

# Fremont -- no landslide detectors planned for ACE's Niles Canyon tracks

**Sam Richards, East Bay Times, 7-18-16**

The Altamont Corridor Express rail line through Niles Canyon, where a San Jose-to-Stockton commuter train derailed into a rain-swollen Alameda Creek on March 7, will not get rockslide-detection equipment in the foreseeable future, a Union Pacific Railroad spokesman said.

Justin Jacobs, a UP spokesman in Roseville, said that UP and ACE, with help from an outside geotechnical expert, determined "new rockslide detectors are not warranted at this time." Their review determined that another such serious mudslide affecting rail operations is improbable, Jacobs said.

He also said it isn't certain rockslide detectors like those used on other parts of UP's rail network would have prevented the accident, ACE's first since it began operations in October 1998.

Steve Walker, ACE's safety and security coordinator, said Monday that ACE was working with UP on the wreck investigation, and supports the findings and the choice to not go forward with landslide sensors.

"Based on the geotechnical person's review, we decided this (fencing) wasn't warranted," Walker said. "As far as we're concerned, we're fine with the results of that investigation."

Union Pacific owns and maintains the rail line through Niles Canyon that eight ACE trains -- four westbound each weekday morning, four eastbound each evening -- use, as do several UP freight trains.

Following heavy rainfall, the eastbound evening train bringing 196 commuters back to Pleasanton, Livermore, Tracy and Stockton struck a mudslide and at least one dislodged tree as it rolled east through the canyon about 2½ miles west of Sunol, near an area in Niles Canyon known as Brightside. The slide occurred before that train arrived at that spot, but sometime after the previous eastbound ACE train passed that spot about an hour earlier.

The lead passenger car ended up in the creek, and nine people were injured. Rescue teams had to get trapped passengers out of the partially submerged car.

Rep. Eric Swalwell, D-Pleasanton, had been part of a meeting about three weeks after the derailment with Sarah Feinberg, head of the Federal Railroad Administration, and ACE officials about preventing a similar accident from happening again.

In a statement Monday, Swalwell said, "I support the judgment of the professional experts at Union Pacific to decide what makes the most sense to ensure passengers' safety. We'll continue to monitor the situation, and ask that the situation be reassessed periodically to catch any change in conditions."

Jonathan Gott, a geologist with the U.S. Geological Survey office in Menlo Park, was not familiar with UP's investigation and would not comment on the railroad's decision to forego slide sensors.

Union Pacific tracks in portions of the Feather River Canyon in Northern California and along the Colorado River in the central portion of that state -- places where mudslides or rockslides are common -- are protected by fences with sensors that set off alerts when a slide happens.

The tracks through Niles Canyon are inspected at least twice weekly throughout the year, railroad officials have

said, and more frequently when storms or geologic events like earthquakes occur, as required by federal regulations.