

March, 2003

The future of the High Speed Rail Authority is now in serious doubt. As an advocate of a statewide passenger rail system, this brings me great joy. I believe the Authority was on the wrong track (no pun intended). A high-speed rail system in California today would almost certainly founder. Creation of a fast passenger rail network starting with existing rail and later upgrading it to 100-120 mph would be a more rational approach with faster returns on investment.

Chris Matthews once said that when boarding a high-speed train in France (the TGV), he felt like he was from Chad, since we had nothing comparable in the United States. The problem is that building a high-speed rail system in California now would be like building it in Chad.

California does not yet have the population density to support such a system. To carry enough passengers to make the system viable (both economically and politically), the train would have to make so many stops it would be, in the words of High-Speed Rail Commission Chair Rod Diridon, like "BART to L.A."

We also lack the infrastructure to support the high-speed system envisioned by the Authority. The successful high-speed trains that exist in Japan and Europe are integrated into systems that include local transit, fast inter-city rail, and air transportation. Local and regional transit in California is sporadic and largely uncoordinated.

The system is also proposed as an alternative to the existing air transportation system rather than as a complement to it, as is the case elsewhere. The premise of the use of high-speed rail as an alternative is based on constricted runway capacity at key points such as LAX and SFO. While it is true that the system cannot handle many more airplanes than it does now, it can handle larger airplanes. The airlines like this limit in capacity, since it allows them to charge higher prices than they could without capacity constraints.

Faced with competition from a rail system, they would simply fly larger aircraft. 747's are already in use on one-hour shuttle flights in Japan. Thus, runway capacity can be increased by a factor of four or five just by operating bigger airplanes. Because high-speed rail would incur a \$35 billion capital expense and the airlines can expand far more cheaply, the airlines could charge less for a ticket, or the high-speed rail would have to operate at a loss in direct competition.

I am not against high-speed rail in California. Rather, I think we need to build a fast inter-city passenger rail system in the 100- to 120-mile per hour range first. This should start by creating the best system we can on existing rights of way, from Redding in the north to San Diego in the south, then steadily improving the system through grade separation, electrification, and new alignments to bring it up to the faster speeds (100-120 mph). We need to coordinate local and regional transit systems with this fast inter-city rail as the

system is built. These two steps will show rapid returns for a relatively modest investment.

Parts of this system are already in place. Amtrak California (a partnership between Amtrak and Caltrans) already operate two lines in Northern and Central California that are models for the whole nation. The San Joaquin runs between Oakland and Bakersfield. The Capitol (managed by BART) operates more than a dozen trains daily between San Jose and Sacramento. Unfortunately, the only train linking Northern and Southern California (the Coast Starlight) only operates once per day and leaves Redding just after the bars close (about 2:30 AM).

I would propose adding trains between Redding and the Bay Area through Sacramento, an alternate route for the Capitol that goes through the Tri-Valley two or three times per day, and a Bay Area to Los Angeles train through the Salinas Valley and Santa Barbara once or twice per day. In addition to this, an extension of the San Joaquin from Bakersfield to Los Angeles would form the basis of a pretty good network.

Finally, when we build the high-speed rail system, the first corridors served should be those that connect major airports with out-lying areas. After this is accomplished, the high-speed system can be finished using parallel fast rail lines as feeders.

If we try to build a stand-alone high-speed rail system right now in California, we'll spend a lot and get a little. If we take the necessary steps first, we'll end up with the best transportation system in the world and get plenty of bang for the buck.

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