



EDITORIAL

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High-speed rail pays off

New study says Valley will greatly benefit from building system.

A new study clearly defines the benefits to the Valley of the proposed high-speed rail project -- and the tally is in the billions of dollars.

The report, authored by Shawn Kantor, a professor at the University of California at Merced, says the direct economic benefits of savings in the Central Valley -- which includes the Sacramento and San Joaquin valleys -- would total \$3 billion annually.

Some of those benefits would come in the form of savings of time and money as passengers shift from cars and airplanes to the less-expensive trains. There would also be savings in travel time, reduced freeway and airport congestion, lowered accident risk and productivity gains from train travel -- it's easy and safe to use a laptop or a phone on a train; it's not advisable from behind the wheel of a car on Highway 99.

Economic benefits would include thousands of new jobs, many very well-paying, both in construction and subsequent operation of the trains. Kantor points out that the Valley -- where the longest single stretch of tracks will be -- would absorb somewhere between 15% and 40% of the \$40 billion it's estimated the system will cost to build.

Building the system would have a "pronounced effect" on service, communications, utilities, finance, insurance and real estate sectors of the Valley economy, Kantor found.

It gets better. The high-speed system will permit the Valley to more fully participate in the statewide economy, Kantor said. "Market integration" would mean as much as \$48 billion annually in new income.

Kantor's study bolsters the argument in favor of Proposition 1A, the \$9.9 billion bond measure on the November ballot that would jump-start the construction of the nation's first true high-speed rail system.

We have long maintained that all the regions of the state -- even those not directly served by high-speed rail -- would benefit from its construction, but we've also felt that the Valley stands to gain the most. We'll see enormous economic benefits, from the jobs created to build and operate the system to greater connectivity with the rest of the state. We'll see cleaner air as many drivers and air passengers choose the high-speed alternative.

And we'll start to get those benefits sooner than most. The system's first stretch of track is likely to connect Bakersfield and Merced, through Fresno. The trains must be tested and certified before the system opens, a process that will take two to three years. And the only place in the 800-mile system where the trains will run at top speed -- about 220 miles per hour -- is through the Valley. So that test track, which will later form part of the full system, will be built here.

The economic case for high-speed rail is well-established. It's even more important in tough times like these, when there's such a great need for jobs and investment.