

## Henry R. Perea: High-speed rail is Fresno game-changer

By Henry R.  
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After 15 years of lawsuits and opposition from skeptics who said it would never work and would cost too much on the heels of the Great Depression, the Golden Gate Bridge opened on May 27, 1937. This magnificent structure forever changed the San Francisco landscape. Who today would say that building this bridge was a bad idea?

Tuesday, at noon, Gov. Jerry Brown will preside over a historic groundbreaking in Fresno that will provide another significant mode of transportation for all Californians, as well as forever change the economic landscape of Fresno County and the San Joaquin Valley. This groundbreaking will be for the new California High-Speed Rail System.

Under Gov. Brown's visionary leadership and guided by the steady hand of Chairman Dan Richard, CEO Jeff Morales and the High-Speed Rail Authority Board, the first-in-the nation, 800-mile high-speed rail capable of going over 200 mph will move Californians across the state like never before. Think about it: approximately one hour, 15 minutes from Fresno to the Bay Area and one hour, 30 minutes from Fresno to Los Angeles.

This will forever change how we think about travel for business and pleasure. One day, this system will crisscross America and it will bring construction jobs and related industries, and provide communities with opportunities to establish themselves as centers for this 21st century industry.

In the past five years, the first \$6 billion was designated to begin construction of the spine of the system here in the Valley. As this construction begins, efforts are also underway to upgrade and increase electrification of the existing passenger rail systems in San Francisco and Los Angeles. And, as construction moves south from Madera to Bakersfield, the train will move through Palmdale and connect to the Los Angeles rail system.

How does this change our local economic landscape? Already this project has brought money and employment to hard-pressed economies in the Valley. Forty-four local companies are among the certified small businesses awarded \$296 million in active contracts. The equivalent of 632 new full time jobs have been created. That's real prosperity we can feel at home as dollars in our pocket, money spent at local businesses, and local tax revenue for improvements to Valley communities — and this is just the beginning.

These are the jobs — and careers — that change the future, not just for workers, but for whole families.

Fresno County, through the efforts of the private-public partnership Fresno Works, is also poised in 2015 to win its bid for the Heavy Maintenance Facility and Operation Center and its 1,500 highly skilled, high-wage jobs. This state-of-the-art facility will become a center for transportation and economic development with a land-use plan crafted to foster commercial, industrial and residential housing projects that will be unsurpassed anywhere in the United States.

Government, education and business leaders have plans in place to assure our community takes full advantage of this opportunity. Today, training programs prepare residents to work on rail construction. Tomorrow, those programs will educate people to build trains, run them and maintain them.

Is this pie in the sky? Not really. Manufacturers of bullet trains in Germany, Japan, China, Spain and other countries are preparing their bids to provide the first bullet train in America. As big of a prize as the California system is, the real prize is providing the trains to serve the entire nation. These manufacturers know the successful bidder will build these trains in America with an American work force. Let's make sure it's a Fresno County work force, with the best training programs and the most experience with the system.

So, why not Fresno County? The answer is simple. Fresno County through the efforts of Fresno Works has labored tirelessly to create and implement a vision that will forever change the economic landscape of our community.

So, be prepared to get on board Tuesday — ready or not, you will be a part of history.

Let's all be a part of the future that puts Fresno County on the forefront of better jobs, better lives, more successful small businesses and healthier and happier families! Our children and grandchildren deserve the same opportunities that our forefathers provided for us — to prosper and raise their families here in the Valley.

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