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Jobs, transportation and innovation for the AV

By: Es C. Ledford Jr.



The California High-Speed Rail Authority and the city of Palmdale recently entered into an agreement that allows the city and the authority to begin planning the proposed high-speed rail station here in Palmdale, next to the civic center and the Palmdale Transportation Center.

Our city has worked closely with the authority to ensure that Palmdale and all of the communities of the Antelope Valley have the opportunity to be at the forefront of transportation, innovation and economic development in the region.

As one of the fastest-growing cities in Los Angeles County over the past two decades, Palmdale residents have one of the longest commutes in the

country, according to the U.S. Census Bureau, and we are committed to bringing multiple transit connections and options to our residents as soon as possible. As part of this agreement with the authority, the city of Palmdale will receive \$600,000 in grants to explore options and seek public input for the design and development of the Palmdale Transportation Center.

When it comes to planning this new station, we will focus on the best ways to integrate high-speed rail service into the region, as well as promote economic development and sustainable community strategies. This is a real game-changer for Palmdale and the Antelope Valley and we must be ready to take full advantage of this exciting opportunity.

Construction of the statewide high-speed rail system is well underway in the Central Valley including bridge construction, utility relocation, and demolition and clearing activities.

Contractors on the first phase of construction in Madera and Fresno counties include 40 small businesses from across California, with active small-business contracts valued at \$296 million.

The design-build contract for the next two phases of construction on the 65-mile segment from Fresno to north of Bakersfield was awarded in January.

The authority also recently announced that five construction teams qualified to bid on the fourth phase of construction, which constitutes the

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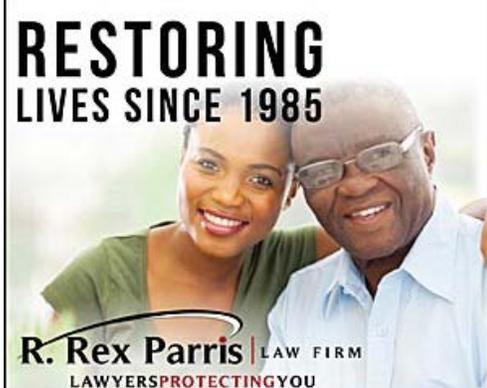
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next 22-mile segment of construction through the counties of Tulare and Kern and the cities of Wasco and Shafter.

Thousands of jobs will be created, both directly and indirectly, from each phase of construction. In addition to construction work, other local industries and businesses will see an economic boost from all of this activity. As dollars are spent locally, companies will expand and hire more people, who will then spend more dollars at local restaurants, stores, entertainment venues and other sites, further fueling the local economy. High-speed rail is clearly on the move and heading our way, which is why making sure we're prepared for it is one of my top transportation priorities.

That's why our city's Planning Division has been working on several key projects that will help determine the future of transportation and development in Palmdale.

The Palmdale Transit Oriented Development Overlay Zone Project will evaluate various land uses and transit options surrounding the Palmdale Transportation Center, and prepare a plan that will provide multiple pathways for connecting transportation options - including regional rail service, local buses, and bikes - between the project area and the future high-speed rail station.

By creating a visionary framework for transportation and economic development, and establishing an overlay zone, we can adapt and encourage smart growth and development within walking distance of the transportation center.

Our Avenue Q Feasibility Study will determine the feasibility of developing the Avenue Q Corridor to incorporate a variety of transit options and a mix of housing, retail and business developments.

Because Avenue Q provides a direct route to the transportation center, planning for and supporting this type of growth and extending the proposed multi-use trails from the Palmdale Transit Village area into the project area will pave the way for development that will be beneficial to both the city and its residents.

Just imagine being able to walk from your home to dine at a local restaurant, visit some of the local shops, or even bike to work.

This is what the future looks like.

Jobs, economic development, smart growth opportunities and improved transit options are what is needed and what the high-speed rail project will bring to Palmdale and the Antelope Valley. After all, there's no reason why our residents shouldn't be able to live, work and play right here in their own communities.

For those who commute to Burbank or Los Angeles, a high-speed rail station in Palmdale will cut down on commute times, allowing them to spend more time being productive at work and more time at home with family and friends.

As our region continues to grow, we must be prepared to meet the challenges and greet the opportunities that come with it.

By investing our resources in multiple transportation and connection options today, we can and will attract the jobs and the businesses of tomorrow.

James C. Ledford Jr. is mayor of Palmdale

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