million in funding is needed to cover this phase, which would include clearance under both CEQA and NEPA and 30% preliminary engineering.

SJRRC, SJJPA, and BCAG will also continue coordination on project implementation with external parties and stakeholders, including UP and local/regional agencies.

As part of the PA&ED phase, ridership forecasts will be refined, focusing on the more definitive project description and considering a longer-term horizon year and the impact of recent trends (as a result of data on the post-pandemic work and travel patterns and adjustments to demographic growth projections in California).

Chapter 7

Fare Strategy

This chapter describes the existing fare structures for ACE and the *San Joaquins*, as well as existing transit fares within the North Valley corridor. This is followed by a high-level analysis of potential fares for North Valley Rail (based on existing ACE and *San Joaquins* fares) and a discussion of relevant strategies for consideration when it comes time establish fares for the new service.

- **7.1 Existing Fare Structure**
- **7.2 Sample Fares**
- **7.3 Farebox Recovery and Funding Operations**
- **7.4 Fare Strategy Considerations**

7.1 Existing Fare Structure

This section describes the existing fare structures for both ACE and the *San Joaquin*, as well as existing transit fares within the North Valley corridor.

7.1.1 ACE

7.1.1.1 Overview

ACE operates on a “first come, first served” basis without reserved seating. The fare structure is a distance-based system with five basic fare buckets (one-way, round-trip, 10-trip, 20-trip, and monthly). Current ACE fares by station pair are summarized in **Table 7-1**.

As shown in **Table 7-1**, fare pricing increases with distance but also incorporates some zone-based pricing, with stations in the Tri-Valley (Pleasanton, Livermore, and Vasco Road) and in Santa Clara County (San Jose, Santa Clara, and Great America) each treated as station groups or zones and sharing a uniform fare. For example, a passenger traveling to or from the Tri-Valley zone will be assessed the same fare whether the Tri-Valley end of their trip is at Pleasanton, Livermore, or Vasco Road. The same holds for passengers traveling to or from the Santa Clara zone. For passengers traveling between the Tri-Valley and Santa Clara zones, there are nine different station pairs (18 total, if considering both directions of the service) that all share the same fares.

Table 7-1 also shows that there is a total of 11 different pricepoints across the system, with one-way fares ranging from \$4.25 to \$15.50. These pricepoints can be mapped across the station pairs to better illustrate the differences between specific station groups or zones. This analysis is shown in **Table 7-2**.

As shown in **Table 7-2**, pricepoints are lowest for fares within the Tri-Valley and Santa Clara zones (Pricepoint A), gradually increasing until reaching the maximum pricepoint (Pricepoint J) for trips between Stockton and the Santa Clara zone. Due to the zonal delineation and other considerations, the escalation in pricepoints is not directly proportional to trip distance. For example, trips between Tracy and Pleasanton (approximately 30 miles one-way) are assigned Pricepoint C1 and are cheaper than trips between Stockton and Tracy (approximately 23 miles one-way), which are assigned Pricepoint D. Also of interest is the “jump” in fares between Pricepoint D (\$6.50 one-way fare) and Pricepoint E (\$10.25 one-way fare), as well as the differential pricing for 10-trip tickets between Pricepoints C1 and C2.

Tickets for ACE may be purchased on mobile devices via ACE’s mobile ticketing platform (the ACE Rail mTickets app), and passengers are encouraged to activate their ticket prior to boarding the train. Tickets may also be purchased in paper form from approved ACE ticket vendors and at many ACE stations such as Stockton, Lathrop–Manteca, Tracy, Livermore, Pleasanton, Fremont, Great America, and San Jose. Paper tickets (except for monthly passes) must be validated before boarding the train.

Passengers who purchase 11 consecutive monthly passes also qualify for a free monthly pass for the 12th month through ACE’s Loyalty Reward Program.

In terms of commuter benefits programs, ACE accepts payments via transit benefit cards and Wageworks vouchers. Clipper, the Bay Area’s regional transit card, is not accepted on ACE.

Table 7-1: Existing ACE Fare Structure – Station-Pair Detail

Origin station and ticket type ↓ ↓ ↓ ↓		Fares														
		← Destination station / MP →														
		Downtown Stockton	Lathrop–Manteca	Tracy	Vasco Road	Livermore	Pleasanton	Fremont	Great America	Santa Clara						
		SKT	LTM	TRA	VAS	LIV	PLS	FMT	GAC	SCC	SJC					
		85.6	74.8	62.3	42.0	39.1	32.5	19.5	6.9	2.6	0.0					
Downtown Stockton	One-way Round-trip 10-trip 20-trip Monthly			\$5.25 \$6.50 \$26.25 \$52.25 \$97.50	\$6.50 \$12.25 \$52.00 \$93.25 \$168.75	\$10.75 \$16.75 \$75.00 \$131.50 \$241.75	\$10.75 \$16.75 \$75.00 \$131.50 \$241.75	\$12.25 \$22.00 \$98.00 \$170.50 \$312.75	\$15.50 \$27.50 \$120.00 \$210.25 \$386.00	\$15.50 \$27.50 \$120.00 \$210.25 \$386.00	\$15.50 \$27.50 \$120.00 \$210.25 \$386.00					
Lathrop–Manteca	One-way Round-trip 10-trip 20-trip Monthly				\$6.25 \$11.75 \$50.00 \$88.25 \$161.25	\$10.25 \$16.00 \$73.00 \$125.75 \$231.25	\$10.25 \$16.00 \$73.00 \$125.75 \$231.25	\$11.75 \$20.25 \$94.00 \$163.00 \$299.75	\$14.50 \$26.00 \$155.00 \$201.00 \$370.00	\$14.50 \$26.00 \$155.00 \$201.00 \$370.00	\$14.50 \$26.00 \$155.00 \$201.00 \$370.00					
Tracy	One-way Round-trip 10-trip 20-trip Monthly				\$6.25 \$11.75 \$50.00 \$88.25 \$161.25	\$6.25 \$11.75 \$50.00 \$88.25 \$161.25	\$6.25 \$11.75 \$50.00 \$88.25 \$161.25	\$10.25 \$16.00 \$73.00 \$125.75 \$231.25	\$11.75 \$20.25 \$94.00 \$163.00 \$299.75	\$11.75 \$20.25 \$94.00 \$163.00 \$299.75	\$11.75 \$20.25 \$94.00 \$163.00 \$299.75					
Vasco Road	One-way Round-trip 10-trip 20-trip Monthly					\$4.75 \$6.25 \$50.00 \$50.50 \$93.50	\$4.75 \$6.25 \$50.00 \$50.50 \$93.50	\$6.25 \$11.75 \$73.00 \$88.25 \$161.25	\$10.25 \$16.00 \$73.00 \$125.75 \$231.25	\$10.25 \$16.00 \$73.00 \$125.75 \$231.25	\$10.25 \$16.00 \$73.00 \$125.75 \$231.25	\$10.25 \$16.00 \$73.00 \$125.75 \$231.25				
Livermore	One-way Round-trip 10-trip 20-trip Monthly						\$4.75 \$6.25 \$50.00 \$50.50 \$93.50	\$6.25 \$11.75 \$73.00 \$88.25 \$161.25	\$10.25 \$16.00 \$73.00 \$125.75 \$231.25	\$10.25 \$16.00 \$73.00 \$125.75 \$231.25	\$10.25 \$16.00 \$73.00 \$125.75 \$231.25	\$10.25 \$16.00 \$73.00 \$125.75 \$231.25				
Pleasanton	One-way Round-trip 10-trip 20-trip Monthly							\$6.25 \$11.75 \$73.00 \$88.25 \$161.25	\$10.25 \$16.00 \$73.00 \$125.75 \$231.25	\$10.25 \$16.00 \$73.00 \$125.75 \$231.25	\$10.25 \$16.00 \$73.00 \$125.75 \$231.25	\$10.25 \$16.00 \$73.00 \$125.75 \$231.25	\$10.25 \$16.00 \$73.00 \$125.75 \$231.25			
Fremont	One-way Round-trip 10-trip 20-trip Monthly								\$6.25 \$11.75 \$50.00 \$88.25 \$161.25	\$6.25 \$11.75 \$50.00 \$88.25 \$161.25	\$6.25 \$11.75 \$50.00 \$88.25 \$161.25	\$6.25 \$11.75 \$50.00 \$88.25 \$161.25	\$6.25 \$11.75 \$50.00 \$88.25 \$161.25	\$6.25 \$11.75 \$50.00 \$88.25 \$161.25		
Great America	One-way Round-trip 10-trip 20-trip Monthly									\$4.75 \$6.25 \$30.00 \$50.50 \$93.50	\$4.75 \$6.25 \$30.00 \$50.50 \$93.50	\$4.75 \$6.25 \$30.00 \$50.50 \$93.50	\$4.75 \$6.25 \$30.00 \$50.50 \$93.50	\$4.75 \$6.25 \$30.00 \$50.50 \$93.50	\$4.75 \$6.25 \$30.00 \$50.50 \$93.50	
Santa Clara	One-way Round-trip 10-trip 20-trip Monthly										\$4.75 \$6.25 \$30.00 \$50.50 \$93.50	\$4.75 \$6.25 \$30.00 \$50.50 \$93.50	\$4.75 \$6.25 \$30.00 \$50.50 \$93.50	\$4.75 \$6.25 \$30.00 \$50.50 \$93.50	\$4.75 \$6.25 \$30.00 \$50.50 \$93.50	\$4.75 \$6.25 \$30.00 \$50.50 \$93.50
San Jose	One-way Round-trip 10-trip 20-trip Monthly															

Source: ACE (via <https://acerail.com/tickets/>).

Table 7-2: Existing ACE Fare Structure – Pricepoint Summary

Origin station	← Destination station →									Fares by pricepoint								
	SKT	LTM	TRA	VAS	LIV	PLS	FMT	GAC	SCC	SJC	One-way	Round-trip	10-trip	20-trip	Monthly			
SKT		B	D	F	F	F	H	J	J	J	A	\$4.75	\$6.25	\$30.00	\$50.50	\$93.50		
LTM				C1	E	E	E	G	I	I	I	B	\$5.25	\$6.50	\$26.25	\$52.25	\$97.50	
TRA					C1	C1	C1	E	G	G	G	C1	\$6.25	\$11.75	\$50.00	\$88.25	\$161.25	
VAS						A	A	C2	E	E	E	C2	\$6.25	\$11.75	\$73.00	\$88.25	\$161.25	
LIV							A	C2	E	E	E	C2	\$6.50	\$12.25	\$52.00	\$93.25	\$168.75	
PLS								C2	E	E	E		E	\$10.25	\$16.00	\$73.00	\$125.75	\$231.25
FMT									C1	C1	C1		F	\$10.75	\$16.75	\$75.00	\$131.50	\$241.75
GAC											A	A	G	\$11.75	\$20.25	\$94.00	\$163.00	\$299.75
SCC											A	A	H	\$12.25	\$22.00	\$98.00	\$170.50	\$312.75
SJC												A	I	\$14.50	\$26.00	\$155.00	\$201.00	\$370.00
												J	\$15.50	\$27.50	\$120.00	\$210.25	\$386.00	

Source: ACE (via <https://acerail.com/tickets/>).

7.1.1.2 Special Discount Programs

In addition to the discounts offered for more frequent riders through the five basic fare buckets discussed above, ACE also offers discounts for seniors, people with disabilities, and Medicare recipients. To qualify for these discounts, each discount requires the passenger to meet specific requirements. For instance, passengers with a disability need to provide documentation of a qualified disability to the Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV). Passengers with Medicare must provide a copy of their Medicare card and a photo identification when purchasing a ticket to receive a discount. Seniors aged 65 and older are also eligible for a discount if a valid photo identification is presented during purchase at the station.

Passengers who already have a reduced fare identification card for connecting transit services, such as an Access San Joaquin Discount Fare Card (DFC) or a Regional Transit Connection (RTC) Discount Card, are also eligible for discounted fares when presenting their card as proof. To receive these discounts through the ACE Rail mTickets app, the passenger must submit a paper application to enroll.

Children aged five and under can travel for free when accompanied by a paying adult, while tickets for children between six and 12 years old are available at a 50-percent discount.

Groups of 10 or more people also qualify for group travel, which includes station-to-door itinerary service and reserved seating for the group in a designated section of the train. For school groups, one chaperone rides free for every ten students.

7.1.1.3 Pilot Discount Programs

ACE also offers two pilot discount programs: the Student Incentive Program and the Community Assistance Program (CAP). The Student Incentive Program offers special student ticketing options for students enrolled at participating colleges (Santa Clara University, San José State University, and Las Positas College). Students at Santa Clara University and San José State University can purchase these discounted tickets directly from the college institution but not through the ACE Rail mTickets app. Students enrolled at Las Positas College need to purchase tickets at the Livermore Amador Valley Transit Authority (LAVTA)/Wheels transfer center.

Passengers who need financial assistance can apply for CAP, which offers discounts of approximately 50 percent off of regular ACE fares. Applicants must be between 13 and 64 years of age, must not be eligible for other ACE discount ticket programs, and have a household income at or below 200 percent of Federal poverty levels. Applicants must contact San Joaquin County for income assessment verification and submit an entitlement

request form to the ACE Ticketing Department for validation before being able to purchase CAP tickets through the ACE Rail mTickets app.

7.1.1.4 Future Goals

SJRRC is currently in the beginning stages of a comprehensive evaluation of ACE fares and ticketing, starting with an assessment of the current fare structure. Currently, there is no well-defined methodology for setting ACE fares, and discounts by bucket (i.e., round-trip, 10-trip, 20-trip, monthly) are not consistent across the system. One of the key outcomes of this effort could be the establishment of normalized discount percentages by bucket systemwide, with the overall goal being to implement a rational fare system modeled on the current *San Joaquin* fare system. SJRRC staff have been evaluating several potential options for revamping ACE fares and have identified one scenario for potential implementation that aligns closely with the current *San Joaquin* fares.

The timing for this overall process is tied to SJRRC's pursuit of a new, fully-digitized ticketing platform for ACE, which is a key component of modernizing ACE's "in-station" ticket offerings and unifying passenger behavior across both app-based and paper ticketing. With this change, all passengers—regardless of whether they have an app-based or paper ticket—would be required to tap or scan their ticket at an electronic validator at the station prior to boarding. The new ticketing platform would also eliminate the need for new agreements with third-party ticket companies (e.g., at stations). A Request for Information (RFI) for the new ticketing platform was released in May 2023, and a Request for Proposals (RFP) is expected to be released shortly. The target completion date for the new ticketing platform is sometime in 2026.

7.1.2 *San Joaquin*

7.1.2.1 Overview

As the operator of the service, Amtrak manages and operates ticketing for *San Joaquin* trains and connecting Thruway buses, but general fare policy is established by the SJJPA.⁽¹³⁾ The *San Joaquin* service operates on a reserved ticketing system, where tickets are valid only for a specific date and for a specific train or Thruway bus, and must be purchased prior to boarding.⁽¹⁴⁾ Like other Amtrak services, tickets can be purchased online through the Amtrak website (<http://www.amtrak.com>) or *San Joaquin* website (<https://amtraksanjoaquin.com/>), through the Amtrak mobile app, at automated ticket kiosks (at most stations), by phone, at ticket counters at staffed stations, or through travel agents. If seats are available, tickets may be purchased from the conductor after boarding the train, but a surcharge is applied if the boarding station is staffed. All *San Joaquin* tickets are for "coach" class, reflecting the current rolling stock design and amenities. Purchasing a ticket guarantees a seat on the train or Thruway bus, but not a specific seat.⁽¹⁵⁾

Fares are calculated according to a distance-based formula, with a descending fare-per-mile contribution as trip distance increases, and then rounded to the nearest \$0.25. Passengers purchasing a combined rail and Thruway bus ticket are assessed a fare equal to the sum of the individual rail and bus tickets. Transfer discounts are not explicitly offered for combined rail and Thruway bus tickets, as the formula's cost-per-mile is lower for Thruway buses than for trains, providing an inherent discount for combined tickets. In the past, Thruway bus tickets were

(13) Ticket modification and cancellation are subject to Amtrak policies.

(14) In terms of operations, reserved ticketing allows for better control over seating capacity to prevent standing conditions, particularly during periods of high demand. When displaying potential itineraries during the booking process, Amtrak's reserved ticketing system also indicates the level of crowding (e.g., "90% full") to give passengers the option to choose trains or buses with more available capacity.

(15) The ticket reservation system allows for a 5-percent overbooking policy to avoid cases where a given itinerary may appear as "sold out" even though the passenger would only be without a seat for a short segment of the trip.

not sold individually and needed to be purchased as part of a rail trip. With the passage of SB 742 in 2019, however, some Thruway bus routes have become available for bus-only ticketing, whereby passengers are no longer required to have a connecting train ticket.

The *San Joaquin*s employ a single-bucket fare structure, but with peak and shoulder pricing⁽¹⁶⁾, typically around holiday periods such as Memorial Day (last Monday in May), Independence Day (July 4), Labor Day (first Monday in September), Thanksgiving (last Thursday in November), Christmas Day (December 25), and New Year's Eve (December 31). The base "Value" fare, which includes a cancellation fee and restrictions on itinerary changes, applies in most cases, but some segments offer a "Flex" fare—with full refundability for cancellation and no fees for itinerary changes—at a slightly higher pricepoint.

When SJJPA assumed management of the *San Joaquin*s in 2015, the service employed revenue management more liberally, with Amtrak increasing fares based on multiple escalation price-points as available capacity decreased or if warranted by potential opportunities for increased revenue. SJJPA subsequently revised the fare policy for the *San Joaquin*s to eliminate revenue management, citing equity impacts, poorer ridership performance (particularly among last-minute bookings), and other factors. As a result, *San Joaquin*s fares are no longer escalated directly based on available capacity or time of booking. However, adoption of the peak and shoulder pricing schemes allows SJJPA to continue employing some elements of revenue management. As the contract operator for the service, Amtrak has expressed interest in returning to more aggressive revenue management to increase fare revenue, but SJJPA has thus far not agreed to further changes to this effect.

In addition to individual tickets, the *San Joaquin*s offers three different multi-ride passes for frequent riders, valid for a single fixed pair of trip ends (rail stations or Thruway bus stops):

- **Monthly Pass.** The Monthly Pass offers unlimited rides within a given calendar month and provides a discount of up to 50 percent (assuming a usage rate of 20 days, or 40 one-way trips). The Monthly Pass is only available for rail-only trips, with the exception of combined rail and Thruway bus trips to/from San Francisco.
- **10-Ride Pass.** The 10-Ride Pass offers 10 one-way rides at a 30-percent discount. The 10-Ride Pass is valid for a 90-day period (beginning the day of the first ride) and available for all rail and Thruway bus services.
- **6TIX Student Pass.** The 6TIX Student Pass offers six one-way rides at a 30-percent discount. Users are required to have valid college or university identification on hand to present to the conductor. The 6TIX Student Pass is valid for 365 days (beginning the day of the first ride) and available for all rail and Thruway bus services.

Passes are available for purchase online, through the Amtrak mobile app, at ticket counters and ticket kiosks at stations, or by phone. After purchasing a pass, passengers must make a ticket reservation prior to boarding to apply the pass for a given ride.

Amtrak also offers two additional passes—the USA Rail Pass and California Rail Pass—with larger geographical coverage. The USA Rail Pass is valid for 10 rides (segments) over a 30-day period (beginning with the first segment) on Amtrak services throughout the country (with some route exceptions and other restrictions). The California Rail Pass, which must be purchased at a staffed station, is valid for travel on any 7 days during a consecutive 21-day period, with eligible services consisting of the three State-operated corridors (*San Joaquin*, *Capitol Corridor*, and *Pacific Surfliner*) and most of their connecting Thruway buses (including service to Reno

(16) "Peak" pricing applies an additional 20-percent fee during the peak demand period; "shoulder" pricing applies an additional 10-percent fee during the "shoulder" periods leading up to or following after the peak demand period.

and Las Vegas), as well as the *Coast Starlight* between Los Angeles and Dunsmuir (Siskiyou County). For both passes, travel is restricted to two roundtrips (four one-way trips) on a given route segment.

7.1.2.2 Discount Programs

The *San Joaquins* offer several standardized and seasonal discounts to reduce the burden of ticket prices and promote ridership:

- **California Everyday Discounts.** Developed in coordination with the two other State-funded intercity services (*Capitol Corridor* and *Pacific Surfliner*), this program provides a 15-percent discount for the following passengers when entering a discount code during booking checkout:

- Seniors (62 years of age or older)
- Passengers with disabilities and their companions
- Veterans and active military personnel, including their spouses and dependents
- Students between the ages of 13 and 25

Children between 2 and 12 years of age receive a 50-percent discount.

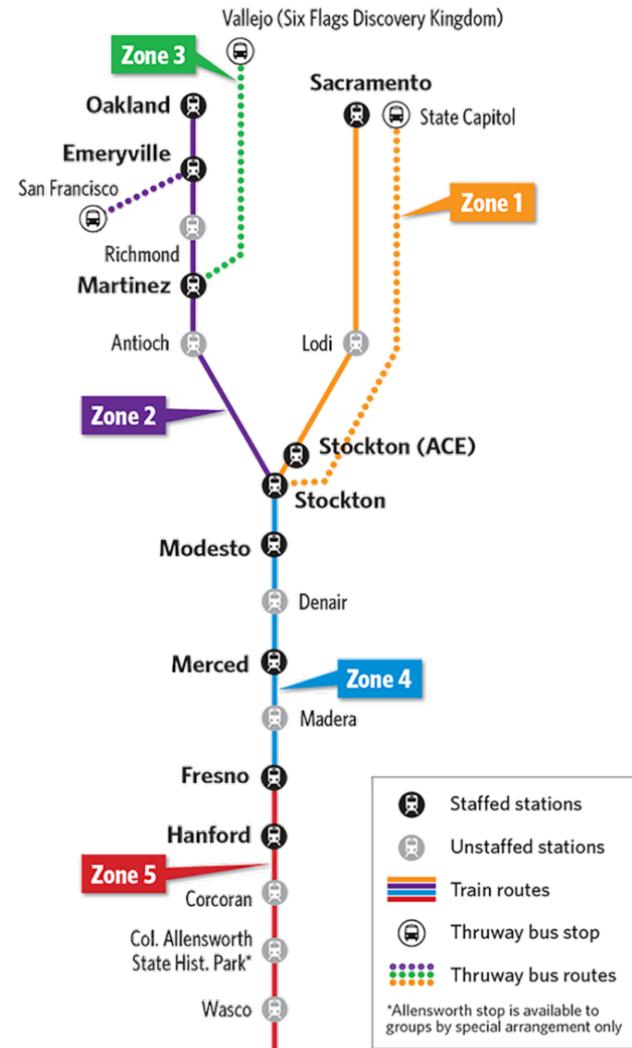
- **Group discounts.** To increase competitiveness with other modes for passengers traveling in groups, the *San Joaquins* also offers several discounts specifically for group passengers:

- **Groups.** Passengers traveling together in groups of 15 or more are eligible for a 30-percent discount off the normal fare.
- **Kids 'n' Trains.** This seasonal program offers significantly reduced fares for school and youth groups (grades K–12 or ages 5 to 18) and their chaperones. The same low fare is offered for everyone in the group, both children and adults, for one-way or round-trip travel on the same day. For round-trip travel, the fare is doubled if the return leg is not on the same day. Currently, the program is structured around five zones as shown in **Figure 7-1**, with slightly different pricing for Zone 1 and for Zones 2–5. Travel on Thruway buses under this program is only permitted between Emeryville and San Francisco, between Stockton and Sacramento, and between Martinez and Six Flags Discovery Kingdom.
- **Friends and Family.** This program offers discounts for small groups of up to 6

Figure 7-1: Kids 'n' Trains Zone Map

KIDS 'N' TRAINS

San Joaquins Zone Map



Source: SJPA.

passengers. The promotion offers a 50-percent discount for each companion fare with the purchase of a full-fare adult ticket.

Beyond the discount programs described above, the *San Joaquin*s also offer additional promotional overlays to further drive incremental ridership and revenue. Examples of regular promotions currently in effect (as of July 2023) or recently offered include the following:

- **Summer travel sale.** With the purchase of one ticket, this promotion offers a discount of 50 percent on up to 5 additional tickets.
- **Spring break sale.** This promotion offers a discount of 30 percent on tickets.
- **Senior midweek sale.** This promotion offers a 50-percent discount for seniors when traveling on Tuesdays, Wednesdays, or Thursdays.

The *San Joaquin*s also occasionally operate special trains or offer mini-campaigns as a regular part of partnerships and strategies for incremental ridership and revenue. Special trains typically involve extending a regularly-scheduled train, adding a “special” (i.e., non-regularly-scheduled) station stop, or operating a special train, usually as a way to introduce new riders to the service at marginal additional operating cost and substantially reduced fares. Examples include the special stop at Allensworth (for Colonel Allensworth State Historic Park) and the Battle of the Bay (games between the Bay Area’s two Major League Baseball franchises, the San Francisco Giants and Oakland Athletics).

Mini-campaigns are typically designed to promote ridership in a specific area of the corridor, often in conjunction with an event, typically involving a discount for a certain stop for a day or other designated period of time. Examples include mini-campaigns for the Hanford Winter Wonderland ice rink and the California Hispanic Chambers of Commerce’s California Business Policy Summit.

As the service is currently operated by Amtrak, the *San Joaquin*s are also eligible for membership points accrual and redemption through the Amtrak Guest Rewards program.

7.1.2.3 Fare Policy History and Future Goals

The current fare structure and policy for the *San Joaquin*s originate from the analysis supporting SJJPA’s decision in 2018 to eliminate revenue management. As part of this analysis, fares for the *San Joaquin*s were normalized along the fare-per-mile methodology described above (including a decreasing fare-per-mile calculation as trip length increases) to ensure a more equitable fare structure throughout the corridor. This process was undertaken with some guidance from Amtrak and the LOSSAN Rail Corridor Agency based on a similar normalization process undertaken for the *Pacific Surfliner*.

The fare policy document identifies several key longer-term goals requiring additional analysis and exploration:

- **Fare capping.** With a significant share of *San Joaquin*s ridership coming from disadvantaged communities, fare capping would ease the financial burden of fares by allowing riders to “build” their way to a discounted multi-ride pass one ride at a time, as opposed to paying the full cost upfront. Implementation schemes could include capping fare payments at a given number of trips within a given time period or offering a graduated discount for each new trip based on the number of trips already taken. Examples of transit agencies in California that have recently implemented fare capping include the Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority (LACMTA or “Metro”); San Diego Metropolitan Transit System (MTS) and North County Transit District (NTCD); the Alameda–Contra Costa Transit District (“AC Transit”); and SacRT.

- **Means-based fares.** As described above, the *San Joaquin*s already offers several discount programs, but like many transit operators, these discounts are primarily intended for vulnerable or dependent age groups (e.g., seniors, children) and people with disabilities. With the increased industry-wide focus on equity more recently, many transit agencies have been implementing or exploring discounted fare structures based on income level. Examples of recent implementations of means-based fare programs in California include the Low Income Fare is Easy (“LIFE”) program being administered in the Los Angeles area by LACMTA and the Clipper START pilot program being administered in the San Francisco Bay Area by MTC.
- **Business class.** Amtrak already offers business class in the Northeast Corridor, the Midwest corridors, and select West Coast corridors (*Cascades* and *Pacific Surfliner*), but the *San Joaquin*s currently only offers a single (“coach”) fare class. The SJPPA has included exploration of a new “business” class section in its latest annual business plans. At the bare minimum, implementation would require development of a methodology and fare grid for the new fare class, but could also include considerations related to rolling stock (e.g., seating configuration).⁽¹⁷⁾
- **Single-use coupons.** SJPPA is currently exploring single-use coupons as an overlay to capture ridership from event intercepts and partner promotions.
- **Future fare increases.** Establishing a well-defined methodology for regular fare increases based on inflation, operating cost increases, and other factors will help ensure a stable fare revenue stream for the *San Joaquin*s.

7.1.3 Existing Fares in the North Valley Corridor

7.1.3.1 Overview

In addition to looking at existing fare structures and policies for ACE and the *San Joaquin*s, it is also useful to consider existing fares for public transit within the North Valley corridor when establishing a future fare structure and policy for North Valley Rail. Fares can be a significant factor in people’s travel choices—not just when evaluating transit-based options against other modes (e.g., personal automobile), but also when weighing one or more transit-based options against each other.

While it is still too early to establish specific fares for North Valley Rail, the analysis of existing transit fares presented below can serve as a starting point to help inform that process, but will, of course, need to be updated to reflect current conditions at that time. While the analysis below focuses strictly on existing fares within the North Valley and between the North Valley and Sacramento, it can also be expanded in the future to a wider geographical area to allow additional focus on other markets beyond Sacramento (e.g., Bay Area, San Joaquin Valley).

As mentioned earlier, SJPPA staff have already completed an extensive fare normalization effort to create a distance-based fare grid for the *San Joaquin*s that is equitable across the entire system. While the basic fare grid for the new North Valley stations should follow the same methodology, a comparison against other transit-based options can be useful, particularly in cases where ridership is underperforming (which may, for example, indicate that the service is not competitive against other options) or where capacity is available to accommodate incremental ridership. Promotional overlays, for example, can help increase market share (by introducing new

(17) While the Siemens Venture cars produced for the Illinois Department of Transportation (IDOT) for use in the Midwest include business class seating, the cars being produced for Caltrans under the same joint order only include coach seating.

riders to the service) and encourage all-new demand (i.e., trips that would not have been made at all) to support the service and capture additional fare revenue, without altering the equity of the basic fare grid.

7.1.3.2 Analysis and Comparison

Fares for the *Coast Starlight* are somewhat variable, likely reflecting adjustments for available capacity and travel date based on Amtrak's revenue management policy. For example, queries through Amtrak's online booking system for travel between Chico and Sacramento on several different dates showed at least four different pricepoints for a one-way adult fare in coach class: \$18.00, \$22.00, \$27.00, and \$35.00.

Typical (adult) fares for intercity buses within the North Valley are summarized in **Table 7-3**. Fares are the same for Greyhound and FlixBus, but day-of bookings are priced more expensive than advance bookings. When booking, a transaction fee (\$3.99) is also applied for each payment transaction, separate from the fares shown in **Table 7-3**.

Table 7-3: Intercity Bus Fares (Greyhound and FlixBus)

Origin stop and booking date ↓ ↓ ↓ ↓ ↓		Fares (one-way, adult)			
		← Destination stop →			
		Chico	Oroville	Marysville	Sacramento
Chico	Day-of Advance		\$9.99 \$8.99	\$20.99 \$18.99	\$33.99 \$26.99
			\$9.99 \$8.99	\$15.99 \$13.99	\$38.99 \$35.99
Marysville	Day-of Advance	\$20.99 \$18.99	\$15.99 \$13.99		\$19.99 \$17.99
Sacramento	Day-of Advance	\$33.99 \$26.99	\$38.99 \$35.99	\$19.99 \$17.99	

Source: AECOM.

As shown in **Table 7-3**, day-of bookings are slightly more expensive than advance bookings, with the difference ranging anywhere from as little as \$1.00 for shorter-distance trips (e.g., Chico ↔ Oroville) and \$7.00 for longer-distance trips (e.g., Chico ↔ Sacramento). Also of note is the lower fare for Chico ↔ Sacramento trips than for Oroville ↔ Sacramento trips, which may have to do with competition with the *Coast Starlight*.

Fares for the Yuba–Sutter Transit commuter bus service are shown in **Table 7-4**.

As might be expected, the commuter bus generally offers the cheapest fares within the corridor relative to distance, although travel is only possible between the Yuba–Sutter area and Sacramento. For travel between Butte County and the Yuba–Sutter area or Sacramento, the *Coast Starlight* or intercity bus may be cheaper, depending on the desired itinerary and time of booking. Between Chico and Sacramento, for example, the *Coast Starlight* generally appears to be cheaper than intercity bus, except in cases when the fare has been escalated to the highest buckets. In these situations, typically for bookings under short notice, intercity bus can be cheaper. As the *Coast Starlight* does not stop at intermediate stations between Chico and Sacramento, transit users likely default to intercity bus for trips between Butte County and the Yuba–Sutter area.

Table 7-4: Commuter Bus Fares (Yuba–Sutter Transit)

Fare category or product		Morning/ afternoon	Midday
One-way fare: Basic fare		\$4.50	\$4.50
One-way fare: Senior (age 65+) or passenger with disabilities		\$4.50	\$2.25
One-way fare: Youth (age 5–18)		\$4.50	\$2.25
One-way fare: Children (age 4 and under with adult)	(a)	Free	Free
Monthly pass: Yuba–Sutter Transit only	(b)	\$135.00	
Monthly pass: Yuba–Sutter Transit and SacRT	(b)	\$185.00	

Source: Yuba–Sutter Transit (via https://www.yubasuttertransit.com/files/fa794cf01/YST_Sacramento_09-01-20+v3.pdf).

Notes:

- (a) Limit of two free fares per adult.
- (b) Monthly passes are valid on both morning/afternoon and midday Sacramento service, as well as any local or rural fixed-route service operated by Yuba–Sutter Transit.

7.1.3.3 Thruway Route 3

In addition to the above three options, Thruway Bus Route 3 also operates through the North Valley corridor, providing timed connections at Stockton San Joaquin Street station with Oakland-branch *San Joaquin*s trains for continuing journeys south of Stockton. Because Route 3 is not currently eligible for bus-only travel as allowed under SB 742, passengers must currently purchase a connecting train ticket in order to use Route 3 for travel within the North Valley corridor. As combined rail and bus fares on the *San Joaquin*s service are the sum of the individual rail and bus portions of the trip, the bus-only fare associated with the North Valley portion can be derived by comparing the full combined (rail and bus) fare against the fare for the rail-only portion of the trip. This analysis is shown in **Table 7-5** using sample itineraries from Stockton San Joaquin Street to the North Valley.

Table 7-5: Thruway Route 3 Fares

Combined rail and bus trip Stockton San Joaquin Street to or from:	Actual fare (one-way, adult)	Rail-only trip Stockton San Joaquin Street to or from:	Actual fare (one-way, adult)	Thruway-only trip Sacramento to or from:	Estimated fare (one-way, adult)
Chico	\$22.00			Chico	\$11.00
Oroville	\$19.50	Sacramento	\$11.00	Oroville	\$8.50
Marysville	\$16.00			Marysville	\$5.00

Source: AECOM.

As shown in **Table 7-5**, the estimated Thruway-only fare is priced substantially lower than either the *Coast Starlight* or intercity bus. For example, the estimated Thruway fare from Chico to Sacramento is \$11.00, which compares very favorably against the *Coast Starlight* (\$18.00–\$35.00) and intercity bus (\$26.99 for advance booking or \$33.99 for day-of booking). In the short-distance market between Marysville and Sacramento, the estimated Thruway-only fare is at the same approximate pricepoint as the basic fare for commuter bus.

7.2 Sample Fares

As an initial planning-level exercise, it is also informative to consider what actual fares for North Valley Rail might look like based on existing fare pricing for the *San Joaquin*s. The *San Joaquin*s were selected for this exercise because they most closely resemble the proposed North Valley Rail service (i.e., an intercity service) and

because SJRRC's and SJPPA's approach to fares for the larger Valley Rail Program is currently guided by the existing *San Joaquin*s fare structure as a foundation. While this is only a very simple analysis at this stage based on comparable station pairs, the results are meaningful in considering potential pricing schemes for the service. As these sample fares are based on existing fares (and represent costs in existing dollars), the actual fares for the service would likely be higher to reflect cost escalation to future-year dollars.

As discussed earlier, fare pricing for the *San Joaquin*s is based on a fare-per-mile calculation. A sample fare grid for the North Valley Rail stations reflecting distance-based pricing can therefore be developed by referencing the existing fare grid for the *San Joaquin*s. For this exercise, sample fares for each North Valley Rail station pair are referenced from comparable rail-only station pairs in the existing *San Joaquin*s system based on travel distance. The results of this analysis are shown in **Table 7-6** for the four new North Valley Rail stations, Natomas (the Valley Rail terminus), and Midtown Sacramento (the main stop for North Valley Rail trains in Downtown Sacramento).

It should be noted that these fares are approximate only, as they are based on fares from comparable station pairs (as opposed to the actual fare-per-mile calculation), but the results should still give a good idea of the approximate pricing for North Valley Rail based on existing *San Joaquin*s pricing.

Table 7-6: Sample Fare Grid

Origin station ↓ ↓ ↓	Fares (one-way, adult)						
	← Destination station and approximate distance (miles) from Midtown Sacramento →						
	Chico	Gridley	Oroville	Marysville–Yuba City	Plumas Lake	Natomas	Midtown Sacramento
	84	58	66	41	32	8	0
Chico		\$7.50		\$10.50	\$12.25	\$16.50	\$18.00
Gridley	\$7.50			\$7.50	\$7.75	\$11.00	\$12.50
Oroville				\$7.50	\$8.00	\$12.50	\$14.00
Marysville–Yuba City	\$10.50	\$7.50	\$7.50		\$5.00	\$8.00	\$9.75
Plumas Lake	\$12.25	\$7.75	\$8.00	\$5.00		\$7.75	\$8.00
Natomas	\$16.50	\$11.00	\$12.50	\$8.00	\$7.75		
Midtown Sacramento	\$18.00	\$12.50	\$14.00	\$9.75	\$8.00		

Source: AECOM.

As shown in **Table 7-6**, fare pricing based on existing pricing for the *San Joaquin*s would result in very competitive fares against other intercity transit options in the North Valley. A trip from Chico to (Midtown) Sacramento, for example, would cost approximately \$18.00, compared to \$18.00–\$35.00 for the *Coast Starlight* and \$33.99 (day-of booking) or \$26.99 (advance booking) for Greyhound/FlixBus. Not surprisingly, fares would be less competitive against commuter buses in the shorter-distance markets (Yuba–Sutter area), with a trip from Marysville–Yuba City costing approximately \$9.75, compared to \$4.50 for Yuba–Sutter Transit.

7.2.1 Sample Fares for Longer-Distance Trips

For longer-distance trips beyond Midtown Sacramento, the fare-setting process would likely need to include more comprehensive consideration and coordination on fares for the HSR EOS and for other portions of the larger Valley Rail network (e.g., Union City extension). Based on initial discussions between SJPPA and the HSR Early Train Operator (ETO), base fares for the EOS are expected to be similar to the existing *San Joaquin*s service, although premium fare products may also be offered to target more amenity-driven demand (e.g., business-class passengers). Some sample longer-distance fares to/from Chico based on the existing *San Joaquin*s fare structure are provided below for illustrative purposes:

- Chico–Union City: \$32.25⁽¹⁸⁾
- Chico–Oakland: \$34.50
- Chico–Fresno: \$41.00
- Chico–Bakersfield: \$53.50
- Chico–Los Angeles: \$67.50

7.3 Farebox Recovery and Funding Operations

7.3

Farebox revenue partially offsets the cost of providing transit service and is an important source of funds in the overall O&M budget. As with most public transit services in the United States, however, farebox revenue for North Valley Rail is not expected to be sufficient to cover the entire cost of providing the service. Farebox recovery, calculated as the ratio of farebox revenue to operating expenses (i.e., O&M costs), is a useful metric in evaluating the “self-sufficiency” of a transit service. A system with a high farebox recovery is able to cover a significant portion of its operating expenses through fares.

Based on data from the FTA’s National Transit Database (NTD) Agency Profiles (for ACE) and the latest (2023) SJPPA Business Plan for the San Joaquin, farebox recovery for both services has historically been in the same general range (i.e., 40–55 percent). Post-COVID, farebox recovery for both services bottomed in 2021 and is currently on an upward trajectory, although it is still lower than pre-COVID levels.

While there are typically other minor sources of revenue outside of farebox revenue (e.g., parking revenue, advertising revenue), the *San Joaquin* and ACE generally rely on other funding sources to cover the remainder of their operating expenses:

- For the *San Joaquin*, SJPPA submits an annual funding request to the State to cover operating expenses, as well as other costs associated with administering and marketing the service. The State is the sole source of this funding, reflecting the function of the *San Joaquin* as an intercity service benefitting the entire state.
- For ACE, the remainder of operating expenses are typically covered by a range of local, State, and Federal sources, with the majority coming from local sales taxes generated through the LTF, State Transit Assistance (STA), and local ballot measures such as San Joaquin County’s Measure K, Alameda County’s Measure B and Measure BB, and Santa Clara County’s Measure A.

In the case of North Valley Rail, three of the daily roundtrips would be classified as “intercity” services and the remaining daily roundtrip would be classified as a “commuter” service, as shown in [Figure 3-7](#). Like the *San Joaquin*, it is expected that operating expenses for the three “intercity” roundtrips would be covered by a combination of directly-generated revenues (e.g., fares, parking fees, tenant leases, etc.) and State funding. Like ACE, operating expenses for the “commuter” roundtrip would be covered by a combination of directly-generated revenues and other sources of funding, potentially including local sales taxes and other local, State, and Federal sources.

(18) The total cost to travel to/from San Jose or the Peninsula would be slightly higher than the fare to/from Union City to account for the additional fare on connecting transit services (e.g., BART, Dumbarton Corridor buses).

7.4 Fare Strategy Considerations

The following considerations should be carefully weighed when it comes time to establish fares for North Valley Rail. As fares will likely not be set until much closer to the start of service, fare structure and policy for the North Valley Rail should be re-evaluated at that time, starting with the issues identified here and adapting as needed.

7.4.1 Valley Rail Program and Fare Rationalization

SJJPA's fare policy document for the *San Joaquin*s identifies several future goals and considerations related to fare policy for the *San Joaquin*s as described earlier, including fare capping, means-based fares, business class, single-use coupons, and a methodology for future fare increases. The document also identifies the larger Valley Rail expansion program as a key driver for future adjustments to the current fare structure and policy, including the need to define strategic goals for the *San Joaquin*s in terms of uniform fare pricing with ACE for shared station pairs.⁽¹⁹⁾ ACE's current fare policy review and fare normalization effort for ACE, as described in [Section 7.1.1.4](#), will be guided by the emerging fare structure of the *San Joaquin*s.

The natural end result of this overall process is a “uniform fare grid” across both systems, such that the fare for a given station pair is the same price, regardless of whether the trip is taken via ACE or the *San Joaquin*s. From a passenger perspective, a uniform fare regardless of operator may simplify trip planning, but some logistical considerations would likely need to be addressed prior to any practical implementation of a uniform fare grid across both services. In particular, the two systems handle ticketing quite differently (as described earlier), with ACE operating on a “first come, first served” basis with unreserved ticketing (like most commuter rail systems) and the *San Joaquin*s employing reserved ticketing (like typical intercity rail systems). Fundamental differences between the two services (e.g., rolling stock, passenger amenities, service frequency, etc.) may also warrant different pricing structures.

A similar overlap of intercity and commuter rail services can be found in Southern California between the *Pacific Surfliner*, Metrolink's Ventura County and Orange County Lines, and NCTD's COASTER service, which can provide a useful precedent for consideration. The current solution there revolves around two elements: honoring monthly passes from other operators for the overlapping trip portions and operating some trips as “codeshare” services. Specifically, the Rail 2 Rail program allows passengers with a Metrolink Monthly Pass or NCTD COASTER Regional Monthly Pass to use *Pacific Surfliner* trains for travel within the station pairs indicated on their pass at no additional charge, although there are blackout dates (usually for holidays or major events such as San Diego Comic Con or opening weekend at Del Mar Racetrack) to account for increased ridership on Amtrak trains.

Similarly, passengers with a *Pacific Surfliner* Monthly Pass can board Metrolink or COASTER trains for travel within the station pairs indicated on their pass at no additional charge. *Pacific Surfliner* 10-Ride Passes are also accepted on Metrolink trains on the Ventura County Line between Burbank Airport (South) Station and Los Angeles Union Station, but not on other segments overlapping with Metrolink.

For travel outside the station pairs indicated on a given Monthly Pass, the passenger is required to purchase a ticket with the corresponding operator for the portion of the trip not covered by the pass. For Metrolink or NCTD pass holders with bicycles, a paid *Pacific Surfliner* ticket with a bike reservation is required.

(19) Shared station pairs would be present where ACE and the *San Joaquin*s operate along the same route, such as for the Sacramento Extension (UP Sacramento Subdivision between Natomas and Stockton) and for North Valley Rail.

Separate from the Rail 2 Rail program, there are also four *Pacific Surfliner* trains (two roundtrips daily) that are considered “codeshare” services with Metrolink’s Ventura County Line. All Metrolink pass and ticket holders may use these trains within the station pairs indicated on their ticket or pass, without restrictions on blackout dates.

SJRRC staff have also expressed that the ultimate goal for ACE and the *San Joaquin*s is to implement not only *uniform pricing on shared station pairs* but also *uniform base fares by distance* for both services, meaning that two different trips (i.e., different station pairs), each of the same distance but one on the ACE system and one on the *San Joaquin*s system, should be priced the same. Although SJRRC’s new ticketing platform (discussed earlier in **Section 7.1.1.4**) will be focused on ACE, the associated RFP is anticipated to require that the platform be able to handle the *San Joaquin*s service, including Thruway connections. Integration of the *San Joaquin*s service into the ticketing platform would likely be implemented incrementally after the platform’s initial debut in 2026. While Amtrak may still be permitted to sell tickets in the future, a single, SJRRC-controlled ticketing platform would greatly simplify ticketing for passengers.

Overall, there are positives and negatives associated with more comprehensive approaches to fare rationalization across both services and more limited approaches that are only valid for certain cases (e.g., specific station pairs, specific ticket types, etc.). However, these issues are not unique to North Valley Rail and should be explored in depth as part of the larger Valley Rail program. Based on current timelines for future service expansion, ACE and *San Joaquin*s trains would already be operating in shared corridors once the Sacramento (Natomas) Extension opens. Solutions for North Valley Rail should then simply align with the overarching approach determined in the earlier extension to Natomas to ensure consistency across the entire expanded Valley Rail system.

7.4.2 Other Key Drivers

Outside of the changes described above, there are also other key future drivers influencing the overall context of fare structure and policy for ACE and the *San Joaquin*s. The first involves HSR, which will replace the *San Joaquin*s south of Merced. With both ACE and the *San Joaquin*s providing timed connections with HSR in Merced, extensive changes to the fare structure and policy may be needed to ensure equitable and consistent treatment of the two connecting services and of the entire integrated system (HSR, conventional rail, and Thruway bus) as a whole.

In terms of ticketing and fare policy, the HSR service is anticipated to adopt revenue management when selling tickets, meaning that the future SJRRC ticketing platform will also need expandability to incorporate such elements. Revenue management could be compartmentalized, however, such that it only applies to longer-distance trips, with shorter-distance trips being less affected and still priced according to simpler, more passenger-friendly schemes.

The second key driver is the California Integrated Travel Project (“Cal-ITP”), which involves modernizing and standardizing transit riders’ experience throughout the state by focusing on three fundamental areas of improvement:

- **Contactless payment.** Enabling fare payment via contactless bank cards, in lieu of only cash or agency-specific fare cards.
- **Automated fare discounts.** Automating the application process for discounted fares (e.g., seniors, youth, people with disabilities, lower-income riders, veterans, and others) and allowing for electronic verification of discount eligibility, eliminating the need for slow and time-intensive paperwork with each transit agency.
- **Trip planning.** Establishing minimum General Transit Feed Specification (GTFS) guidelines for all transit agencies across the state and assisting individual agencies with implementation.

While Cal-ITP is statewide in scope, some of the efforts are perhaps more relevant for local and regional transit than for intercity and inter-regional rail, which has historically operated quite differently from those systems. If these changes are in alignment with SJRRC's and SJJPA's overall approach to future fare collection and fare policy for ACE and the *San Joaquin*s, however, then more specific consideration of Cal-ITP initiatives may be warranted in the context of North Valley Rail.

As with the other key drivers described above, however, it is expected that many of these issues will be addressed, if necessary, at the systemwide level by SJRRC and SJJPA prior to North Valley Rail. As an incremental expansion of the larger system, North Valley Rail would adopt whatever fare structures and policies are in effect at that time for the respective services.

7.4.3 Specific Considerations for North Valley Rail

While it is expected that much of the fare structure and pricing for North Valley Rail would derive directly from the corresponding systemwide elements (e.g., distance-based fare grid), there are also potential considerations more specific to North Valley Rail, which are briefly discussed below.

7.4.3.1 Student Discounts

As described earlier, the *San Joaquin*s currently offers the 6TIX Student Pass, while ACE has a pilot Student Incentive Program for students at participating colleges. College students are expected to be a key ridership driver for North Valley Rail, including for commutes to/from campus and for trips back home (to other parts of the state) or leisure trips over long weekends or academic breaks. These discount programs should therefore be considered for expansion under North Valley Rail to include Chico State and Butte College. The programs should also be considered for expansion to include California State University, Sacramento ("Sacramento State") and University of California, Davis ("UC Davis") if those institutions have not already been added as part of earlier Valley Rail service expansions prior to North Valley Rail.

7.4.3.2 Service Duplication in the Yuba–Sutter Area

As discussed earlier, Yuba–Sutter Transit currently operates a weekday bus service between the Yuba–Sutter area and Downtown Sacramento, primarily during the commute periods but also including some limited midday service. As shown in the analysis presented in **Table 7-6**, fare pricing based on existing *San Joaquin*s fares would result in one-way fares for North Valley Rail on the order of approximately \$10.00 or more for these trips, or almost twice (or more) of the comparable Yuba–Sutter Transit fare.

Fare pricing for the new stations at Marysville–Yuba City and Plumas Lake should therefore carefully consider potential competition and duplication in the Sacramento market. While North Valley Rail and Yuba–Sutter Transit each have distinct markets (intercity-focused vs. commute-focused, Capitol Mall area vs. Midtown Sacramento), there is some potential for overlap between the two, particularly in the commute market. These issues should be explored in more depth in subsequent stages of the project, in close coordination with Yuba–Sutter Transit. This should include a more detailed evaluation of future plans for their Sacramento bus service after North Valley Rail begins operation, and what, if necessary, is needed to differentiate the two services to avoid direct competition, both in terms of fares and in other areas.

7.4.3.3 Special Promotions

Two major venues—the Toyota Amphitheatre and the Hard Rock Hotel and Casino Sacramento—are located in Wheatland near the future Plumas Lake Station. Demand from these venues could be a significant source of incremental ridership and revenue for North Valley Rail, and fare promotions should consider ways to capture this market and introduce new passengers to the service. If warranted by demand, this could include special-

event trains with special fare pricing, as well as promotional offers through the venues (e.g., discounted event or venue tickets).

In the past, ACE has operated special event trains for San Francisco 49ers home games at Levi's Stadium and is currently exploring future special service to concerts and other events at the stadium. As mentioned earlier, the *San Joaquin*s also already offers fare promotions for Juneteenth service at Allensworth and for Battle of the Bay games at the Oakland Coliseum. These precedents show strong potential that can be carried directly over to North Valley Rail.

7.4.3.4 Discounts for Local Transit Connections

ACE passengers can transfer for free when making local connections via Santa Clara Valley Transportation Authority (VTA) buses and light rail vehicles or LAVTA buses. For North Valley Rail, similar agreements should be explored with Yuba–Sutter Transit and with B-Line, as these local transit operators would provide important first- and last-mile connections for train riders. Connections for Yuba City and for Chico State University are particularly important and should be prioritized if more open-ended (e.g., systemwide) agreements for fare-free transfers cannot be reached with the individual transit agencies. Similar agreements should also be explored with SacRT for connections within the Sacramento area if such agreements are not already in place as part of earlier Valley Rail service expansions prior to North Valley Rail.

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Chapter 8

Conclusion and Next Steps

This chapter summarizes the key outcomes and findings of the Strategic Plan Effort and the critical next steps for implementation of the project.

- **8.1 Conclusion**
- **8.2 Next Steps**



8.1 Conclusion

Supported by a comprehensive community and stakeholder engagement process, the Strategic Plan has advanced the initial planning and development for North Valley Rail, in support of the goal of bringing high-quality rail service to the North Valley, an underserved part of the state. While the Strategic Plan has been focused on the immediate goal of starting an initial service as soon as possible, the service would continue to grow over time (with the Draft 2023 CSRP targeting hourly frequency by 2050) and could be extended further north to Red Bluff and Redding.

Through this Strategic Plan, BCAG and its consultants—working closely with partner agencies SJRRC and SJPPA—have developed an initial project definition at a sufficient level of detail to be carried forward into the next phase of project implementation. This includes identifying the general service characteristics and other parameters of the project, potential infrastructure improvements and associated capital costs, and key benefits (ridership). The Strategic Plan has also helped to initiate and further discussions with the host railroad (UP) on the necessary infrastructure improvements and the potential use of CAFs; develop an overall funding and implementation strategy, particularly for the immediate next phase of project development (PA&ED); and explore potential fare strategies for the new service.

A summary of the project definition and key findings from the Strategic Plan is provided in **Table 8-1**.

A well-developed funding strategy for using regional and State funding sources has been identified for the next project phase (\$11.6 million), involving CEQA/NEPA environmental clearance (PA&ED) and 30% preliminary engineering (PE), anticipated to commence in spring 2024. Funding for the subsequent project phases, including detailed design (PS&E), permitting and ROW acquisition, and construction could come from a variety of Federal, State, and local/regional sources. Other issues affecting overall project implementation have also been identified, including potential changes to the SJRRC/SJPPA governance and operations models, coordination with the State on fleet procurement for the larger Valley Rail Program, and key permits and approvals.

Table 8-1: Summary of Initial Project Definition and Key Findings

Parameter	Description
Route	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • UP Sacramento Subdivision: Natomas–Marysville (Binney Junction) • UP Valley Subdivision: Marysville (Binney Junction)–Chico
Stations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Plumas Lake • Marysville–Yuba City (2 site options, including one with 3 design variants) • Gridley • Chico (2 site options)
Initial (“starter”) service	<p>4 roundtrips/day (including 3 roundtrips/day with timed connections to/from HSR in Merced, marked with an * below)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1 roundtrip/day* Chico–Merced via ACE (UP Fresno Subdivision south of Stockton) • 1 roundtrip/day* Chico–Merced via <i>San Joaquin</i> (BNSF Stockton Subdivision south of Stockton) • 1 roundtrip/day* Chico–Stockton San Joaquin Street, with timed connections to/from Merced and Oakland branches of the <i>San Joaquin</i> • 1 roundtrip/day Chico–Union City
Support facilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1 layover facility in Chico (2 site options) • New side platform at Natomas
Key bus connections	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Oroville (via Gridley) • Sacramento International Airport (via Natomas) • Supplemental corridor service (6 roundtrips/day) to connect with Valley Rail trains starting or terminating at Natomas
Preliminary estimated capital cost (YOE dollars)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stations and layover facility: \$270.0 – \$285.0 million • Corridor improvements: \$230.0 – \$245.0 million (may be replaced partly or in whole by capital access fees) • Rolling stock would be part of the Valley Rail Program and is not included in the costs above
Estimated O&M cost (2023 dollars)	\$24.0 million annually (increase in systemwide cost due to Project)
Forecasted ridership (initial years of service)	592,100 (annual) or 1,622 (daily) (increase in systemwide ridership due to project)
Platform design length (typical)	705 feet (based on Bombardier BiLevel trainset with 8 passenger coaches)

Source: AECOM.

8.2 Next Steps

To maintain project momentum, the focus of project implementation should shift towards the next project phase and securing the necessary \$11.6 million in funding to support PA&ED/PE. In preparation for the environmental clearance process and preliminary engineering, BCAG, SJRRC, and SJPPA, in coordination with the State, will begin more in-depth discussions with UP on defining infrastructure improvements and identifying potential opportunities for the use of CAFs.

BCAG, SJRRC, and SJPPA will also continue to coordinate with the State and other project partners to ensure that North Valley Rail is included in the appropriate planning documents, including the Final CSRP and MPO-specific RTPs. This, together with the completion of the CEQA/NEPA environmental review process, ensures that critical Federal, State, and local/regional funding sources will be available to support subsequent project phases.

Caltrans, in coordination with BCAG, SJRRC, and SJJPA, will be conducting a related analysis of how to bring Valley Rail and North Valley Rail trains directly into Sacramento Valley Station and what infrastructure improvements might be required to achieve that longer-term goal.



NORTH VALLEY RAIL

CHICO • GRIDLEY • MARYSVILLE/YUBA CITY
PLUMAS LAKE • SACRAMENTO



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