

CENTERLINE LIGHT RAIL UNVEILED

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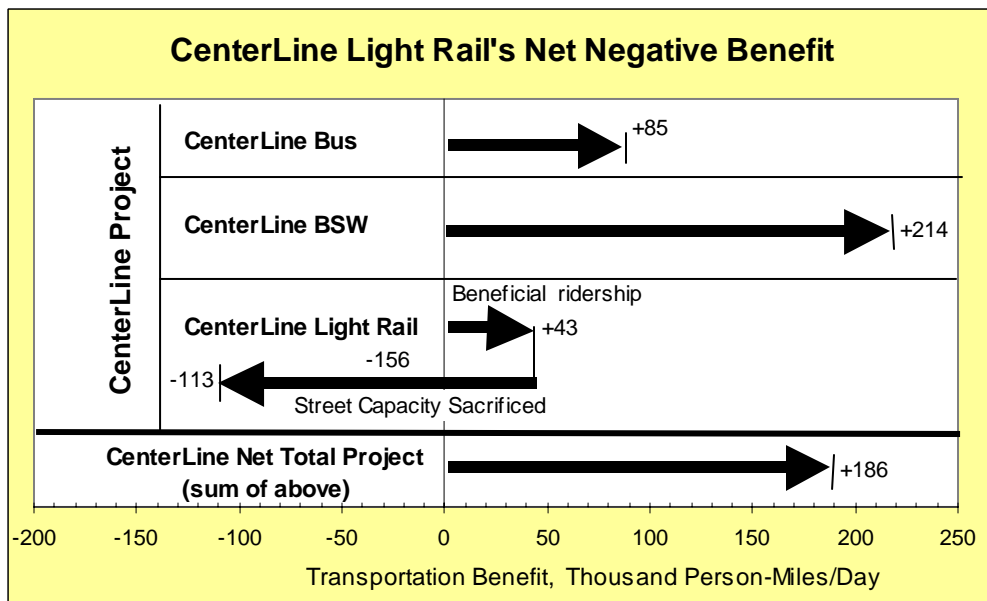
In September 2003, the Orange County Transportation Authority published a revised EIR/S for the CenterLine Project[1]. In this document, for the first time, the CenterLine Project was redefined not as just Light Rail, but a bundle of three elements of so called "independent utility":

- A \$1040 million CenterLine Light Rail ("LR")
- A \$ 185 million CenterLine Bristol Street Widening, ("BSW") [1, p.S-15], and
- A \$ 544 million CenterLine Bus Service expansion ("BUS"). [1, p. 2-26].

How much does Light Rail contribute to the overall project benefit? The EIR does not address this important question. All its findings pertain solely *to the bundle as a whole*.

The best and right way to answer this would be to perform comparative modeling (OCTAM) analysis of each of the independent elements independently, but OCTA has chosen not to do so. Lacking such separate element modeling analyses, however, it is possible to estimate the separate performance contributions based on their descriptions in the EIR. The gritty sources, calculations and assumptions are fully documented in a separate report [2] available on request or online at www.urbantransport.org/debundle.pdf

This figure summarizes the estimated relative magnitudes of the projected year 2025 congestion, time-saving, and emissions reducing benefit of each of the three "independent utility" elements of the project.



The mostly street-level Light Rail (LR) element would provide some 43,000 person-miles per day beneficial (congestion reducing) ridership. But at the same time, and *inseparably*, it would cause street-traffic disruption and loss of some 156,000 person-miles/day capacity due to

taking street lanes and blocking or preempting existing traffic crossings. Thus the estimated *net* contribution of Light Rail itself is negative 113,000 person-miles/day, largely negating the benefit of the Bus and BSW elements alone¹.

Simply dropping light rail (along with its inherent street traffic disruption) from the tri-part CenterLine Project would therefore predictably result in:

- 60% *more* capacity, mobility, travel-time, air quality, and energy consumption benefits,
- eliminating or significantly reducing *half* of the eighty adverse environmental impacts tabulated in Section 4 of the EIS, and
- *cost saving* of over a billion dollars.

The objective findings of the EIS do not and cannot refute these estimates. They are simply, and conspicuously, silent on this important issue. This begs the question: WHY? Why did project management decide to include Bristol Street Widening and Bus Expansion in a Center Line Light Rail Project bundle and analyze only the whole bundle. Is there a meaningful rationale for the bundling other than to hide the counterproductivity of the Light Rail system from view of the public and decision makers.?

Prior to this analysis many of us were opposed to CenterLine light rail because of its horrible ineffectiveness, a billion dollars for less a less than one two-thousandth of our need. Now we find it far worse than that. Based on the best evidence now available, the best estimate is that including Light Rail in the CenterLine project is a billion dollar mistake, that will actually make mobility, congestion, travel-time, and emissions *worse* than doing nothing.

References

1. "Supplemental Draft Environmental Impact Statement/Revised Draft Environmental Impact Report for the Orange County CenterLine Project", p. S-15, .OCTA, August 2003. p.S-15.
2. "CenterLine Debundled Analysis", AJM Engineering, 8/04/04.
On line at "www.urbantransport.org/debundle.pdf>

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¹ The CenterLine BSW element, about 18.4 street lane-miles, may be regarded as consisting of two parts 1) 5.0 lane miles to bring presently existing Bristol Street up to 6 lanes divided for its full length, and 2) 13.4 lane miles to make up for the 13.4 In-mi light rail street Right-Of-Way taking. OCTA has argued that CenterLine does NOT take street ROW, that the ROW the LR uses is more than made up for by the BSW element. This is a Sophistic play on words. It is true that the CenterLine PROJECT provides a net increase in street lane-miles, but it is misleading to suggest that the CenterLine *Light Rail* element does not take lane-miles. The street capacity taking is inseparable from Light Rail. You can't have one without the other. The street capacity sacrifice is an inescapable part of the price we have to pay for the light rail. In fact, we can infer from EIR Table 5-17 that the 13.4 lane-miles LR ROW replacement costs are actually charged to the CenterLine BSW element, not to the LR element.

