

DEL MAR TIMES

High-speed rail proposition worth support

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As freeways continue to grind along at a snail's pace, sending harmful auto emissions into our air and impatient commuters onto surface streets and coastal roads, the notion of clean and efficient public transportation has increasingly become part of our dialogue.

Voters now have a chance to answer at least some of those concerns with Proposition 1-A, the High-Speed Rail Bond initiative.

Proponents say high-speed trains use one-third the energy of air-travel and one-fifth the energy of auto travel while eliminating 12.7 billion pounds of greenhouse gas emissions (the equivalent of removing more than one million vehicles from our roads) and reducing dependence on foreign oil by up 12 million barrels per year. These are pretty heady numbers in these days of increasing energy concerns.

Voter reaction is bound to immediately center on the monetary aspect of the measure - an almost \$10 billion dollar bond issue with principal and interest rates estimated to cost the state about \$647 million a year. Concerning to say the least in these times, especially in California, but on further review of the measure, not disheartening.

This is a bond, not a tax, and interesting financial protections have been included as a matter of law. As part of a public/private partnership, Prop 1-A would allow the bond money to be used only after 75 percent of partnership dollars were secured for the project - no funds, no bonds.

The other side of California's troubling balance sheet is its worrisome unemployment numbers. The economic stimulus aspect of this measure could be a boon to the California job market and a moribund construction industry. It is estimated the project could provide up to 200,000 temporary jobs and 500,000 permanent jobs.

There are several questions associated with the project including a provision that states all operating and maintenance costs will be covered by affordable ticket fares. The fares will undoubtedly be competitive in regard to airfares, but will they be competitive enough to attract Californians away from their precious automobiles?

There is also no guarantee federal and matching funds will be raised for the project, but the safeguards inherent in the measure should prevent the state from taking too large a hit.

Sometimes we need to look beyond the economic present with eyes squarely focused on the future and as a result, bring back a little shine to California's tarnished forward-thinking and environmentally friendly reputation.

We recommend a yes vote on Proposition 1-A.