

Rail revolution will change Fresno County



By Henry R. Perea
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The who's who of high-speed rail know Fresno County is the place to be. Today several important heavy hitters within the high-speed rail and transportation arena are meeting right here in downtown Fresno.

The Economic Development Corporation's annual economic profile and annual report is focusing on high-speed rail and the following will talk about the importance of this mode of transportation to hundreds of attendees: Joseph Szabo, Federal Rail Administration administrator; Rod Diridon Sr., California High Speed Rail Authority board member and executive director of the MINETA Transportation Institute; Roelof van Ark, executive director to the California High Speed Rail Authority; Oliver Hauck, president of Siemens Industry, Inc., Mobility Division; and William Schroerer, research and policy director for Smart Growth America.

The movers and the shakers aren't the only ones who know Fresno County is the place for high-speed rail. Our residents do, too. Through the Fresno Works-hosted "I Want My High Speed Train!" video contest, hundreds of residents expressed enthusiasm for the high speed train.

Fresno Works received great entries about bringing the high speed train to Fresno and more than a thousand people voted for their favorite videos. The winning video will be unveiled at today's high-speed rail event. It's exciting to see just how supportive our citizens are of high-speed rail. Fresno County is high-speed rail's biggest supporter and we continue to offer unabashed support to the California high-speed rail Authority. After all, high-speed rail is an economic game changer for our area.

Just last week, through a public process, the Fresno County Transportation Authority cast a monumental vote to earmark \$25 million from Measure C as an incentive to the Authority to locate its heavy maintenance facility in Fresno County.

The thousands of jobs and millions of dollars this facility will bring to the local economy is unsurpassed and certainly worthy of funding. As co-chair of Fresno Works, the local collaboration dedicated to bringing the heavy maintenance facility to Fresno County, I can say without hesitation that Fresno County is doing all it can to help create a brighter future for its residents through high-speed rail.

Federal Transportation Secretary Raymond LaHood has said that California is way ahead of the curve when it comes to high-speed rail. He said, "The people there have been working and planning for high-speed rail for more than a decade, and they are willing to put up their own taxpayer dollars."

If California is ahead of the curve, then Fresno County is leading the charge.

The rest of the world is paying attention, too. Recently an illustration in a major national newspaper showed Fresno as the home of high-speed rail development. To be given this designation is incredible, as high-speed rail is our future. Fresno County, our future is bright.

Just this week, in fact, the federal government announced it has earmarked \$715 million to go toward the San Joaquin Valley segments of this massive infrastructure project. Beyond the race for the heavy maintenance facility, the race is on to win the honors of being the first segment built on the high-speed rail line.

Next week's Authority meeting will put forth the criteria to help in the decision-making process of where to turn dirt first. One of four segments will be chosen: Los Angeles to Anaheim, San Francisco to San Jose, Merced to Fresno or Fresno to Bakersfield.

The recent announcement of federal funding bodes well for Fresno County as it looks more and more like the first segment will be built somewhere in the Valley.

The likelihood of this segment being built in the Valley means a greater likelihood that Fresno County will get the heavy maintenance facility.

Fresno Works doesn't take this opportunity lightly and has been working hard to prepare the land for the maintenance facility. But even more, we have been researching financing possibilities and have garnered overwhelming public support for the maintenance facility.

Thomas Jefferson said every generation needs a new revolution. Fresno County, high-speed rail is our revolution.