

# San Jose Mercury News

## EDITORIAL

*October 18, 2008*

### Yes on 1A: It puts Silicon Valley and California on the fast track

Americans who visit Japan or Europe and hop a bullet train get a stunning reminder of how far behind much of the industrialized world we are in swift, clean, efficient transportation. Californians can change that by approving Proposition 1A, a bond to begin construction of a high-speed rail system that would whisk passengers from Los Angeles to the Bay Area through downtown San Jose in a mere 2 1/2 hours. It will be a catalyst for the economic growth of California and this region over the next 100 years.

The proposal, years in the making, has been thoroughly vetted in public debate, particularly over the route. The High Speed Rail Authority made the right choices, coming up with a practical and visionary plan that will place San Jose and Silicon Valley at the heart of the Bay Area's economy. We recommend it.

Proposition 1A's \$9.95 billion bond will cover about a quarter of the cost of the high-speed rail project. The source for the rest is not certain, although similar systems have found private investment, and a federal high-speed rail funding bill just signed by President Bush was drafted in part with this project in mind.

Still, there's no question it's expensive, and, with a recession looming, voters will be wary. But a down economy is exactly the time to invest in transportation and other infrastructure that will form the backbone of our future prosperity.

The plan will create 160,000 good construction jobs now as it lays the groundwork for population and job growth. And it will be a critical step toward energy independence: The trains use dramatically less energy than airplanes and cars, and they run on electricity, most of which will come from renewable sources. High-tech, high-speed rail may be the greenest kind of travel after bicycles.

Critics say costs are underestimated. We don't doubt that some figures will prove to be off; if we demand perfect cost predictions with a project of this magnitude, looking many years into the future, we'll never build anything major in California again. But the state estimates seem to have been done responsibly, and the recession could actually mean lower costs for some early work. The proposition does include requirements for public accountability on spending, so activists can monitor the contracts.

Santa Clara County voters have another transit question to decide: Measure B, the one-eighth-cent sales tax to operate the BART extension to Silicon Valley. This would complete the funding package for BART, and it's fail-safe, in that it won't be collected unless all the money to construct the line is secured.

If Measure B is a train rolling into a station, Proposition 1A is more like a whistle blowing and an "all aboard" call. But imagine the power of ringing the bay with high-speed transit, through the final BART link, and connecting to Los Angeles as well. These are the right things to do for the future, and putting them off will only increase the costs. Vote yes.