

Rail will lift our Valley up



FRESNO WORKS

By Steve Geil

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Rep. Devin Nunes, R-Visalia, recently criticized high-speed rail, calling it an expensive “train wreck.” His view of high-speed rail is very short-sighted.

Once every 50 years, an event of extreme importance takes place that can transform a region economically. The computer industry transformed and branded Silicon Valley. Hollywood was transformed and branded as the “Entertainment Capital of the World.” I believe that high-speed rail is just such an historic tipping-point event that can transform the San Joaquin Valley.

This region is economically chained to high unemployment and poverty by time and distance. High-speed rail will break down these barriers and provide access to jobs miles from where we live.

An economically disadvantaged region such as the Valley immediately connects with vibrant areas such as Silicon Valley and Sacramento for employment opportunities, freeing our grandchildren from becoming prisoners to their own geography.

Our federal and state representatives have the political influence and power to transform this region into a thriving Valley of jobs and opportunities by working to designate Fresno County as the High-Speed Rail Development Center for the nation.

Fresno County has the perfect attitude and aptitude; longitude and latitude to make it the home of high-speed rail development. It will take a diverse, available, educated, and skilled work force for the planning, design, engineering, construction, operation and maintenance of the nation’s high speed rail system.

And then there is the opposition.

The same people who say ObamaCare was passed because legislators didn’t listen to a majority of the people are now turning a deaf ear to the majority of the people who have made it clear they want high-speed rail.

A poll of Californians released in July showed only 13% opposed the high-speed rail project. Of those polled, 34% said they would like to see the project move forward “as quickly as possible,” 42% said they would like to see the network built, despite concerns over the estimated \$42 billion final cost.

Opponents claim they want to create jobs and be globally competitive, but are unwilling to recognize the hundreds of thousands of jobs that will be created by high-speed rail, or its ability to improve our global competitiveness.

But there is a bigger issue not discussed by opponents. This system is not for our generation. It is for future generations who will use high-speed rail as commonly as we use today’s super highway system.

It was my grandfather’s generation that decided in the 1950s to build the highway system that exists today. Their generation understood the importance for planning and building for future generations. They knew they would never get to use it. They built, and we continue to build, a system that connects this great country coast to coast.

High-speed rail creates economic and job opportunities for the next generation in the same way freeways did ours. They shouldn’t have to move to find a job.

High speed rail is not “pork.” It’s an investment.

Yes, California’s budget is a shambles, but the people approved a \$9.95 billion bond. With federal financing, we will still need to finance the remaining gap of almost \$15 billion from the private sector. Those discussions are taking place around the world. I can tell you first hand that private investors are seriously interested.

And by nesting the maintenance, testing, training, and research facilities in the San Joaquin Valley, we will not just be building a high-speed rail system, we will be building a legacy that brings opportunity and prosperity, transforming Central California into an economically self-sustaining region for generations to come.