

Fresno County supervisors to reconsider high-speed rail stance

[fb fresnobee.com /2014/07/12/4022363/fresno-co-supervisors-to-reconsider.html](http://fresnobee.com/2014/07/12/4022363/fresno-co-supervisors-to-reconsider.html)

By Marc Benjamin



Conceptual view of high speed rail.

SPECIAL TO THE BEE

Fresno County supervisors have supported high-speed rail for the past seven years, but that support is waning and could change Tuesday.

That's when supervisors will discuss whether the rail program still is following its original plans and meeting voters' intentions, and whether they can continue to support it.

Officials with the California High-Speed Rail Authority learned about the planned discussion on the meeting agenda and will be in Fresno on Tuesday to address supervisors, state officials confirmed.

Supervisor Debbie Poochigian had the issue placed on Tuesday's agenda "to give direction to staff in case the supervisors have an interest in changing their position."

Poochigian said she drafted a resolution if the board now chooses to oppose high-speed rail.

The issue, she said, has not been discussed for several years, and she and board Chairman Andreas Borgeas weren't on the board that voted for the original resolution of support.

In 2012, supervisors crafted a letter to the high-speed rail authority but continued to support the plan. Poochigian said those questions — ranging from business dislocation, projected revenues and cost

estimates — went unanswered.

The price of the project, Poochigian said, has skyrocketed since it was first supported by voters, doubling to \$68 billion. And, she said, trips will take longer and be more costly for riders and on a slower train than originally envisioned.

"As far as I'm concerned, California cannot afford this," she said.

Borgeas said he, too, is concerned about skyrocketing costs. "It is of a nature and financial scope not contemplated when residents voted on this issue many years ago," he said.

Supervisor Phil Larson said he has supported high-speed rail in the past, but he also has concerns.

"When we supported it years ago, that's not what it is today," he said.

Tuesday's discussion comes only days after Supervisor Henry R. Perea returned from Washington, D.C., where he pitched Fresno as the location for a high-speed rail maintenance, research and testing facility.

Perea said he was disappointed by Poochigian's proposal because his rail facility discussions with the Federal Railroad Administration last week were fruitful.

"That would make us the center for high-speed rail research in the country," Perea said. "Now, we will put out a resolution that is way beyond our authority and hurt our local economy. It defies logic."

He said decisions being made in the courts, Washington, D.C., and Sacramento are "at a higher pay grade than the (Fresno County) Board of Supervisors."

He remains a strong supporter of high-speed rail because of the jobs it will create.

The rail project will generate 20,000 new construction jobs in each of five years in the Fresno area, said Lisa Marie Alley, spokeswoman for the California High-Speed Rail Authority.

She said 71 firms with offices in Fresno County already are working on the project. Nine Fresno County companies, she said, have signed contracts with a total value of \$56 million.

The first leg of the rail project came in under \$1 billion, significantly lower than engineers' estimates of \$1.5 billion to \$2 billion, Alley said.

The reporter can be reached at (559) 441-6166, mbejamin@fresnobee.com or [@beebebenjamin](https://twitter.com/beebebenjamin) on Twitter.