



HSR “Plan B” – Making ARRA HSR Funds Work for California

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California is in danger of losing \$2.4 billion of ARRA grants, due to the CHSRA project’s legal problems and the September 2017 expenditure deadline. (Another \$929 million in federal FY 2010 grant funds does not have an expenditure deadline.) These funds could be secured for California if they were redirected to improving Amtrak service in the Central Valley. The San Joaquin Joint Powers Authority could deploy the funds within the time limits, because laying track in a freight railroad right-of-way is much simpler.

This would require renegotiation of the ARRA grant with the Federal Railroad Administration, shifting California’s grants from the Core Express (125-250+ mph) tier of the HSR Corridor Investment Strategy to the Regional Service (90-125 mph) tier, which serves mid-sized and large cities. Central Valley residents from Bakersfield to Sacramento would greatly benefit from a program to “Upgrade existing intercity passenger rail corridors to improve reliability, speed, and frequency of existing services.” The San Joaquin Amtrak Corridor can be improved at a modest cost with minimal disruption.

The project would cost-effectively build ridership, demonstrate demand for higher-speed HSR and restore public confidence in the State’s leadership in rail transport. A higher-speed San Joaquin Corridor would feed into a future statewide HSR system, enabling one-seat rides to Los Angeles and the Bay Area.

Advantages

- The President wins (fulfills his stated HSR vision)
- The Governor wins (he can take credit for the idea--and gets out of the controversy)
- BNSF & UPRR win (the public pays for track improvements)
- Farmers & land owners win (limited ROW acquisition needed)
- Labor & the local economy win (construction work still needed)
- Traveling public wins (improved service decades sooner)
- Eastside cities win (minimal disruption, minimal additional train noise)
- Sacramento wins (faster travel to Capitol, decades sooner)
- Safety wins (grade crossings on major arterials replaced by grade separations)
- HSR travel wins (faster Valley rail travel will stimulate interest in other corridors)

Disadvantages--None

Other Possible Projects

The following near-term projects would support future HSR, if funding is available: “LOSSAN” (Pacific Surfliner) corridor improvements including LA Union Station “run-through” tracks, and grade separations for the 3 most dangerous grade crossings in the LA-Anaheim rail segment; Caltrain Extension to Downtown San Francisco.