

RAIL: EIR due in summer for Palmdale-Burbank segment

From A1
Comments may be emailed to gfarra@fs.fed.us or mailed to Angeles National Forest and San Gabriel Mountains National Monument, Attn. George Farra, 701 North Santa Anita Ave., Arcadia, CA 91006.

Documents on the drilling proposal are available online at <http://go.usa.gov/3tpnR>.

The California High-Speed Rail Authority earlier this year hired a Spanish firm called SENER for \$56 million to do engineering and environmental planning on possible routes between Palmdale and Burbank, including three alternate tunnel routes.

The draft environmental report for the Palmdale-Burbank segment is to be ready by next summer, with the final environmental report in summer 2017, documents show.

While enthusiastically supported for decades by Palmdale officials, who see it as a necessity for the Antelope Valley's economic future, the proposed high-speed rail network is opposed by leaders and residents in Acton, Agua Dulce, Santa Clarita and San Fernando, through whose communities it was originally proposed to pass.

Lancaster officials also objected to routing the tracks along Sierra Highway, with Mayor R. Rex Parris this summer calling the rail plan "a total boondoggle" and saying it could eliminate Lancaster businesses along the street.

Since 2013, at the suggestion of Los Angeles County Supervisor Michael D. Antonovich, rail authority officials have been studying alternate routes that would tunnel through the San Gabriel Mountains between Palmdale and the Burbank airport rather than parallel the Antelope Valley Freeway

into Santa Clarita.

Even so, Acton residents worry that a tunnel route would affect their rural lifestyle, either by disrupting well water supplies or by surfacing too near them.

The five-year contract calls for SENER to perform preliminary design for the Palmdale-Burbank rail segment, including an option that would bore through the mountains. These engineering services will include conceptual design engineering and analyzing various alternatives before selecting the preferred one, the company said.

SENER will define the area for environmental impact analysis and the right of way to be acquired, for the track alignment, stations, and ancillary elements. The company says it will cooperate with city planners for the station areas in Palmdale and Burbank.

SENER has been present in California since 2008 with offices in San Francisco, being involved in local projects such as a master plan for Los Angeles Union Station. It also did conceptual studies for an expressway tunnel between Irvine and Corona.

The company is among the firms that worked on a 35-mile-long tunnel for trains to travel at 155 mph through the Swiss Alps. The double-tube Gotthard Base Tunnel, on which construction started in 1999 and is due to finish next year, will be the longest and deepest tunnel in the world, going through the Alps at less than 1,801 feet altitude.

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cbostwick@avpress.com

STUDENTS: Pilot program will focus on special needs buses

From A1

the new equipment with students from two schools, Valley View Elementary School in the Westside Union School District and Eastside High School in the Antelope Valley Union High School District.

"We want to see how it's going to work. It's one more way for us to ensure greater safety of our kids in the transportation to and from school," Westside Superintendent Regina Rossall said.

"I'm in favor of it but I would be cautious on what the cost is and how we can afford it," Antelope Valley Union High School District trustee Barbara Willibrand said.

The pilot program is voluntary. Beginning Thursday and running through Dec. 18, it most likely will focus on special needs buses.

"This works so well with handicapped students who may have limited mobility; it gives us a tool that is very mobile," Fuselier said, adding the system's mobility makes it easier to scan students in wheelchairs or those with limited mobility.

There is no cost for the pilot program.

DeVries has been working on the system for 15 years. He piloted two previous generations that used fingerprint biometrics in 2005 and 2010, but those systems proved too expensive and inconsistent and also lacked mobility.

DeVries declined to say how much the system would cost once it is ready. Iritrak will rent the systems to school districts or transportation agencies for three years rather than sell it to them.

The equipment on one bus costs less than \$800, but there are also other costs and features that go into a working system, including cellular costs, he said.

The system could help limit school transportation agency's liability, DeVries said.



Iritrak Corp.

DON'T BLINK — The Iritrans system is a binocular-like device that scans the irises — the colored part — in a child's eyes when he or she boards and exits a school bus. The Antelope Valley Schools Transportation Agency will field test the system starting Thursday.

He added the system would cost less to supply 90 buses for three years than it would to purchase one bus.

Asked how he plans to meet projected demand once the system is ready to go, DeVries said he hopes to secure deals with corporate partners such as Verizon, whose cellular network Iritrans uses.

"We're going to deploy six to 10 of the waiting districts. We can support that and then by that time I'll have a national company with a national footprint to step in," DeVries said.

David Walthall, a retired director of transportation with the Ontario Montclair School District and a shareholder in the company, conducted one of DeVries' previous tests with fingerprint biometrics.

"I would have loved to have a system where we could track

kids," Walthall said in a telephone interview.

Walthall worked with DeVries on a previous iteration of the system.

"We really wanted it go work; we really wanted it to be a success," Walthall said.

Karla Rhay, chief administrative officer of Southern California Schools Risk Management, said Iritrans can help reduce litigation.

"It's going to mitigate the situation by providing accurate information, real-time data," Rhay said.

In the Whittier death, for example, autistic teen Hun Joon "Paul" Lee, who could not talk, was found dead the afternoon of Sept. 11 in a Whittier Union High School District parking lot. How long he had been alone in the hot bus was not disclosed, but Los Angeles news media reported that the bus driver had declared the bus "all clear."

Southern California Schools Risk Management is a joint-powers authority that seeks to help its member districts connect with products or services that can benefit districts with products to reduce losses.

"It's letting schools know that this technology exists," Rhay said.

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■ **Mailing address**
The Antelope Valley Press
P.O. Box 4050
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