



**PD Editorial: For Prop. 1A
High-speed train would put state on fast track to recovery**

THE PRESS DEMOCRAT

Published: Friday, October 10, 2008 at 5:01 a.m.

Last Modified: Friday, October 10, 2008 at 8:33 a.m.

Measure Q, which calls for restoring passenger train service in the North Bay, is not the only smart, rail-oriented measure on the Nov. 4 ballot.

We also encourage voters to approve Proposition 1A, a \$9.95 billion bond measure to help create an 800-mile high-speed rail network connecting San Francisco and Sacramento to Los Angeles.

Anyone who has been to Europe or Asia and ridden an electric high-speed train understand the benefits of these systems. They work. They're efficient, environmentally friendly and less expensive than air travel.

Imagine a train traveling 220 mph from San Francisco to Los Angeles. You could get there in about 2½ hours -- for about \$50. You would be hard-pressed to get to either SFO or Oakland airport, park, pass through security and take an airplane to Southern California in less time -- let alone less money.

Given the high cost of fuel, taking a car could be even less efficient.

As with the SMART measure, the biggest obstacle to the high-speed train is fear -- fear of something new and, more recently, fear that this is not something the state of California can afford.

We posed that question to retired Judge Quentin Kopp, now chairman of the California High Speed Rail Authority. We liked his answer.

"We're priming the pump," Kopp said, noting that the rail program would create 160,000 construction jobs and, once completed, 450,000 permanent jobs. "You gotta go. You can't be afraid."

He wants to remind voters that the Golden Gate Bridge, along with many public improvement projects, was begun in 1933, in the middle of the Great Depression.

There were also plenty of complaints about creating a system called BART back in the 1960s.

"Where would be if we didn't have BART now?" Kopp asked.

There are other reasons to be confident in this project. Proposition 1A would authorize the state to sell \$9.95 billion in general obligation bonds to fund the planning and construction of the system. But there are safeguards for how the money can be spent.

For example, only 2.5 percent can be spent on administration, only 10 percent on planning and other non-engineering work, and no construction can begin until all the financing is in place.

Plus, it comes with the requirement that the state's share of the cost can be no more than 50 percent. In fact, the plan is to have the state pay one-third of the cost, while funding from the federal government, local agencies and the private sector cover the other two-thirds.

It's no secret that the state faces a problem right now in accessing short-term loans to pay its bills. But this involves long-term debt, and even with Proposition 1A, the state would be within its bonded capacity.

That's why Proposition 1A has the support of the state Legislature, Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger and many organizations across the state, including the Sierra Club, labor unions, cities, counties and a variety of business organizations.

The Press Democrat joins these groups in recommending a yes vote on Proposition 1A.