



## UNION-TRIBUNE EDITORIAL

# Yet another obstacle / Union Pacific says no way to proposed high-speed rail route

By [Union-Tribune Editorial Board](#),

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Even in a state with a long history of dishonest ballot propositions, the 2008 measure providing \$9.95 billion in taxpayer seed money for a \$43 billion high-speed rail system linking Northern and Southern California stood out. Future ridership and environmental and economic benefits were all grossly exaggerated. Despite promises, the formal business plan that would have exposed the dubiousness of claims made by “bullet train” advocates wasn’t released until after voters narrowly OK’d the project.

Ever since, these deceptions have been systematically exposed. When finally released, the official business plan from the California High-Speed Rail Authority and subsequent revised plans sharply cut ridership estimates and increased ticket-cost projections. Authority leaders are preparing to use legal tricks to force local and state taxpayers to subsidize the system’s operating costs, despite language in the ballot measure intended to guarantee this would never happen. The idea that \$43 billion is remotely enough to build a statewide high-speed rail system looks more like a fantasy by the day. Silicon Valley residents have made clear they want the train to be built underground – at a likely cost of \$500 million per mile, not including land costs.

Now yet another huge obstacle has emerged. Union Pacific, the rail giant that runs freight trains from the Bay Area to Long Beach, is strongly objecting to state plans to place high-speed rail tracks adjacent to its tracks for at least 200 miles. The railroad says intruding on its right of way would create a big safety risk because of interference with maintenance and the potential for catastrophe if a freight train derailed. Union Pacific also says the authority’s plan would make nearby rail-related development much more difficult.

The railroad also balks at the rail authority’s attempts to buy land in San Jose and Gilroy needed for the state’s planned route. Union Pacific says it and its freight customers won’t sell unless compelled to by eminent domain.

Critics say the railroad is just trying to drive up the price that the rail authority will have to pay to gain cooperation. That may well be true. But that doesn’t seem to be the message that Union Pacific officials are conveying behind closed doors.

“They don’t want us, first of all, in their right of way or in any of their property. And, secondly, they

have grave concern about us crossing their property with any overpasses,” rail authority executive Tony Daniels said at a recent hearing in Sacramento. An obscure state law gives the Legislature the power to pull the plug on voter-approved bond measures. There has long since been enough evidence that lawmakers should do just that. The rail authority’s problem with Union Pacific is just one more powerful reason to call it quits.

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