

DWIGHT'S RESPONSES TO A CITIZEN RE TUNNEL ISSUES AND A POSSIBLE FAIRGROUNDS ALIGNMENT

September 27, 2023

Below are questions I received in response to my white paper on the tunnel. The questions are shown in black, and my answers are shown in blue, based on what we know now, subject to update as more facts appear. As always, these answers reflect my personal views and not necessarily those of the city or my council colleagues.

Keep in mind that we won't know the details about this project until the technical engineering and EIR/EIS are completed, and that's still 2 years off! Right now we don't know much about a possible fairgrounds alignment as SANDAG has not studied and reported on that, although I and others are urging them to do so.

1. You state that a route through the fairgrounds will raise safety concerns.

What are those and how are they different from the safety concerns of the tunnel construction and once the tunnel exists in the hillside?

Background and Challenges for a Fairgrounds Alignment. First some background on why it is likely to be very difficult to route the train through the fairgrounds. Trains can't navigate more than about a 2% grade. So, if there were to be a proposed tunnel under the fairgrounds (SANDAG hasn't studied a tunnel under the fairgrounds, but they did review a potential portal on the fairgrounds). SANDAG advises that the rail bed all the way back to and including the Solana Beach Train Station would need to be regraded and gradually lowered as it approached the fairgrounds to get down deep enough for a portal on the fairgrounds. SANDAG indicates that this is infeasible and I suspect they are right.

Also, trains don't do well with sharp turns and it looks to me like the southbound turn would have to start early, perhaps before Via de la Valle and would likely require rebuilding or modifying the Via De La Valle Bridge, might require the "take" of homes above the horse race practice track, and perhaps in Solana Beach. SANDAG has not studied or confirmed any of this, but it seems inevitable to me. Add in the difficulty of building a tunnel below the water table (this can be done as it was in the Chunnel, but it is more difficult and more expensive). All these make a tunnel under the Fairgrounds seems a long shot.

At Grade Alignment or an Elevated Rail across the Fairgrounds Brings Challenges. Assuming no tunnel, that leaves either (1) an at grade rail across the fairgrounds or (2) an elevated rail across the fairgrounds.

An At Grade Alignment. Most of the fairgrounds is in the 100 year floodplain. An at grade rail would have to be elevated, most likely on a berm, above the 100 year flood level taking into account projected sea level rise. Even if done right such a berm would impede flood flow and run contrary to the Coastal Commission and city policies for development in the floodplain.

An at grade rail would require a high and wide berm through the fairgrounds. The standard railroad right of way is 100 feet wide. Remember there would be double tracking, so a berm to hold a double set of tracks would be quite large. The berm and rails would also have to be fenced or otherwise secured on both sides for safety. All this would have a significant impact on the fairgrounds. There would also be a need for a new bridge over the SD River east of the fairgrounds, right in the lagoon. Likely also a new bridge on the west over the SD River and Stevens Creek. Both doable, but not without issues.

Regarding safety, routing hazardous materials and military ordinance through the fairgrounds (at grade or elevated) or routing normal train traffic through the fairgrounds would pose significant risks in the event of derailment or other accident to large numbers of people, especially during the fair and races and during the other 300+ events per year held on the fairgrounds. Risks to habitat and wildlife would also occur. It's a good question for experts, which I'm not, but I suspect that routing these trains and materials in a deep tunnel under Del Mar in one of the current SANDAG alignments being studied is likely safer, putting fewer people at risk. Finally, note that whatever dangerous materials would be routed by train have been travelling Del Mar for decades on the current bluff alignment.

An Elevated Railway. What about an elevated railway? I'm not an expert on elevated railways. But, I know it would be a challenge to elevate a double track railroad, provide the required access for maintenance and emergency evacuations, and ADA emergency access. I suspect significant structures, including several elevators or large wheelchair accessible ramps would be required. There would be view impacts, noise impacts from passing trains (elevated or at grade) to those on the fairgrounds and to wildlife in the lagoon.

There would be a need to gradually elevate the rails as the fairgrounds are approached from the north likely requiring railroad bed alteration a significant distance "upstream." There would also be issues for turning and river and creek crossings as discussed above. As I-5 is approached east of the fairgrounds the elevated rails would have to gradually come down to enter a tunnel portal. I think this would be very difficult to do and still keep the rails above the fairgrounds and out of the lagoon. Bringing the rails down to grade and into a portal by the I-5 would likely impact the \$100 million restored lagoon and bring opposition from the Coastal Commission and others.

Is it possible to do an at grade rail through the fairgrounds, a tunnel through the fairgrounds, or an elevated rail? Yes. Engineers can design and build anything, given enough money. The issue for SANDAG and for us: Is the option of a route through the fairgrounds better or worse than the other tunnel alignments, taking into account, safety, cost, speed, environmental impacts, and impacts to the largest number of people and businesses, and community concerns? I don't think we can answer that yet. We need those SANDAG technical and environmental studies. We need SANDAG to study these options including through the fairgrounds. But, I think we do know enough to know that

the fairgrounds options have significant issues.

2. You raise a concern for access. What's the concern specifically over access, and how is that worse than the access to Del Mar from the north or south?

The access concern is mainly for events and people at the fairgrounds as an at grade or elevated rail system would split the facility. There could also be access issues for the Coast to Crest trail and Jimmy Durante Blvd. both of which a fairgrounds alignment would have to cross.

3. You raise a concern for noise. Isn't it better to have construction noise for a public transportation project on public land where no one lives? Isn't the noise at the fairgrounds better than noise for residential neighbors?

Construction noise is better away from homes, in my opinion, but also not good for the thousands visiting the fair, the races, and the fairground's other events or for horses stabled on the fairgrounds or for wildlife in the lagoon. Noise from construction is temporary. Noise from rail operations for the long term would be significant at the fairgrounds whether the rails are at grade or elevated, (60 trains per day now going soon to 100 per day). Rail operations noise would include the sound of engines, wheels on rails, and horn blowing which in some circumstances is required by federal law. Again, we need to see the studies, but I suspect the noise impacts would be less and affect a smaller number of people if the train were in one of the SANDAG tunnel alignments.

4. I know there are noise ordinances for neighborhoods. You also mention environmental and 'other' concerns. What are those environmental concerns that are more important than the environmental concerns of a tunnel through a residential neighborhood that supports a freight train with diesel fumes? What are the 'other' concerns?

Environmental concerns would be impacts to the lagoon, to the San Dieguito River and Stevens Creek, to wildlife, to trail users, visual impacts, including view blockage from an at grade or elevated rail through the fairgrounds, fencing, light from train engine headlights and ditch lights, and noise among others. There would also be significant impacts to ongoing fairgrounds operations. The other tunnel alignments under study by SANDAG do not impact the lagoons in this way and do not impact fairgrounds operations or the many people and animals who attend fairgrounds events. Once in one of the SANDAG tunnels there is limited if any noise (except at the portals where it can be significant) and no visual impact.

The tunnel alignments SANDAG is studying include alignments to improve Penasquitos Lagoon by removing the existing rail and berm. In contrast, a fairgrounds alignment would be adding obstructions in the floodplain and lagoon. Again, the issue will be whether an alignment through the fairgrounds is better or worse from an environmental perspective than the other alignments? Until we see the EIS/EIR we can't

answer that question but we can identify issue areas of concern. SANDAG will be looking at a broader perspective than just impacts to Del Mar. They will no doubt identify all the issues I outline above and more.

5. You believe the Coastal Commission will raise concerns.

If the tracks are property aligned and constructed, couldn't these be mitigated? Maybe. Mitigation may be possible depending on the impacts identified in the EIR/EIS. The Coastal Commission will likely consider protection of the lagoon as the priority, not protection of our homes and neighborhoods. The Coastal Act mandates that the Commission prioritize protection of coastal natural resources and coastal access, not protection of the built environment. SANDAG may also have no choice but to conclude that moving the train to one of their tunnels would be the best and most appropriate mitigation from a regional perspective.

6. You mention the train will be slower with the I-5 or Fairgrounds alternative.

It would seem to me that losing a minute or two to save our village would be worth it. The train doesn't come speeding out of the Solana Beach station ever. It slows down coming and going. Is this really more important than the people that live in Del Mar? Travel time is a top priority to SANDAG, LOSSAN, NCTD, FRA, AMTRAK, Cal STA, BNSF, and commuters deciding whether to take the train or their car. An effective case for a fairgrounds alignment needs to convince these stakeholders on their terms that it's a better solution, and travel time will factor into that analysis. These powerful entities, not Del Mar, have the decision authority and they will make their decisions based on the law that governs them.

7. You mention it would still require a tunnel at I-5. I don't know anyone that opposes a tunnel as a portion of this re-route. I do know many people that don't want it at the entrances of our hillside community, nor under their homes. We are not talking about just a passenger train under residences, we are also talking about a freight train. There's a big difference. This tunnel entrance with walls and fans and whatever else needs to be there permanently would be a horrible eyesore and the destruction of our beautiful village just to save a minute or two for a train? That just seems crazy and outrageous and such narrow thinking.

I understand this viewpoint. However, for this argument to carry the day it needs facts to back it up. Here is a link to questions I posed to SANDAG and their responses. In particular, note the examples they cite of heavy freight trains successfully travelling in tunnels in urban areas. It will require facts and examples to show that a tunnel under Del Mar is unduly dangerous and that a fairgrounds alignment is better and safer. <https://dwrightworden.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/Tunnel-question-responses-from-Danny-Veeh.pdf>.

A tunnel in the I-5 right of way would be about 2.2 miles long. The major problem is in getting across the fairgrounds and lagoon to such a tunnel as noted above. And, if the fairgrounds alignment options are more expensive, as I suspect they would be, adding the cost for a tunnel in the I-5 R.O.W. may render this option economically infeasible.

Granted, there is more than money that matters, including protecting our community and the environment, but cost will be taken into account.

8. You mention that it is unclear if the Fairgrounds will support it.

If SANDAG is making decisions about where this goes without our blessing here in Del Mar (and it does seem that's the case), then how is it that the Fairgrounds gets to turn it down but we cannot?

I don't know if the fairgrounds will turn it down or that they have the power to do that. I do suspect they won't like routing a double track train line through their facilities when other options exist. I also know that the fairgrounds is state property owned and managed by the state and their opinion will be given weight.

CONCLUSION

I know much of what I wrote above may not be what you were hoping to hear. Your determination to protect your home and our town are legitimate perspectives that I support. I'm 100% with you on wanting the best for Del Mar and in support of your right to advocate for your position. But, I know that the way to be successful will require facts, and a skilled presentation of why there is a better alternative.

There are, of course, upsides to a fairgrounds alignment: no portals requiring Del Mar homes to be taken (maybe with the exception of on Via de la Valle and possibly homes or apartments in Solana Beach?), perhaps avoiding the need to rebuild the current river trestle, possibly a station stop on the fairgrounds, moving construction, noise, dust, etc. away from Del Mar homes, no hazardous material travelling under homes, and maybe more. I see and appreciate these upsides. But, I also know SANDAG will raise each of the issues I outline above, and more. We can't ignore that reality. Rather, we need to be prepared with answers based on facts. In the end, the decision-makers will balance the upsides and downsides. They will take account of Del Mar concerns, but also of the regional impacts.