



## California's economy needs high-speed rail

By: **Steve Falk** | 01/22/12 4:00 AM

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California high-speed rail has been under fire following the resignation of the project's Chief Executive Roelof van Ark and the release of the revised business plan to bring the voter-approved rail system to fruition. While vocal critics continue to condemn high-speed rail, Gov. Jerry Brown gave his unequivocal support for the project in Wednesday's State of the State address, calling it "a wise investment."

The San Francisco Chamber of Commerce and local business organizations throughout the state continue to support this critically important project. California high-speed rail will be the nation's largest transportation project. Debate and discussion surrounding how it gets built — and with whose money — are worthy and important. However, absent from the current debate is any discussion about the costs and feasibility of the alternatives: doing nothing or expanding existing infrastructure. When the project is placed in the context of these other choices, the need for high-speed rail becomes quite clear.

Over the next two decades, California's population will grow by more than 10 million people — the equivalent of adding the entire state of New York with our borders. By the year 2050, the state's population is expected to reach 60 million people. California's current transportation infrastructure simply cannot accommodate this level of growth. Doing nothing is simply not an option. Major investments are needed to serve the future of our state.

Building high-speed rail will not be cheap. The revised business plan puts the total construction cost for the 800-mile-long project at \$98.1 billion spread over 20 years. That's a big number that is bound to leave some amount of sticker shock. But this cost must be measured against the second alternative, creating the equivalent capacity within our existing transportation infrastructure.

To achieve the same level of mobility delivered by the high-speed rail system, the state would need to add 2,300 miles of new highways, 115 new airport gates and four new runways — all at a combined cost of \$170 billion. That's \$71 billion more than building high-speed rail. What's more, these new roads and airports will require additional investments in maintenance, while the operations and maintenance for high-speed rail will be covered entirely by ridership revenues.

Building new roads and airports will also have a negative impact on the environment. Adding capacity for millions of cars and flights will significantly increase fuel consumption, traffic

congestion and carbon emissions. California is a leader in protecting the environment and promoting sustainable communities. high-speed rail provides an opportunity to meet the state's growing transportation needs while reducing carbon emissions by an estimated 3 million tons annually and catalyzing more sustainable urban growth along the rail corridor.

In the current economic climate, jobs should also be taken into consideration. While jobs would certainly be created over time to build and maintain highways and runways, high-speed rail is expected to generate 100,000 jobs over the next five years and 1.2 million to 1.4 million over the next 20 years. By 2040, up to 450,000 new permanent jobs not related to high-speed rail could be created statewide by the added speed, capacity and commerce provided by the system.

Where does this leave us?

Californians voted for a high-speed rail system to connect northern and southern California. The California High-Speed Rail Authority has put forth a solid plan based on the design, environmental and economic realities of our time. The state has secured \$3.5 billion in federal funds to break ground on the project this year. And Gov. Brown has reiterated California's support for the project.

California high-speed rail is on the brink of reality, while no viable alternatives have been presented to accommodate the future needs of our state.

This is not the time to put the brakes on high-speed rail. It's the time to invest in the future.

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