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Jul. 31, 2009

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## Nevada can build fastest train in the world

By RICHANN BENDER  
SPECIAL TO THE REVIEW-JOURNAL

Over the past 10 years, our state has competed in, and won, a national competition sponsored by the U.S. Department of Transportation to build the first 300 mph magnetic levitation (maglev) train in the Western Hemisphere, with a \$45 million guarantee to the state of Nevada to complete final environmental approvals and start construction.

Construction on the first segment of the maglev train -- the fastest train in the world -- can begin in 2010 and would be built entirely in Nevada by hard-working Nevadans.

The backers of the high-speed, conventional-rail DesertXpress would like to "reprogram" this guaranteed \$45 million away from Nevada, and instead expect us all to just wait five years for their privately owned train to nowhere to get taxpayer-backed loans. This is not in the best near-term or long-term interests of Nevada jobs or Nevada's economy.

After recent events, it's possible that Nevadans might be thinking that the California-Nevada Interstate Maglev Project -- the preferred technology of a federally mandated public-private commission tasked with bringing high-speed rail to the region -- is on the ropes. However, three key factors will help ensure that the people of Nevada and Southern California will make the ultimate decision about which project best meets the needs of the region:

First, maglev technology is far superior. Currently operational in Shanghai, China, with a 99.85 percent on-time record, 21st century maglev transportation systems travel at speeds of more than 300 mph, twice that of Amtrak's fastest commuter train. The proposed system between Anaheim, Calif., and Las Vegas will allow travelers to make the full 269-mile trip in a record 81 minutes.

Maglev is also greener than traditional forms of ground and air transportation, and unlike DesertXpress, it complies with all state and local land use and environmental regulations.

The maglev project also addresses the primary reason for constructing a high-speed rail system: congestion on Interstate 15 throughout the region, connecting Las Vegas to the heart of the population and business centers in the Southern California Basin.

DesertXpress' proposed ending of Victorville, Calif., falls well outside of congested highway areas.

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Second, maglev costs about the same as traditional high-speed, steel-wheel-on-rail trains. DesertXpress supporters have repeatedly cited a nonexistent \$40 billion price tag as a reason for not building the maglev project. A March 2009 Government Accountability Office report lists the true estimated cost of the Las Vegas to Anaheim maglev project as \$12.1 billion.

In fact, the Federal Railroad Administration also estimates the cost of traditional high-speed, steel-wheel-on-rail trains at \$30 million to \$50 million per mile, which would mean DesertXpress could cost up to \$9 billion for the Las Vegas-to-Victorville route (far more than the \$4 billion reported on the organization's Web site). If you put the two projects side by side, this puts maglev in the same cost per mile range.

Third, and perhaps most important, from the beginning maglev has made clear that it intends to use a combination of both private capital and government funding. To date, no high-speed rail project in the United States has been constructed solely with private capital.

This didn't stop DesertXpress from actively selling the idea of a privately funded train. In fact, advocates of DesertXpress have for years cited the "private" element as one of the primary reasons their project deserves support.

As recently reported by the Las Vegas Review-Journal, however, their focus has now shifted to seeking taxpayer funded federal loans to cover the majority of financing for the project.

Last year, President Barack Obama spoke about maglev technology and said: "I don't want to see the fastest train in the world built halfway around the world in Shanghai. I want to see it built right here in the United States of America."

It's time to make this vision a reality. Working together, let's send the message that we're ready to lead both the nation and the world into a new era of 21st-century transportation.

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