

Fresno Council Member Brandau uses billboard to tout pro-dam, anti-bullet train message

By John
Ellis



Fresno City Council Member Steve Brandau used \$3,000 in campaign funds to buy a pro-dam, anti-bullet train billboard along Highway 99 near the Herndon Avenue exit.

COURTESY STEVE BRANDAU

- Council member uses campaign funds to buy billboard space
- Steve Brandau's message "not so much anti-train as a pro-Temperance Flat"
- He plans to put up more billboards to get his point across

Fresno City Council Member Steve Brandau says he sees at least 20 different water-related articles just about every day, but still, "nobody is paying a damn bit of attention to it."

As California suffers through its fourth year of drought, Brandau isn't referring to increasing water conservation efforts. It's increasing water storage that is being ignored, he says.

So Brandau decided to do something himself, dipping into his campaign account to purchase space on a prominent Highway 99 billboard. His message — "Governor put Our Water BEFORE your Train."

"It looks fantastic; gorgeous," Brandau said of the billboard. "I'm a conservative. This is right in my wheelhouse."

The timing also is almost perfect. It comes days after 12 state Senate Republicans sent a letter to Gov. Jerry Brown

that states, in part, “We need new sources of reliable, clean water. The construction of significant, large surface storage projects is critical in planning for our state’s water needs ...”

Brandau said his frustration is that the state’s high-speed rail project looks to be a higher priority for Brown than increasing water storage in the state. He hopes northbound drivers on Highway 99 near the Herndon Avenue offramp will see his sign as they are headed toward Sacramento and then “take that message right to the governor.”

The sign isn’t cheap. It cost Brandau’s campaign account around \$3,000 for the artwork and to keep the sign up for six weeks. He chose the location because it is in his Fresno council district, and also because it is in a well-traveled location. But that meant paying the full price because the empty billboard inventory in his desired location was tight.

Still, Brandau says his goal is to put up more of the signs around town. He would like to get the message to Brown and state legislative leaders that building Temperance Flat and other dam projects should be a priority for California.

Brown spokesman Evan Westrup called Brandau’s billboard statement “a false choice. California is a growing state that must fix its aging transportation and water infrastructure — our economic vitality depends on it. That’s why taxpayers voted for ballot measures to build high speed rail and new water storage and why both are a priority.”

Brandau said the billboard is “not so much anti-train as a pro-Temperance Flat, pro water strategy.”

He hopes people will see the website on the billboard — www.damtrain.com — where the talk is more about increasing water supplies than stopping the state’s bullet train.

Contact John Ellis: jellis@fresnobee.com, (559) 441-6320 or [@johnellis24](https://twitter.com/johnellis24) on Twitter.