

# Get on board with High-Speed Rail before train leaves station

In November 2008, California voters approved the Safe, Reliable High-Speed Passenger Train Bond Act for the 21st Century, to construct the first High-Speed Rail (HSR) System in the nation.

The event in itself is truly historical! It created a public mandate to improve mobility and catching-up with other countries successfully operating a HSR system across the globe. But with high profile projects, comes high profile controversies — and HSR is no different.

I've heard comments from people and read media articles, condemning the project and anticipating its demise. Ladies and gentlemen, the first piling for the project were placed in the ground in June. By all accounts, the system is under construction, employing hardworking men and women, including a significant number of small businesses.

Remember, no major capital project comes without controversy, i.e. the Golden Gate Bridge. Seventy-five years, media reports and general consensus rejected the bridge. But now you can't imagine San Francisco without it! No one likes the costs and impacts that go along with developing large projects — but in the end, everyone climbs aboard.

As far back as the 1800s, people complained about the Transcontinental Railroad. Needless to say, connecting our country's urban centers and allowing cross-country commerce to ensue providing the foundation for the economic powerhouse that is the U.S. That said, history does now repeat itself, asking the same question(s).

## Viewpoint

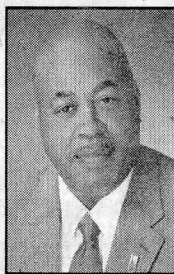
Rich Poston

The first nation to operate a complete dedicated high-speed rail system was Japan 50 years ago. Soon to follow were China, France, Germany, Italy, Taiwan, South Korea and Spain. These nations have efficiently moved their growing population from city-to-city without any major issues.

Meanwhile, here in the U.S., we are still wasting billions on widening freeways. Unbelievably, the 110 freeway in L.A. has 12 lanes and Atlanta Georgia's I-75 has 15 lanes, promoting single user car riders that drive up fossil fuel usage and greenhouse gas emissions. This is a waste of taxpayers' money. It's not safe, and our auto insurance is at alarming rates due to the number of minor to fatal car crashes per year. We must do better, it will only get worse.

We have placed such a major burden on our freeway/commuter systems, now is the time to embrace stronger solutions. HSR has proven itself for over 50 years, why is it taking the U.S. so long?

The California High-Speed Rail project is being funded through voter-approved \$9.95 million Proposition 1A, \$3.2 million in federal stimulus funds, and more recently, California's Cap & Trade funds, which will provide an ongo-



POSTON

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ing stream of funding through-out project completion.

My neighbor Cynthia, commutes from the Lancaster Station to L.A. Union Station five days per week. Her monthly Metro rail pass is \$426. Her daily roundtrip is 144 miles per day including a four hour commute time. The same destination for AVTA is \$304 plus five hour commute time. Your car averages \$550 per month and the commute time is four to seven hours per day, without consistency because of traffic variances. We must do better!

Let's look at HSR, Palmdale to Burbank in 20 minutes. Travel time saving is 3-4 hours. You can leave work from downtown L.A. at 6 p.m. and be at home for dinner, help your child with homework, and during the summer months be at home before the streetlights come on. No stress — just better quality of life. Our current population in California is 38.4 million and is expected to reach 50 million in 2030. We need to act now!

The Antelope Valley African American Chamber of Commerce Board and its members urge you to get behind California HSR project and be on the right side of history.

*Rich Poston is past Vice-Chairman of Palmdale Chamber over Governmental Affairs & Economic Development and a member of Council of Chambers — California Black Chamber of Commerce.*