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EDITORIAL

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Yes on California bonds

Bullet trains, children's healthcare and veterans' housing all deserve support.

Prop. 1a: High-speed rail line

There's something undeniably alluring about a bullet train -- the technology is so powerful, the speed so breathtaking, it makes quotidian trips seem exotic. Perhaps that's why proponents of Proposition 1a, which would authorize \$9.95 billion in bonds for a high-speed rail line connecting Northern and Southern California, think it would be wildly successful. They predict the line could draw 117 million riders a year by 2030, compared with 3 million now taking the high-speed Amtrak train in the densely populated Boston-Washington corridor. And they say it will turn a billion-dollar profit by then even as it keeps ticket prices remarkably low.

The projections by the measure's opponents, led by the libertarian Reason Foundation in Los Angeles, are much less sanguine and more persuasive. If voters approve Proposition 1a, it seems close to a lead-pipe cinch that the California High-Speed Rail Authority will ask for many billions more in the coming decades, and the Legislature will have to scrape up many millions of dollars in operating subsidies.

And yet, we still think voters should give in to the measure's gleaming promise, because it's in their long-term interest. Weaning travelers from gas-powered, road-choking cars is critical to the state's health and competitiveness. A high-speed rail line would not only provide a cleaner and faster alternative to automobiles, it would encourage transit-friendly development.

The measure isn't as big a risk as it would be if the state were footing the entire bill. The "backbone" segment from Los Angeles to San Francisco is projected to cost \$33 billion, with about 75% from federal and private sources. Until those funds are secured, the state won't issue most of its bonds. If the line never gets built, the state's losses will be well under \$2 billion. That's not too much to wager on a visionary leap that would cement California's place as the nation's most forward-thinking state.