

Las Vegas casinos may be betting on high-speed rail

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There may be some new big-bucks players when it comes to California's high-speed rail line — Las Vegas casinos.

It's estimated that 18 million people a year hop on Interstate 15 from Southern California to Las Vegas. And while most eyes have been on California's high-speed rail dream, Nevada has been moving ahead with its own \$6 billion DesertXpress to link Vegas with the San Bernardino County town of Victorville.

What it needs is a big infusion of federal loans.

One idea being floated to make the project more attractive to the feds would be to extend the Vegas line across 60 miles of desert to Palmdale (Los Angeles County) and hook it to the high-speed rail link planned between Palmdale and Burbank.

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A Vegas-to-Burbank line — which has the backing of the casinos — could be a money-maker and thus attract the interest of the private investment that high-speed rail needs if it is ever to connect San Francisco to Los Angeles.

“Right now we have the Japanese coming and the Chinese coming in, and maybe two weeks after that the Spanish,”



said California's high-speed rail chief, [Dan Richard](#).

Fun times: Lots of chatter at the Hall of Justice over Sheriff **Ross Mirkarimi's** appointment of former Assistant District Attorney **Van Ly** as his new, \$144,000-a-year chief of staff.

For starters, Mirkarimi's announcement memo made a point of noting that Van was pronounced "Fun' with a 'V."

But the catty chat was over Ly's abrupt departure from the D.A.'s office in November 2011, after 13 years on the job, following what law enforcement sources said was an internal investigation into an alleged shoplifting incident involving her at the local Costco.

"If I was in court, I would object to the word 'shoplifting,'" Ly told us. "I was detained (by store security) to determine whether there was any unpaid merchandise."

Ly says that in the end, it was all "cleared up."

"I paid for all the merchandise before I left the store," she said. "I was never arrested for shoplifting. ... Stuff happens all the time like this — it was a misconception."

Ly says she doesn't actually know why she was subsequently let go from her job, other than it was a few months after [George Gascón](#) was appointed D.A. and that she served as an at-will employee.

"There was no discussion about any allegation of any wrongdoing," she said. "Basically, the D.A. gave me a chance to resign or be separated from the organization, and I chose to be separated."

Ly says she never discussed the matter with Mirkarimi, whom she met years ago when he was working as an investigator for then-District Attorney [Terence Hallinan](#).

"I don't know what he (Mirkarimi) knows" about the incident, Ly said.

Mirkarimi said Friday that he couldn't comment on a "confidential personnel matter, especially one that occurred within another department."

However, he said, "I look at the totality of what someone like Van can bring to this office, and believe she will be an outstanding chief of staff."

A Breed apart: You can say one thing about San Francisco's new [Board of Supervisors](#) president, **London Breed** — she is not afraid to speak her mind.

When the former community activist ran for the board in 2012, she did so without the blessing of a number of political movers, including her mentor, former Mayor [Willie Brown](#). Brown, now a Chronicle columnist, and many other big names were backing Mayor [Ed Lee's](#) appointee in District Five, [Christina Olague](#).

When eyebrows were raised, Breed shot off an f-bomb-laden blog post that went viral. Among other things, referring to Brown and Chinatown power broker [Rose Pak](#), she wrote, "I don't do what no motherf— body tells me to do."

"It was not meant to be public," Breed said at the time. "I got upset. At the end of the day, I should have been better than that. I'm willing to admit it."

But she added, "I'm not going to be used by anyone."

Although Breed's outburst may have cost her in the short run — Sen. [Dianne Feinstein](#), for one, decided not to endorse her — it made it clear to all that she was not a Brown pawn. It also upped her visibility.



Since defeating Olague, Breed appears to have mended fences with Brown. He has become a fixture at her events and fundraisers, and at the celebration at 1300 Fillmore on Thursday following her election as board president, Brown was the emcee.

Whether the two are genuinely close or just following the old adage, "Keep your friends close and your enemies closer," is the grist of speculation.

We're not sure even they know.

San Francisco Chronicle columnists [Phillip Matier](#) and [Andrew Ross](#) appear Sundays, Mondays and Wednesdays. Matier can be seen on the KPIX TV morning and evening news. He can also be heard on KCBS radio Monday through Friday at 7:50 a.m. and 5:50 p.m. Got a tip? Call (415) 777-8815, or e-mail matierandross@sfchronicle.com.
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