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## UP's repairs on fast track

**Officials see one set of rails open by month's end -- but probe of fire's cause is going more slowly.**

**By Tony Bizjak - Bee Staff Writer**

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With crews working at breakneck speed, Union Pacific rail officials say one of two critical Sacramento tracks may reopen by month's end, a mere 16 days after being destroyed by a suspicious fire.

The same can't be said about determining the cause of the fire, which remains suspicious in the minds of investigators.

After laboriously sifting through the fire scene in the parkway just north of the American River and coming out with few leads, Sacramento Fire Department officials say they now must track down potential witnesses and winnow down the possible causes.

"We haven't identified the cause of the fire," Fire Marshal Troy Malaspino said Monday. "We are going to have to solve it primarily through witness interviews.

"It is going to take time."

Time, however, is what UP officials do not have.

The dramatic fire last Thursday, seen from miles around, not only will cost the company up to \$30 million for reconstruction, but is delaying millions of dollars' worth of freight shipments daily.

UP spokesman Mark Davis said consumer goods heading east to market or west to foreign ports are as much as two days behind schedule.

Railroad company crews at the fire site, just west of the Capital City Freeway, have plenty of experience of responding to disasters, Davis said.

"In any disaster, man-made or natural, hurricane or tornado, our employees do what it takes because of the importance of the moving of goods," Davis said.

That round-the-clock construction work, especially pile driving, is bothering some residents.

"It is terrible," Richard Sickert, a Woodlake neighborhood resident about a mile from the bridge reconstruction. "You can hear right through the windows and walls. I know they need to get this done, but there is some need for local community consideration."

UP is replacing the old timber trestle with a pre-cast concrete and steel structure. The new structure will be built on as many as 282 piles, UP spokesman Davis said.

Using pre-cast girders and caps in single-track widths, workers will construct the first track this month, and add the second track in April, UP's Davis said.

UP has not yet decided whether they will allow passenger trains on the first track, or wait until the second track is finished May 1.

Rail commuters who used that site have not been as inconvenienced as first feared.

Some 135 to 180 commuters daily take the Capitol Corridor train in to Sacramento from Auburn, Roseville and Rocklin. Instead, on Monday, five buses transported them to Sacramento. Chuck Robuck's bus from Auburn arrived downtown early.

"We'd sure like to have this kind of on-time performance with the train," Robuck said. He said passengers, who call themselves C.C. Riders, want their train back, however.

"The train is too much fun," Robuck said.

That included a St. Patrick's Day party last Thursday with a five-piece band aboard the last train over the trestle before the fire.

Similarly, Amtrak officials on Monday began transporting passengers on buses between the Bay Area and Roseville, which has become the temporary final stop for the California Zephyr train between here and Chicago.

The train agency initially tried rerouting trains through Marysville, but that took hours longer than they had hoped.

"We don't want our passengers taking delays on top of delays," Amtrak spokeswoman Vernae Graham said.

Fire Marshal Malaspino said investigators have not found an incendiary device. On the list of witnesses are crew members on the last train through that area, 15 minutes before the fire.

Malaspino said sparks from trains at times have caused brush fires, but that is unlikely in this case because the tracks were high on a trestle and vegetation below was green.

Malaspino said the fire is considered suspicious -- if for only one reason:

"That thing has been there 100 years and suddenly it burned," he said. "We are leaning toward arson, but I'm not sure we are there yet."

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