



## New Plan Won't Save High Speed Rail

*By George Runner*

After years of setbacks and costly delays, the California High-Speed Rail Authority announced a 180-degree turn in February, with a new plan to begin the first leg of construction from the Central Valley to the Bay Area.

The dramatic move to build the first leg of this misguided project to the Bay Area instead of Los Angeles attracts headlines and might seem like welcome news for Bay Area residents; but no matter where it begins, high speed rail is still a bad investment for California.

This latest change in strategy and direction is an act of desperation. The goal of the Authority is to lay as much track as possible, making it more difficult to derail the project. It's not plausible the Authority only recently discovered that boring holes through the Tehachapi and San Gabriel Mountains won't be easy or cheap.

Either way, changing directions doesn't make the Authority's mountain of a problem disappear. And the move does nothing to restore public confidence in the project.

Not factoring in these costs earlier is a gross oversight, but it isn't surprising considering the Authority's past history of making failed estimates. Originally, proponents of the project estimated the total cost would be \$33 billion. Consultants hired by the Authority now believe the project could cost taxpayers \$71 billion when adjusted for inflation.

Outside experts estimate the final cost of the high speed rail project could be \$93 billion. That's a huge blow to California taxpayers.

When I coauthored the opposition ballot argument in 2008, we called the measure a "boondoggle" that "could cost \$90 billion—the most expensive railroad in history." We warned that no one really knew how much the project would ultimately cost.

The project is already years behind schedule, won't begin operations until 2026, and will have to be heavily subsidized by taxpayers until it breaks even. The assumption that the project will attract significant investments and additional state and federal funding is wishful thinking at best.

A decade from now, driverless cars seem like a better bet for investors than a not-so-fast train from San Francisco to Los Angeles. And without receiving an additional \$2 billion from congress, it's unlikely that there will be enough money to lay tracks between San Jose and San Francisco.

Government officials should recognize consumer trends and invest taxpayer dollars into our crumbling roads and other critical transportation infrastructure. This year, for example, the governor's budget proposes to spend \$1.8 billion on this High Speed Rail project. Those dollars would go a long way toward improving California's failing roads and highways today.

Yes, California voters did approve High Speed Rail in 2008, but the Authority has yet to deliver on any of the promises it made to the voters nearly eight years ago. Given the delays and increased costs, it's clear that Californians deserve to vote on the issue again.

Merely switching plans will do nothing to restore the public's trust or viability of the project.

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