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Expert to Explain Unique Community Process for High Speed Rail

BURLINGAME, Calif. – October 29, 2009 – The public will have two opportunities next week to learn about a community-input process that will be used for the Peninsula portion of the high speed rail line from an expert hired by the California High Speed Rail Authority (CHSRA) and Caltrain. This is the only section of the line to have this additional process, which is designed to integrate concerns and suggestions from stakeholders in the project as it is being designed.

Hal Kassoff, a nationally known expert on Context Sensitive Solutions (CSS), will be in town all week to help members of the CHSRA board of directors, local officials and the public understand how CSS works. He is a senior vice president with Parsons Brinckerhoff.

CSS has been successfully used for many years in highway projects to incorporate thinking from a wide variety of stakeholders. Its inclusion in high speed rail represents the first time it will be used on a rail project anywhere in the world.

Kassoff will explain CSS on **Wednesday, November 4, from 7 p.m. to 9 p.m.** at a meeting hosted by the CHSRA and Caltrain. He will give a shorter explanation on **Friday, November 6**, during the Peninsula Cities Consortium meeting at **8:45 a.m.** Both meetings are open to the public and will take place in the Council Chambers at **Burlingame City Hall, 501 Primrose Road.** **Advance reservations are required by November 1 for the November 4 meeting;** email prp@samtrans.com or call Camille Tsao at (415) 836-5604.

The Federal Highway Administration defines CSS as “a collaborative, interdisciplinary approach that involves all stakeholders in developing a transportation facility that complements its physical setting and preserves scenic, aesthetic and historic and environmental resources while maintaining safety and mobility.”

The CSS process is intended to empower communities along the Caltrain line – the designated route for high speed rail – between San Francisco and San Jose. In addition to fulfilling the usual California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) and National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) requirements, CSS will provide an overlay that considers all factors and their impacts on surrounding communities - not just the rail corridor. It will offer additional transparency and accountability during the design process.

“CSS is CEQA and NEPA on steroids,” said Terry Nagel of the Burlingame City Council, who is her city’s alternate on the Peninsula Cities Consortium. “High speed rail officials have adopted its use because they realize the usual methods of public

engagement are not sufficient for a project of this magnitude on the Peninsula, where people are intensely involved in the process.”

The Peninsula Cities Consortium is a group of five cities (Atherton, Belmont, Burlingame, Menlo Park and Palo Alto) that are working together to address mutual concerns about the high speed rail project on the Peninsula. Representatives have been meeting since January. They suggested incorporating CSS in the high speed rail project on the Peninsula. They also plan to introduce a Web 2.0 e-government component that would make it easier for a wide variety of stakeholders and experts to participate in the design.

PCC members have held both a High Speed Rail Teach-In and a High Speed Rail Design Workshop. They invite other cities on the rail line to work with them.

“It is our belief that the final design should minimize the impacts upon local communities and incorporate best practices of urban design ideas from rail communities around the world,” explained Yoriko Kishimoto, Chair of the Peninsula Cities Consortium.

For more information about how CSS is used in the transportation development process, visit www.fhwa.dot.gov/context/cssqa.cfm. To learn more about the Peninsula Cities Consortium, visit www.peninsularail.com