

# ON HIGH-SPEED RAIL'S PROBLEMS – DÉJÀ VU ALL OVER AGAIN

## Brief Note #11 – June 23<sup>rd</sup> 2011

From the authors of *The Financial Risks Of California's Proposed High-Speed Rail Project* and six Briefing Papers. Available at <http://www.cc-hsr.org/>

### **Finding: What's was said about high-speed rail in 2009-2011 repeats 2008.**

**Background:** On October 25<sup>th</sup> 2008, two weeks before 52.7% of Californian's 'spoke' on Prop1A, Joseph Vranich testified before the California Senate Transportation and Housing Committee. <sup>1</sup> As former Director of the High-Speed Rail Association, he has been a high-speed rail advocate for more than forty years.<sup>2</sup> But among his prescient remarks, he made it plain that "after reviewing countless plans, this is first time I am unable to endorse a high-speed rail plan"<sup>3</sup>

Those who are visually and audio-oriented with twelve minutes to spare, can verify all of Mr. Vranich's following statements at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SS0RD6dqpKY>.

*"I'd like to see high-speed rail built, but not this boondoggle"*

*"The current proposal is untenable, will carry fewer people than they claim it will, and cost much more than they admit it will." and "the Authority's work is the poorest I have ever seen"*

*"The ultimate costs will be between \$65 Billion and \$85 Billion (in 2008 \$s) and that excludes the billions of dollars of interest on the bonds"*

*Ridership projections are so far from reality that I have to call it what it is – Science Fiction" and "(CHSRA's) ridership projections depend on super bargains; far lower than fares in 2007. Their 2030 per mile charges will be 1/7<sup>th</sup> Amtrak's charges today. This also cannot be believed."*

*"The work of the Authority is so deficient that if the current plan is implemented it has the potential of setting back high-speed rail 20 years throughout the United States . . ."*

*"Under the current plan, taxpayers will have to subsidize a poorly designed system in perpetuity."*

*"It's time to dissolve the High-Speed Rail Authority . . . give it no more funding . . ."*

Thirty-three months and about a half-Billion dollars of California taxpayers' money later, these comments have been echoed by the Authority's own Peer Review Group, the Legislative Analyst's Office, the State Auditor, and countless citizens and citizen groups. The same Senate Committee has since been told repeatedly what then-Chairman Lowenthal asked Mr. Vranich "Why don't you tell us how you really feel."<sup>4</sup> Yet the project continues.

**Conclusions:** Regrettably Californians have been ill served by the Authority and its Legislative oversight committees. The past Governor was a high-speed rail cheerleader, the present one an enigma whose budget balancing mantra contrasts sharply with his sphinx-like attitude towards the project.

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<sup>1</sup> The Committee's members in 2007 included, *inter alia*, Chair Alan Lowenthal and Senator Joe Simitian.

<sup>2</sup> Joseph Vranich is also the former Executive Director of the National Association of Railroad Passengers, a co-author of *The California High-Speed Rail Proposal: A Due Diligence Report*, September 2008; and published author of works on the US rail system, including *SuperTrains*, *Derailed* and *End of the Line*.

<sup>3</sup> These and all other quotes in this Note can be viewed in the <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SS0RD6dqpKY>

<sup>4</sup> *ibid*.