

Testimony of Robbie Hunter
Congressional Hearing on High Speed Rail
San Francisco, Monday, August 29, 2016

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.

Our council represents 400,000 skilled and trained California construction workers, including 48,000 apprentices that have graduated or the equivalent from California high schools.

Each and every one of these workers work for private construction companies building our harbors, airports, water treatment plants, freeways, transit systems, dams, as well as the vast majority of major private commercial and residential projects throughout the state of California.

These contractors need a streamlined, highly trained, competent work force to compete, using the least amount of workers, building projects in the shortest time frame, done once, done right, under the lowest bid.

The work force that we represent drives the economy of California. They 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.

And I am very proud to report that at this very moment, several hundred of these workers, who are residents of the Central Valley are on the job building the high speed rail in the Central Valley.

This is an area where we have had 60 percent unemployment among construction workers and traditionally has had some of the highest unemployment statewide in the general population.

Now these workers are building the High Speed Rail system that will transform the Valley and all of California.

Of course, I am very happy that all those workers are earning paychecks, supporting their families, and driving the economy.

But I am most gratified that they are creating a third mode of mass transportation, something that California desperately needs right now, and that will greatly benefit the people of this state for generations to come.

Furthermore, the project is being built efficiently and economically. The best value bids for the first construction packages have ranged from 13 to 45 percent below the engineer's estimates, resulting in savings of hundreds of millions of dollars so far.

Decades from now, I believe Californians will look back with gratitude at the vision of this generation's leaders, whose foresight resulted in their magnificent, efficient high speed rail system, less congestion at roads and airports, and a healthier environment.

We simply cannot afford to not build this vitally important infrastructure project.

California's transportation system is already overtaxed and our population will pass 50 million by mid-century.

Doing nothing would ultimately cost far more than building this essential system today.

High speed rail is the only viable means of making sure our transportation infrastructure can meet our growing demand.

Continuing to build more and more freeways and airports would be more expensive, more environmentally damaging, and less efficient for moving millions more Californians up and down the state.

In fact, the non-partisan Legislative Analyst's office has reported that the project would, and I am quoting "alleviate the need to build 3,000 miles of freeway, and five airport runways and 90 new departure gates—at a cost of nearly \$100 billion—that would otherwise be necessary to accommodate interstate travel by 2030."

By saving \$100 billion, the project pays for itself!

To remove any doubt, just look at the spectacular success of high speed rail around the world.

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.

High speed rail is working breathtakingly well everywhere else in the world. California needs its great benefits even more.

As the 2008 ballot summary language pointed out, high speed rail will provide long-distance commuters with a safe, convenient, affordable, clean and reliable alternative to driving and to high gas prices.

It will reduce traffic congestion on the state's highways and at the state's airports.

It will reduce California's dependence on foreign oil.

It will reduce air pollution and global warming greenhouse gases.

It will provide fast, time-saving connections between California's major population hubs.

And it will bring all those thousands of good jobs to working families across the state.

We cannot afford to fall further behind the rest of the world. Our state needs the economic, environmental, and quality-of-life benefits of a third mode of a clean, fast mass transit system to meet the needs of our children and grandchildren just as generations before us paid for and built the infrastructure that has supported today's population and economy.

Thank you very much.