

Public gets first crack at new high-speed rail business plan

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The Fresno Bee

February 10, 2014 Updated 10 hours ago

Tuesday will be the first chance for the public to weigh in on the draft of an updated business plan for the state's proposed high-speed train system when the California High-Speed Rail Authority board meets in Sacramento.

The agency on Friday issued the 101-page draft 2014 Business Plan for at least two months of public comment before a final version is submitted to the state Legislature as required by May 1.

The draft plan — the first update since the rail authority's April 2012 business plan — estimates the construction cost for Phase 1 of the statewide project from San Francisco to Los Angeles at about \$67.6 billion.

The new forecast is down slightly from \$68.4 billion estimated in 2012, but still more than double the \$33 billion predicted in 2008 when California voters approved Proposition 1A, a \$9.9 billion bond measure to help finance high-speed rail planning and construction.

Critics are likely to seize upon the new plan's continued expectation that the federal government will be a major partner in underwriting the cost of the system.

The plan anticipates "the development of a dedicated trust fund for intercity and high-speed rail that is funded with an annual appropriation (that) could then be allocated to those states with high-speed rail programs."

That expectation, however, comes despite steadfast opposition of Republicans in the House of Representatives — including San Joaquin Valley members Kevin McCarthy of Bakersfield, Jeff Denham of Turlock, Devin Nunes of Tulare, David Valadao of Hanford and Tom McClintock of Granite Bay, whose district includes the Sierra down to eastern Fresno County — to any proposals by President Barack Obama to provide money for high-speed rail.

The rail authority hopes to use about \$6 billion, a combination of already-committed federal money and state bond funds, to build its first construction section between Merced and Bakersfield. The updated plan estimates that it will cost about \$31.2 billion to build what the agency calls its "initial operating section" from Merced through Bakersfield and Palmdale into the San Fernando Valley.

But save for the expectation of more federal money and using money from the state's carbon-reduction program, the plan offers little in the way of specifics in how the rail authority will raise money beyond the \$3.3 billion in federal stimulus and transportation funds that the Obama administration already has committed and Prop. 1A bonds.

Also Tuesday:

-- The rail board will consider approving five contracts with engineering and surveying companies for right of way support services in the San Joaquin Valley.

The authority estimates it will need to acquire all or parts of about 1,000 pieces of property along its route between Merced and Bakersfield.

The five companies selected — O'Dell Engineering in Modesto, Napa-based Chaudhary & Associates, Hernandez Kroone & Associates of San Bernardino, and Fresno companies Quad Knopf Inc. and Mark Thomas & Company Inc. — will be doing surveying and mapping work, project administration and information tracking work for properties needed for right of way. The five contracts will have a combined value of up to \$16 million.

-- Authority staff will provide the board with a series of progress reports, including financial and budget updates, agency staffing, and the status of work on the Madera-Fresno section of the route, for which the agency awarded a contract of just under \$1 billion for designing and building the 29-mile segment.

If you go

What: California High-Speed Rail Authority Board meeting

When: Tuesday. Closed session begins at 9 a.m., public session begins at 10 a.m.

Where: State Department of Health Care Services Auditorium, 1500 Capitol Ave., Sacramento.

Online: The meeting will be webcast live [here](#). Read the [agenda](#) and [draft 2014 business plan](#).

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