12th KZGN News Talking Points Editorial

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By: Tom Wiknich

Today’s topic will be: High speed rail breaks ground, California’s bridge to nowhere?

The promoters turned out for the groundbreaking of the new, high-speed rail project to connect San Francisco to Los Angele, with a long-range plan to tie in Sacramento and San Diego, eventually covering about 800 miles. There was not even a mention of a LA to Las Vegas run, which would probably be the most traveled of the whole run. I actually think it would be a neat thing to have. But do I have a problem with how it is being done? Yes.

Anyway, back to what is happening now. Should we all be happy they have broken ground? This editorial will be about the process, and not cover the usual debate over cost effectiveness. I believe this could turn out to be California’s bridge to nowhere. The ground breaking is for the first 29 mile section between Fresno to Madera.

First ask yourself, why are they starting in the middle in a location where ridership would be low to begin with?

The easy answer: the promoters feel it is the easiest section to get started on, and once built, it would turn into an obligatory position. Supporters would say that it has to be finished, or money was wasted. Opponents will have a hard time stopping the project after billions of dollars have already been spent starting the project. I believe starting construction is premature at best, and not even considering the cost burden it will have on taxpayers.

Now, the essence of this editorial. How about just having the right of way to build it? As it stands now, the Feds only own 101 parcels of the needed 526 parcels for just the first 29 miles. Does it make sense to start building a massive project, when we don’t even have the right of way to build it? Not to mention the San Francisco Bay people are fighting that link tooth and nail. The start of construction before the right of way is obtained is really stupid. There are so many court cases pending, there are right of way issues, and just pure opposition to it from both sides of the spectrum. Environmentalists are fighting against it, and conservatives are fighting against it, both for different reasons, but still against it.

But again, back to my main objection to starting construction now. We don’t even have the right of way for the first 29 miles. What about the other 700+ miles we need the right of way? Heaven help them if they run into some ancient ruins along the way. There are so many right of way issues that can run the costs much higher than estimated, and may even make it unaffordable, or stop it totally in its tracks. Pardon the pun. Starting construction is not the right thing to do.

Heck, there are still unbuilt sections of the Eisenhower national freeway system started in the 1960’s due to blocked right of way issues. Look in our own backyard.

The San Luis Obispo to Las Vegas freeway through Ridgecrest was never completed due to right of way issues. There are freeway sections not completed in LA due to right of way issues. Is it too much to ask that we should not start this until we can actually build it?

In conclusion, get the right of way, then start the project.

Let’s not build a bridge to nowhere in California, by starting in Fresno and ending in the middle of nowhere.

Get the complete right of way, and then start the project.

Tell me what you think about this editorial or any other topic you’d like me to discuss! Whether you agree with me or not, I’d like to read your comments. I also encourage your email comments. I may read some email comments on my next editorial. Please email them to info@kzgn.net.

This has been a KZGN Talking Points Editorial, seen right here on KZGN TV on Tuesdays and Thursdays. Until next time, I’m Tom Wiknich, and that’s what I think!