

A Model for Integrating Rail Services with other Transportation Modalities: Identifying the best Practices and the Gaps for California's Next State Rail Plan

Project 1949
July 2021

Eric Peterson
Wenbin Wei
Lydon George



The purpose of this research is to examine the California State Rail Plan of 2018, assessing its effectiveness in addressing rail related issues and opportunities on a statewide level. To achieve this end, this research seeks to establish best practices in state-level rail planning through comprehensive review of state rail plans for all fifty states, as well as review related academic literature. This review process highlighted a number of best practices for planning on a state-level, also unveiling gaps and opportunities to improve the process, scope, and implementation of state rail plans in California and states across the country.

Study Methods

The research involved four steps:

- Reviewing and preparing text outlining the requirements of the Federal Railroad Administration's 2013 State Rail Plan guidance.
- Reviewing state rail plans for all fifty states, as well as academic literature discussing state-level rail planning.

- Organizing, summarizing, comparing, and evaluating innovative practices of these plans.
- Preparing commentary and identifying improvements California (and other states) could make in preparing, submitting, and implementing future rail service plans.

Findings

Academic literature regarding optimal, state-level rail applications were consistent with the Federal Railroad Administration's state rail plan guidance, including integration of rail networks with other modes of freight and transit infrastructure, improved connection of rail systems with consumers and end users, sustainability and environmental considerations, and the economic implications of rail investment. A review of each state rail plan from across the country reflected the differing attitudes, realities, and needs related to rail networks from state to state, identifying unique connections to their region, but also displaying

lower levels of engagement in proficient rail planning. Conversely, this highlighted the quality and strength of the California State Rail Plan, which was forward-thinking in its approaches to rail integration and enhancing end user experience. However, all state rail plans exhibited significant gaps in their aspirations and implementation.

Aspiration is not a plan.

Policy/Practice Recommendations

Based on research in this report, ten recommendations were made to enhance state rail planning:

1. Establish measurable performance standards.
2. Enhance resilience of rail infrastructure.
3. Draw on parallels of rail to interstate highway system.
4. Innovate means of rail funding and financing.
5. Create decision making frameworks with tools to improve future system performance.
6. Establish state and regional rail advisory bodies.
7. Perform periodic review of rail plan implementation.
8. Conduct active outreach to public and stakeholders.
9. Support ongoing initiatives by Caltrans.
10. Revise FRA guidance to promote more nationally cohesive rail planning.

About the Authors

Eric C. Peterson is a transportation policy advisor currently addressing infrastructure funding and finance, public transportation, and intercity and high-speed passenger rail issues.

Dr. Wenbin Wei is a Professor in the Department of Aviation and Technology in College of Engineering at San Jose State University. He has a Ph.D. from University of California at Berkeley in Transportation Engineering and Management.

Lydon George is a recent graduate from the Master of Urban and Regional Planning program at San José State University, focusing on improving public and active transportation systems, racial and social equity, and cultural enrichment in planning.

To Learn More

For more details about the study, download the full report at transweb.sjsu.edu/research/1949



MTI is a University Transportation Center sponsored by the U.S. Department of Transportation's Office of the Assistant Secretary for Research and Technology and by Caltrans. The Institute is located within San José State University's Lucas Graduate School of Business.