

[CONNIE CONWAY: A better use of HSR dollars: Fix our existing infrastructure](#)

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For any of us who have driven on Highway 99 or on other local roads, we know that many of them need urgent repair. As someone who commutes from the Central Valley to Sacramento each week on Highway 99, I sometimes feel like I am navigating an obstacle course.

The Central Valley's roads are also the lifelines for the farms and businesses that need to transport their products to the marketplace. We must reinvest in our transportation infrastructure as soon as possible. Without efficient roads, highways and ports, the Valley's economy will grind to a halt.

That is why my Assembly Republican colleagues and I have introduced a proposal called "California Jobs First," which will reallocate high-speed rail dollars for immediate job-creating infrastructure projects. Our plan lets voters decide on California's transportation priorities.

If the voters agree, our proposal will result in \$11 billion in one-time funds and \$2.4 billion annually for job-creating transportation projects statewide. It ensures that the taxes you pay on fuel are actually used to improve our highways. It also prioritizes the paying of loans that the state borrowed from transportation programs.

Critics have argued that voters already approved high-speed rail, so why should they vote again? My response: It is clear that the current project hardly resembles what the voters approved in 2008. Back then, supporters said it would cost \$33.5 billion to build. But the Governor now predicts it could cost as much as \$80 billion. Others think it will ultimately cost more than \$100 billion. Californians are right to be wary of high-speed rail and should have the final say on its future.

Furthermore, other funding sources have yet to materialize and have been further threatened by recent court rulings and uncertainty in Washington, D.C. It is highly unlikely that high-speed rail will have the funding it needs to open without a massive bailout from state taxpayers. Such a bailout will inevitably have to be funded by taking money away from our classrooms or public safety. It is not a pleasant thing to think about.

Our "Jobs First plan" is instead focused on priorities. Did you know that the high-speed rail folks are spending more than \$200 million to move a 2.5-mile portion of Highway 99 in Fresno just to make room for the train? Wouldn't it be better to use that money instead on actually improving Highway 99?

The simple truth is that our state has limited resources to meet many needs, and we must do a better job of spending wisely. Our proposal leaves it to the voters by giving them a positive

alternative to consider: a plan that rebuilds our state by creating 108,000 new jobs and growing the economy by up to \$140 billion.

The need to invest in infrastructure has never been greater. According to the California Transportation Commission, there is an estimated \$295 billion in unmet statewide needs through 2021. The Commission also estimates that 58 percent of state roads need rehabilitation or repaving, while 20 percent of state bridges need major work. At the local level, 55 percent of roads need to be either repaired or replaced altogether.

For the Central Valley, up to \$9.7 billion in unmet infrastructure needs could be eligible for funding. It would mean less time stuck in traffic and more time for the activities you care about, such as spending time with family. Upgrading our infrastructure will help improve the Valley's poor air quality and get vehicles moving as quickly as possible.

By passing our proposal, we can help Californians and give our economy a much-needed boost without raising taxes in the future. I hope the Legislature agrees and puts our proposal in front of the voters to decide.

Assembly Republican Leader Connie Conway, of Tulare, represents the 26th Assembly District in the California Legislature.