



July 9, 2012

Lisa Marie Burcar
California High-Speed Rail Authority
916-384-9026 office
916-212-8108 cell
lburcar@hsr.ca.gov

Dear Editor:

Over the past year, your reporters covering the High Speed Rail program have spun out one sensational story after another, invariably repeating critics' charges uncritically and writing things that mostly turn out to be wrong. However, the latest example, "High Speed Rail Officials Spurned offer from French Company," hits a new low.

First, it was strategically timed; your reporters asked for our comments on this item several weeks ago. They waited until after the vote on Friday in an attempt to reset the debate and again focus on the "deficiencies" of the High Speed Rail Authority.

Second, how in the world can one elevate the self-serving proposal of one company that would have had the state simply handing them the keys (with no offer of funding, by the way) into a serious policy question? SNCF's proposal to take over the program would be the equivalent of the LA Airports Authority bringing in Airbus to construct the new terminals; don't be surprised when the jetways don't accommodate anyone else's airplanes.

Third, your reporters might have noted that the bond measure authorizing construction of high speed rail specifically calls out cities that must be served. One can argue whether going up I-5 makes more sense (and it doesn't) but there is the small matter that bypassing Central Valley towns raises serious legal questions along with environmental concerns.

Finally, and most notably, I was not a member of the Board during the time frame discussed in your story, but I am aware that there was significant controversy over SNCF in 2010, emanating from their role in deporting French Jews to death camps during WW II. The California Legislature passed Assemblyman Bob Blumenfield's bill (vetoed by Gov. Schwarzenegger) to have barred the company from public contracts absent an apology and compensation. Your newspaper editorialized ("Echoes of the Holocaust") on Nov 20, 2010 that: "Particularly distressing is the fact that the apology was apparently not prompted by regret. Rather, it seems to have been spurred by the company's desire to win multibillion-dollar high-speed rail contracts in California and Florida."

Today's story ignores all of that controversy in an attempt to make the High Speed Rail Authority look incompetent or worse. Yet, it shouldn't have been hard for your reporters to find this material in the archives. After all, one of them covered the issue at the time.

Sincerely,

Dan Richard
Board Chair
California High-Speed Rail Authority