



Written by [Raven Clabough](#) on February 16, 2011

Proposed California High-Speed Train Faces Criticism

Despite the plight of the federal deficit and the American economy, President Obama has proposed spending \$8 billion for a bullet train program, which will serve as only a down payment for the \$53 billion over the next six years. Obama has touted the high-speed train program as a symbol of American innovation, but others contend that it is financially irresponsible.

Even worse is that in the state of California, where a federal high-speed rail system is already underway, critics have found a number of issues. Fox News explains, "Critics say money is being misspent, ridership studies are inflated, the route is politically corrupted and the system will never be self-supporting."



Richard Tolmach of the California High-Speed Rail Authority states, "They don't know where they're going to build it, they don't have a mile of right of way under possession, it is not shovel ready, it is not even engineer ready. It is still a work in progress where the line might go. Right now it is not somewhere the feds should be putting their money."

Fox News describes some of the controversy:

The first leg of the project is slated for the middle of Central Valley — not between major cities, or congested freeway corridors like San Francisco and San Jose or Orange County and Los Angeles. The Central Valley site is between Borden — a point on the map where no one lives—and Corcoran, a town where half the residents will never board a train because they're in prison.

Corcoran City manager Ron Hoggard observes, "We heard things like it's the 'train to nowhere' and we tell people we're not nowhere, we're Mayberry."

In addition to those issues, local residents fear the noise, environmentalists have articulated concern for the wildlife, and farmers have voiced apprehension over the possibility of having their lands bisected by the train.

Hoggard said, "So if it comes through town and it's elevated, you know you have an elevated graffiti magnet at 85 decibels every six minutes. That's probably not a good thing for this small town feel that we want to have."

According to rail officials, however, there are limited options.

Jeff Barker of the California Rail Authority indicates, "We have to get from Los Angeles to San Francisco in 2 hours and 40 minutes, that's by state law. The only way to do that is through the Central Valley."

Yet another example of how federal regulations impact the productivity of an industry.

Regardless of the budgetary issues, the federal government has already allocated money for the



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program in California, approximately \$3.8 billion in stimulus money. Likewise, the state is hoping to see some private investment into the program as well, even as ridership predictions do not support alleged profitability. Without profitability, Fox News indicates that the program requires a government guarantee. "That is something supporters won't admit, since it would likely sink the project."

Skeptics assert that the bullet train program will witness the sinking of taxpayer dollars, while the Obama administration continues to defend the program as a means to clear out the skies and freeways, adding that it will create thousands of jobs.

Of course, if the success of the government-controlled Amtrak system is any indication of the future of the bullet train system, the future is certainly bleak. In 2008, for example, the American taxpayer had to subsidize the average Amtrak ticket by \$32. Furthermore, all of Amtrak's nationwide lines, with the exception of 44, lost money in 2008.

Another problem with the high-speed rail system that critics have failed to address includes stifling competition. NJ.com writes:

Say, for example, somebody wants to travel between Miami and Atlanta. If the federal government pays for high-speed rail service between the cities, the would-be passenger can choose between taking the train and flying on already existing airlines.

But while different airlines compete against each other to provide the best service at the cheapest price, the high-speed train has an unfair advantage in competing for the customer's business. After all, much - perhaps most - of the cost of operating the high-speed train will be subsidized by taxpayers' money.

Faced by this unfair competition from a rival with "deep pockets," some private enterprises would be harmed. Airlines would likely lose some of their money-making routes. Some may go out of business.

Regardless of the harsh data, the Obama administration continues to move forward with its agenda. If the 112th Congress is as fiscally conservative as it is touted to be, it should stop the proposal for the high-speed rail program in its tracks.

Photo: Commuters walk through a tunnel to catch trains at Union Station in Los Angeles, Jan. 19, 2011: AP Images



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