

California High-Speed Rail Head Says Project Still on Track Despite GOP

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Will the Republican takeover of Congress put a crimp in high-speed rail funding in California?

House Majority Leader Kevin McCarthy of Bakersfield has led the charge against the \$68 billion effort to connect L.A. and San Francisco by high-speed rail, voicing concerns about its cost and viability. McCarthy has [called the state's plan](#) for the network "deeply flawed."

Republicans in the California Legislature [have no love for the project](#) either.

But Dan Richard, chair of the California High-Speed Rail Authority, said Friday he's confident there's already enough money for initial construction in the Central Valley.

"The economic stimulus for the Central Valley is going to be enormous," he said. "I don't think people are going to want to stand in the way of that. And I think that as we build pieces of this system, the public is going to demand that it get connected."

Richard estimates the rail line is about half-funded with existing federal and state grants, ongoing cap-and-trade funds, and an expected infusion of cash from the private sector.

Brown Priority

The rail project is considered one of Gov. Jerry Brown's top priorities. The San Jose Mercury News [recently called](#)

[Brown](#) high-speed rail's "top cheerleader." And from the [San Francisco Chronicle](#) last month:

The bullet train is central to Brown's vision for California's future. He compares it to the construction of the Golden Gate Bridge and the State Water Project, although in sheer scale and cost, the high-speed rail line is bigger than those historic public works investments.

"I want you to think about those who built the cathedrals of Europe," he told a crowd of supporters, including a dozen union members in hard hats, when he signed a \$6-billion appropriation for the project in 2012. "First it was the son and then the grandson. They had a vision. It wasn't about ... self-gratification. It was about sacrifice."

Earlier this year, Brown and legislators [agreed to use 25 percent of revenue from the state's cap-and-trade program](#) for high-speed rail.

A potentially devastating blow to the project was averted in October, when the [state Supreme Court refused](#) to review a decision by a state appeals court related to high-speed rail funding. That decision validated the state's funding plans, overturning a lower court's finding that the project violated Proposition 1A, the 2008 measure that allocated the original high-speed rail funds, and blocking the HSR from drawing on \$8 billion in state bond money,

But impediments to constructing the network still remain, the [Sacramento Business Journal](#) reports ...

The California High-Speed Rail Authority needs approximately 1,100 parcels for its first construction segment, 130 miles from Madera to Bakersfield. The state began making offers on properties in 2012 that were standing in the way of future tracks and infrastructure.

So far, the state has sought ownership of 822 parcels, and acquired just 106.

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