

Putting the Brakes on High Speed Rail

The key to a thriving economy is a functional, efficient, and safe transportation system. Nowhere is this more clearly demonstrated than in California, with an economy heavily dependent on trade, commerce, and tourism and an expanding population. By 2030, it is expected that our state's population will increase by 25 percent to nearly 47 million people. During this same period, vehicle miles of travel are projected to increase by 20 percent, placing additional strain on our already-stressed highways and roads. As a member of the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee, one of my top legislative priorities continues to be ensuring that California's transportation needs are met.

While we work to address the many challenges facing our transportation system, it is extremely important that we safeguard taxpayer dollars by spending funds wisely. This is why I am deeply concerned about California's current high-speed rail plan. Four years ago, when voters approved a \$9.95 billion bond to finance the project, the High Speed Rail Authority's business plan estimated that the San Francisco to Los Angeles line would cost \$33 billion. Today, a revised plan shows that it will take \$98.5 billion to finish that segment, while the approximate completion date has been pushed back from 2020 to 2033. In addition, outdated models are being used by the Authority to forecast future ridership, which will be key in determining whether or not the rail line will serve the needs of the public and justify its enormous construction and operations costs.

Questions have also been raised regarding the project's financing model, including the expectation of billions of dollars in future funding from the federal government. Given the current economic climate and our nation's \$15 trillion national debt, it makes little sense to rely on scarce federal resources to finance this risky undertaking. If the project moves forward without addressing these concerns and outside financing – whether from Washington or private investors – fails to materialize, California taxpayers will be on the hook for billions of dollars. With billions of taxpayer dollars on the line, it is imperative that these concerns be addressed immediately.

To get a better understanding of the high-speed rail project's true cost and long-term viability, I, along with a number of my colleagues, have requested that the Government Accountability Office (GAO) conduct a comprehensive study of the project. Specifically, we have asked the GAO to assess the accuracy of the Rail Authority's ridership projections and the amount of federal or state funding that will be necessary to complete construction of the rail line. We have also asked the GAO to study what will be needed to make the project self-sustaining, including the necessary ticket prices and ridership levels. I have also co-sponsored legislation that would freeze federal funding for the project until this feasibility study is completed.

The high-speed rail project will have a major impact on the future of our state. We should not move forward until these serious questions concerning cost and future ridership are addressed. During this session of Congress, I will continue my work on the Transportation Committee to hold the Rail Authority accountable, and develop and

implement fiscally sound solutions that will improve our transportation infrastructure, protect taxpayer dollars, and promote a strong economy.

Rep. Gary Miller represents California's 42nd Congressional District.