



# Let's get fast California trains running in time for the 2028 Olympics

January 21, 2022

*This is a guest blog by Chris Jones, who is an advocate for high speed rail and better public transportation.*

As the California General Assembly considers funding to continue moving California's transportation system forward, let's aim higher: let's make it possible to buy a ticket on California high speed trains by the 2028 Olympics.

Los Angeles will be hosting the Summer Olympic Games that year. While the eyes of the world watch their athletes compete, the Olympics also put the host nation in the global spotlight. Japan took advantage of this at the 1964 Tokyo Games when they unveiled the Shinkansen, the world's first high speed train. It revolutionized the concept of train travel while also helping kickstart Japan's rise as a global economic power.

California is the heart of one of the most densely populated American mega-regions in which fast, frequent trains could outperform driving and even flying. This makes California the perfect place to prove that the concept of high speed rail can work in the United States too.

The idea of American high speed rail has been floated since the attempted High Speed Ground Transportation Act of 1965, but we still have nothing near what a growing number of other countries have achieved. Even Amtrak's Acela's emerging upgrades, with projected top speeds of 165 miles per hour in the Northeast Corridor, will fall short of most of the world's high speed trains which routinely reach speeds above 180 miles per hour. That leaves the title of America's first true high speed rail line up for grabs, and California remains poised to claim it.

When California voters approved Proposition 1A back in 2008, they backed a transformational vision for better transportation with high speed rail at its core. We still expect and deserve that

vision to be delivered.

The project's naysayers fail to see the proven benefits that high speed rail provides, or to offer viable alternatives to address California's already congested highways and airports, which must also contend with even greater demand from a projected rising population. Now that once-in-a-generation opportunities have emerged to invest in American infrastructure—and with the climate crisis forcing our hand—this is the moment to double down on California's high speed rail project.

Since 2015, California has made significant progress on the current 119 miles of high speed rail in the Central Valley, which will eventually allow trains to reach their projected top speed of 220 miles per hour. The current goal for the California High Speed Rail Authority is to extend this initial operating segment to Merced and Bakersfield, where it will connect with existing transit to and from the Bay Area and Los Angeles, and to get it operational before the end of the decade using the remaining \$4.2 billion in funds from Prop 1A.

So far, these remaining Prop 1A funds have been held up in the California State Legislature, which has yet to release them as part of their annual budget due mainly to a few state representatives who would apparently rather see those funds go toward transit projects in their respective districts. Such a move would go against Prop 1A and the will of the voters who approved it in 2008, and further delay high speed rail construction in the Central Valley which has already faced numerous delays due to lawsuits, namely over land acquisitions for its route. The \$4.2 billion left in Prop 1A is crucial to finishing this project before the end of the 2020s and doing that could pay off. Having the service at least partially open and in service before then could bring great publicity to not just the project but to California, especially with the global audience of the 2028 Summer Games.

Los Angeles expects to welcome thousands of international tourists here for the Olympics and has been expanding its own transit network to handle the large crowds. While ideally the entire California high speed rail line from Los Angeles to San Francisco would have already been completed by this point, the Bakersfield to Merced route could still prove an effective publicity tool for the project. Travelers from across the country and around the world who want to explore California during their Olympic visit to the state would have a chance to try America's first true high speed rail line. This initial success will help the push to complete the entire Los Angeles-San Francisco route, as well as inspire other American high speed rail projects.

Instead of letting this opportunity slip away, let's work to make the nation's first high speed rail project a success story. California now has a chance for our high speed trains to set the pace for the nation, just as the Shinkansen did for the world. Just like ours, the Shinkansen too ran over budget and faced harsh criticism while being built but has since become one of high speed rail's biggest success stories. Just as the Shinkansen for Japan and California's beloved Golden Gate Bridge, high speed rail will become a symbol of California. Let's be sure to make it a great one, in time for our whole country and the rest of the world to see it in Summer 2028.

*This is a guest blog by Chris Jones, who is an advocate for high speed rail and better public transportation. He resides in Irvine, California and has been a railfan since he can remember, namely from exploring the various rail lines around Southern California. While his passions may lie more in the history and preservation of the trains of yesteryear, he does have a fascination with the fast-paced modern freight and passenger trains of today, and especially the concept of high speed rail.*