

HIGH SPEED RAIL OPINION

San Bernardino Sun, Opinion-Editorial, Dennis Lytton, Board of Directors of Californians for High-Speed Rail, Los Angeles, July 4, 2012

http://www.sbsun.com/pointofview/ci_21005261/high-speed-rail-boosts-economy [link now dead]

High-speed rail boosts economy

By Dennis Lytton

During the course of any modern political debate, we often hear a familiar refrain from those who oppose particular investments.

They usually say something along the line of "This project will burden future generations with debt." We're currently hearing of lot of this concerning high-speed rail in California. And while concern about our debt is a legitimate and important point of view, it does not apply to California's high-speed rail project. Investment in high-speed rail will actually help to reverse the downward economic spiral that leads to deficits and long-term debt. How can this be?

One word: jobs. The project will create an estimated 450,000 direct job-years throughout its lifetime, as well as a million job-years from all economic activity generated by the statewide project. It is the lack of jobs that is causing our state's budget crisis as tax revenues have plummeted while the unemployed draw on public services. With high-speed rail starting construction next year, the huge number of new jobs generated will dramatically increase tax revenues flowing into the state budget.

At a time when elected officials should be prioritizing how to best improve our job prospects and shore up the state's budget, high-speed rail makes perfect sense.

Over the long-term, high-speed rail provides a foundation for ongoing economic prosperity because it will dramatically improve transportation access around the state and free us from volatile fuel costs. High-speed rail will be a tremendous benefit for new businesses looking to locate in California and for homegrown businesses looking to expand.

As a state, we need to solidify ourselves as the place to do business. That means having world-class infrastructure that efficiently moves people.

In our region, the high-speed rail project will invest well over a billion dollars of Proposition 1A funds to improve existing rail lines that will connect seamlessly to the high-speed rail system. Take our heavily used San Bernardino to downtown Los Angeles Metrolink line, which is eligible for funds to improve speed and capacity. Rather than hedge on the high-speed rail project, our leaders need embrace it so these funds can be unlocked for improvement now to our existing rail lines.

These critical projects, which lay the foundation for high-speed rail while improving the lives of millions of commuters, won't happen if the state does not move forward with the high-speed rail project.

As it's always been, high-speed rail is a "solutions-based" idea at a time when California travelers have nothing but questions. If we're going to be serious about reclaiming our leadership, high-speed rail is an essential addition to our menu of transportation options, and one that is long overdue. It's proven worldwide, utilizes existing technologies, and fosters cleaner travel.

No one supports government waste, and where it exists, it should end. But high-speed rail development does not symbolize an irresponsible short- or long-term investment. It addresses important challenges that are stifling job creation, economic growth, productivity, our environment, and overall quality of life. Government should seek out productive, responsible investments that provide future opportunities for all of us. High-speed rail exemplifies this.

California has always been the home of solutions. Now it needs to be the home to real economic recovery. High-speed rail helps get us there. Let's get started now.

Dennis Lytton is on the board of directors of Californians for High-Speed Rail, and a resident of Los Angeles. Find more information at www.ca4hsr.org.