

*Testimony of Robbie Hunter*  
*Congressional Hearing on High-Speed Rail*  
*Sacramento, CA, August 9, 2018*

Good Morning.

My name is Robbie Hunter, and I am the President of the State Building and Construction Trades Council of California. I am an iron worker by trade, and spent 27 years working in the field building skyscrapers and bridges throughout California. It is my pleasure to appear before this Subcommittee again, and I thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today on California's visionary high-speed rail program.

Our council represents in excess of 400,000 skilled and trained California construction workers, including 48,000 apprentices that have graduated or the equivalent from California high schools. These workers are employed by private construction companies and are responsible for delivering needed infrastructure, housing and commercial properties throughout our state.

The work force that we represent keeps California's economy – the world's fifth largest – moving. These are skilled, highly trained workers that set aside a portion of their hourly wage for their pension and medical benefits and even in retirement are not a burden on the state or federal taxpayers.

I am very proud to report that at this very moment, over two thousand of these workers, who are residents of the Central Valley, are on the job building the nation's first high-speed rail system.

As you know, Mr. Chairman, the Valley was hard hit by the Great Recession and has always been an area of California that has had among the highest unemployment and poverty rates in our state, but it is currently experiencing a major economic recovery thanks in no small part to the construction of high-speed rail. Indeed, the investment the state of California has made in partnership with the federal government has generated an estimated 11,300 job-years of employment and about \$2 billion in total economic activity to date in the Central Valley.

This incredible economic stimulus will only grow as construction expands and California turns its attention to connecting the Central Valley construction with the San Francisco Peninsula.

***The Central Valley to Silicon Valley line will generate close to \$50 billion in economic activity during construction and will provide an estimated 240,000 job-years of work in a region that has been left behind from the economy's recent recovery.***

Of those, over 100,000 are direct job-years, meaning they are direct beneficiaries of the high-speed rail investment – with nearly 85,000 of these direct job-years projected in the construction industry.

Beyond these immediate benefits, the wider effect that high-speed rail will have on California's economy is hard to overstate. The Central Valley has been characterized as an "island" that is

isolated from the rest of the state by transportation, geographic and economic barriers. High-speed rail will help break down those barriers.

Today, what should be a straightforward trip from Fresno to San José, is either a long, frustrating drive, or, on existing passenger rail can take from four to five hours and involve multiple transfers. *The same trip on high-speed rail will take about one hour – with no transfers.*

Connecting the Central Valley and the Bay Area– and their unique economies – provides an opportunity to bring about a better jobs and housing balance through effective land use and transit oriented development. These new connections will help support economic revitalization, affordable housing and workforce development goals.

When the system is ultimately built out to connect the downtowns of San Francisco and Los Angeles, with many cities in between, we will have an unprecedented connection between the centers of our economy -- our corporate headquarters, global finance and business services, high tech companies, media and cultural centers, agricultural businesses and our scientific and technical research universities.

But the economic benefits are not reason alone to support the high-speed rail project. Chief among the many reasons that high-speed rail is essential to California's future is the mobility benefits it will bring. California needs a third mode of mass transportation. One that is efficient, clean, and sustainable.

The rest of the world has recognized what high-speed rail can offer, and I believe Californians will look back with gratitude at the vision of this generation's leaders, whose foresight resulted in less congestion at roads and airports and a healthier environment.

The question is no longer whether we can afford to build high-speed rail, but whether we can afford not to.

The fact is that our transportation system is already overburdened and our state's population will pass 50 million by mid-century.

Clearly, doing nothing is not an option and building evermore roads and airport runways to meet California's travel demands is unrealistic, unsustainable, and less affordable than high-speed rail.

We have learned from places like Spain, France, China, Japan and many other countries that high-speed rail is the most efficient and preferred mode of transportation between population centers 100 to 500 miles apart.

That is precisely the corridor California's high speed rail will serve.

In sum, high-speed rail will:

- Reduce traffic congestion on the state's highways and at the state's airports.

- Reduce California's dependence on foreign oil.
- Reduce air pollution and global warming greenhouse gases.
- Provide fast, time-saving connections between California's major population hubs while bringing economic development along its route.
- And, bring all those thousands of good jobs to working families across the state, and in particular, to families in the Central Valley.

California has always been at the cutting edge, and our can-do spirit toward solving the most pressing problems of the day is what has attracted so many millions of people to the Golden State. Our predecessors made the big investments and took on bold endeavors that naysayers proclaimed impossible. I believe it is our responsibility to do the same and to pass on a better state to the next generation.

I look forward to answering any questions you may have about this much needed project and look forward to working with you to make sure this project receives the funding it richly deserves so that we can finish the work we've started.

Thank you very much.