

# **THE HIGH SPEED RAIL PROJECT AND LOCAL GOVERNMENTS IN CALIFORNIA: A NEW INSTITUTIONAL PROCESS?**

*Charlotte Ruggeri, MRTE laboratory, University of Cergy Pontoise, 95011 Cergy Pontoise, France, charlotte.ruggeri@u-cergy.fr*

## **ABSTRACT**

California has decided to build a high-speed rail network between Sacramento/San Francisco and San Diego, through Los Angeles. This research examines the impacts of the high-speed rail project on local authorities. The high-speed rail project is a new process in the United States, which involves four scales of institutional structures, actors and transportation networks (cities, counties, metropolitan planning organizations and state). The high-speed rail project is a new transportation mode, unknown in California and a new institutional process. This process reveals a complex game of powers in a country not used to high-speed rail. We can try to build a typology of local authorities according to their acceptance or rejection of the project. This research allows to demonstrate how local authorities can take advantage of this project, even lobby for the project.

*Keywords: high-speed rail, territory, cities, local authority, institutional process.*

## **INTRODUCTION**

Since 1993, California has decided to build a high-speed rail network between Sacramento and San Diego, through San Francisco and Los Angeles. The California High-Speed Rail Authority supervises the project since 1997. In 2004, the Authority revealed a first project and in 2008, the Californians voted for the Proposition 1A which allowed state funds for the project. Since 2008, the Authority has published several reports to explain the project, and mostly to justify the budget: 68 billions dollars.

In its reports, the Authority is building a speech and an image: the high speed train will be a way to create a statewide transportation system, above all others transportation networks. But it is not only a transportation network. The Authority repeats all along that this train is a way to reconnect California's cities, counties, the north and the south and to build a unified California. But if we read the reports carefully, the Authority focuses its speech on ridership forecasts, costs forecasts and potential investors. Territories are relegated and simplified with a list of cities and potential stations. The Authority's speech could apply to any territory, any state in the United States and does not describe a spatial approach. Therefore, relationships between the Authority, a state agency, local authorities (cities, counties and Metropolitan Planning Organizations) and communities may vary.

This research aims to demonstrate how the Californian state, through the California High Speed Rail Authority, tries to build a transportation network above all others. The Authority defends a statewide and long-term project, but it creates a strong debate between local authorities and communities, between opponents and partisans. Local authorities have no experiment with high-speed rail and its impacts, for example in the urban areas around the future stations. They cannot learn from other U.S. local authorities. Therefore, the high-speed rail project can be seen as an opportunity or as a potential disaster.

This statewide and public project is not entirely new in California. The United States, and especially California, have developed important infrastructures projects since the 1930's. This project fits into a long Californian tradition of public investments in infrastructures. But it is highly controversial and reveals some classic transportation and infrastructure planning issues.

This paper will describe how the state of California has built a traditional public infrastructure project with a speech and a institutional process. This institutional process develops a multiscale approach, mostly political with a lack of territorial approach. Metropolitan Planning Organizations, counties and cities are considered as actors and not territories. The Authority is seeking for an approval, when local authorities are looking for economic and planning opportunities. It reveals a complex game of powers, in favor or against the project, and can lead to ambitious planning projects or a strong community rejection.

First, this paper will examine the speech and the project from the Authority's side, and will then describe four local authorities' positions: lobby, defense, passive involvement and rejection. The Authority's behavior could be taken as a strong centralized approach but the intensity of the debate and the diversity of local authorities' positions reveal a decentralized interest for the project and its main issue: public transportation.

## **I. METHODOLOGY: POLITICAL SCALES AND APPROACH**

This research interrogates how the California High Speed Rail Authority is implementing a multiscale approach to build a high-speed rail network in the Golden State. This ambitious project causes policy and planning issues. Five political scales are involved in the project.

### **A. Five scales for one project**

This research focuses on five political and institutional scales: the federal government, the State of California, the Metropolitan Planning Organizations' scale, the counties and the cities.

#### *1. The leader: the State of California*

The state is the leading scale of the project. California has initiated the project since 1993 with the Intercity High Speed Rail Commission, which became the High Speed Rail Authority in 1996. This project comes under the will of the California State and governor. Two particular governors have led the project: Arnold Schwarzenegger, a Republican, between 2003 and 2011 and Jerry Brown, a Democrat, since 2011. The State of California is the main decision-maker because the project had to be accepted by the population with a referendum (in 2008) and the budget had to be voted by the State Assembly and Senate to become concrete (in 2012).

The State works closely with the federal government to develop the high-speed rail. The federal government has no active role in this project but is a strong support and one of the main funding resources. The Obama's administration has advocated for high-speed rail in America since 2009 with a speech called "Remarks by the President and the Vice President on a Vision for High-Speed Rail in America"<sup>1</sup> and has repeated its will to develop this new infrastructure in the 2011 State of Union Address<sup>2</sup>. Today, the federal government is one of the two main investors with the State of California, with the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (U.S. Department of Transportation & Federal Railroad Administration, 2009).

#### *2. The regional scale*

The Metropolitan Planning Organization's scale (MPO) is a federal agency acting at a regional level. MPO are responsible for planning, programming and coordination of federal

---

<sup>1</sup> "Remarks by the President and the Vice President on a Vision for High-Speed Rail in America", April 16, 2009 (<http://www.whitehouse.gov/video/A-Vision-for-High-Speed-Rail>)

<sup>2</sup> Barack Obama, State of Union Address, January 25, 2011 (<http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2011/01/25/remarks-president-state-union-address>)

highway and transit investments in urbanized areas. It is federally funded and mandated and made up of representatives from local governments and transportation authorities. A MPO territory can cover several counties like in the Bay Area or only one county like in Kings County. California counts 14 MPO<sup>3</sup> and 11 MPO's territories are concerned by the high-speed rail project: Fresno Council of Governments (FCOG), Kern Council of Governments (KCOG), Kings County Association of Governments (KCAG), Madera County Transportation Commission (MCTC), Merced County Association of Governments (MCAG), Metropolitan Transportation Commission (MTC), Sacramento Area Council of Governments (SACOG), San Diego Association of Governments (SANDAG), San Joaquin Council of Governments (SJCOG), Southern California Association of Governments (SCAG) and Stanislaus Council of Governments (StanCOG)<sup>4</sup>.

Counties are the largest political subdivision between the State and cities. Counties have powers delegated by the State and have no broad revenues like cities. Therefore counties have less power than cities. A county has a staff, appointed by the Board of Supervisor, and a Board of Supervisor. Each county district elects one supervisor. In California, counties play an important role in transportation planning because they must plan and maintain transportation infrastructures<sup>5</sup>. California counts 58 counties and at least 18 counties are concerned by the high-speed rail project.

### *3. The local scale*

The local scale is mostly represented by cities. California has 482 cities<sup>6</sup>. Cities are powerful in California because they were the first form of government in 1848 when the United States annexed California. Cities are probably the first local government concerned by the high-speed train. Cities will welcome future stations and their support is precious for the Authority. 24 cities could have a high-speed rail station. Some stations are already decided, but others are only potential stations for now.

## **B. A political and scalar field work**

This research has been conducted after fieldtrips in 2012 and 2013 in California. The purpose of these fieldtrips was to meet the maximum of actors from local governments to understand their position regarding this project.

---

<sup>3</sup> According to [www.statelocalgov.net](http://www.statelocalgov.net)

<sup>4</sup> California Department of Transportation, Division of Transportation Planning, February 2013.

<sup>5</sup> California State Association of Counties (<http://www.csac.counties.org/county-structure>)

<sup>6</sup> League of California Cities (<http://www.cacities.org/Resources/Learn-About-Cities>)

### *1. The first step: purpose of the project*

This paper tries to provide a broad view of the local governments' position towards an ambitious transportation planning project and to understand the political and territorial mechanisms and games that underlie the debate. The high-speed rail project is the most important and expensive project California has conducted in years. Everybody has an opinion about it and local governments want to be a part of it. This will doesn't necessarily mean that they want to have a station or tracks on their territory. This project is controversial and the intensity of the debate reflects the struggle between actors from different scales and areas. Everyone has a reason to be opposed or to defend the project and most of the city wants to be heard.

This research tries to define some local governments' and territories profiles. This work could lead to a subtle typology in the end (2014-2015), but it is still in progress. Currently data is from interviews, meetings and press are still collected. The fieldwork should end in June 2013 so this paper presents a typology in progress.

The purpose of this work is to show how local governments make stand mostly since the summer of 2012. In 2012, the State Legislature (Assembly and Senate) voted for the budget. Before 2012, only a few cities were already advocating for the project, or were involved or lobbied for the project. The opposition was less vivid as well, or at least less organized.

Those public positions allows to make several hypothesis and to understand several mechanisms:

- How local governments with no experience in high-speed rail, and even in rail sometimes, and no model in the country can build their own comprehension and perception of the project
- How local governments can welcome the project, in a political and spatial meaning which leads to wonder how this project can affect planning and policy practices
- How the high-speed rail could be an alibi for local transportation and urban projects

In California, high-speed rail could be a local godsend declined in a multitude of urban strategies. Today, the debate and the will to make public stand about this project reveals how important it is for cities to have a clear position about the high-speed rail and speeches (sometimes planning projects already) reflect diverse urban and local strategies. This paper will focus its results on the first topic, the comprehension and perception of the project, with some elements about the thirist topic. Its is too early to broach the second topic.

### *2. The second step: meetings, interviews and grey literature*

In terms of methodology, four main approaches were preferred: grey literature, public meetings, private meetings and interviews.

The first work was to take an inventory of all the grey literature relevant for this project. Two main sources were identified: press and reports.

The press is mostly a daily press, from Californian and U.S. newspapers. Before 2012, few articles talked about the high-speed rail project and it was general articles, viewpoints articles like a series of viewpoints in the *New York Times* in January 2012<sup>7</sup>. Since the summer of 2012, articles, especially in California, tries to relay the most information they can about the project and the struggle between local governments, communities and the Authority. The local newspapers from the Central Valley, where the construction is supposed to start, are the most prolific like the *Fresno Bee* and the *Bakersfield Californian*.

The reports can come from several sources and we can identify five types of reports:

- Political and official reports : reports from the High-Speed Rail Authority are a primary source, but also reports from the California Department of Transportation, the U.S. Department of Transportation, the U.S. Senate, from local governments.
- Planning reports: more precise reports about the alignments and stations. They are mostly the EIR/EIS (environmental impact report and environmental impact statement) from the Authority, but also planning reports from cities.
- Research Reports like the report from the Irvine University (Catz & Christian, 2010).
- Lobby reports from private think tank groups or associations like America 2050.
- Militant reports from local or Californian associations like TransFrom, CARRD<sup>8</sup> or the CCHSRA<sup>9</sup>.

This paper focuses on the two first types of reports.

In California, this work has been completed with meetings and interviews. Three types of public meetings were selected. The first type is public meetings from the Authority, especially the Board meetings once a month. Those meetings allow to follow the institutional evolution of the project but also to see the public comments. Everybody can register at the beginning of the meeting to speak during 90 seconds in front of the Board and the Authority's CEO, Jeff Morales. Elected people have a special slot to publicly comment the project in the beginning of each public comments session. Generally those meetings are held in Sacramento, with some Board members in other cities with a live retransmission. Only one meeting has been decentralized, on April 4 2013, in Fresno.

The second type of public meetings is information meetings organized by the Authority or local governments in cities. Those meetings have one purpose: to explain the project and its impacts for local territories. Public comments are allowed too. Those information meetings can be organized without the Authority. Some cities or association like the CCHSRA and CARRD organized frequently information meetings.

The third type of meetings is private meetings with association members, official staffs or elected councils. Some actors organized indeed some meetings to help this research, which was a unique occasions to meet diverse people with diverse involvements and opinions regarding this project.

---

<sup>7</sup> "Does California need high-speed rail?", *New York Times*, January 26, 2012, (<http://www.nytimes.com/roomfordebate/2012/01/26/does-california-need-high-speed-rail>)

<sup>8</sup> Californians Advocating Responsible Rail Design

<sup>9</sup> Citizens for California High-Speed Rail Accountability

*The High-Speed Rail Project in California*  
RUGGERI, Charlotte

At last, this research has been conducted with interviews. 45 interviews have been realized in June 2012 and April 2013, and some interviews will take place in May 2013.

22 people from cities have accepted to be interviewed. Some are elected officials like members of the city council, and some are staff members, mostly from planning and transportation departments. 12 people from counties gave an interview, and only one was a staff member in Fresno. The others are Supervisors so elected members. 6 interviews have been done with MPO staff, 2 with transportation agencies and 3 with associations. The information office of the High-Speed Rail Authority accepted to collaborate with this research and some others interviews with the Authority's staff should take place in May 2013. Several people from the same local government could have given an interview (they are identified with an asterisk).

Table I – Interviews with local governments

Cities	Counties	MPO	State
Anaheim*	Fresno	FCOG	CAHSRA
Bakersfield	Kern	KCAG	
Chowchilla	Kings	MCTC	
Fresno*	Merced*	MTC	
Gilroy*	Sacramento	SANDAG	
Hanford	San Diego	SCAG	
Los Angeles*	San Francisco		
Modesto	San Joaquin		
Murrieta*	San Mateo*		
Riverside*	Tulare		
Sacramento			
San Francisco			
San José*			
Shafter			

Table II – Interviews with other institutions

Associations	Transportation Agencies	Others
CARRD	BART	Orange Chamber of Commerce LA Times
CCHSRA*	Caltrain	
Transit Coalition		

The interviews broached two main topics. The first topic was about the high-speed rail in general and its impacts on California, the second topic was about the impacts of the high-speed rail on local territories and the strategies to welcome (or not) the train.

This paper will focus only on few territories because some interviews are not handled yet, or incomplete.

## **II. THE HIGH SPEED RAIL AUTHORITY: WHICH PROCESS FOR A NEW INFRASTRUCTURE?**

The Californian high-speed rail project has been conducted by a regional agency since 1993, the High Speed Rail Authority (HSRA or CAHSRA). This state agency has been developing the current project since 2004.

### *1. The birth of the project*

The California High Speed Rail Authority has been building this project mostly since 2008, even if the first project was revealed in 2004. In 2004, the project was to link San Francisco and Los Angeles, but the Authority quickly proposed to add Sacramento and San Diego to the line. Sacramento is indeed the capital-city of California and San Diego the second city in terms of population with 1,311,882 persons<sup>10</sup>. This will is present in the Proposition 1A (CAHSRA, 2012):

Initiate the construction of a high-speed train system that connects the San Francisco Transbay Terminal to Los Angeles Union Station and Anaheim, and links the state's major population centers, including Sacramento, the San Francisco Bay Area, the Central Valley, the Inland Empire, Orange County, and San Diego.

Before 2008, the project was rhetorical. In 2002, the State Legislature succeeded twice in postpone the referendum to approve the budget. This referendum took place only in 2008 when Californians voted for the Proposition 1A which allowed state funds for the project. Since 2008, the project has become more precise and the Authority has published several reports to explain and justify the cost, 68 billions of dollars.

The most recent reports and the two primary resources in order to understand the institutional project are the California High-Speed Rail Program Draft 2012 Business Plan published in November 2011 (CAHSRA, 2011b) and the California High-Speed Rail Program Revised 2012 Business Plan, Building California's Future published in April 2012 (CAHSRA, 2012a). Now, the Authority publishes environmental reports (EIR/EIS reports) for every section to suggest alignments and stations plans. The construction should start during the summer of 2013.

### *2. The high-speed rail project and its territory*

Those two reports, the EIR/EIS reports and the website of the Authority allow to see where the train will run and stop. The Authority has cut the high-speed rail line in ten sections: San Francisco-San Jose, San Jose-Merced, Merced-Fresno, Fresno-Bakersfield, Bakersfield-Palmdale, Palmdale-Los Angeles, Los Angeles-Anaheim, Los Angeles-San Diego,

---

<sup>10</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, 2011.



Sacramento-Merced and the Altamont Corridor. Only one final EIR/EIS report for the Merced-Fresno section (CAHSRA, 2012b) and two revised draft EIR/EIS reports for the Fresno-Bakersfield (CAHSRA, 2012c) and the Bay Area-Central Valley (CAHSRA, 2012d) sections are available for now. For the others sections, the Authority has published preliminary analysis reports.

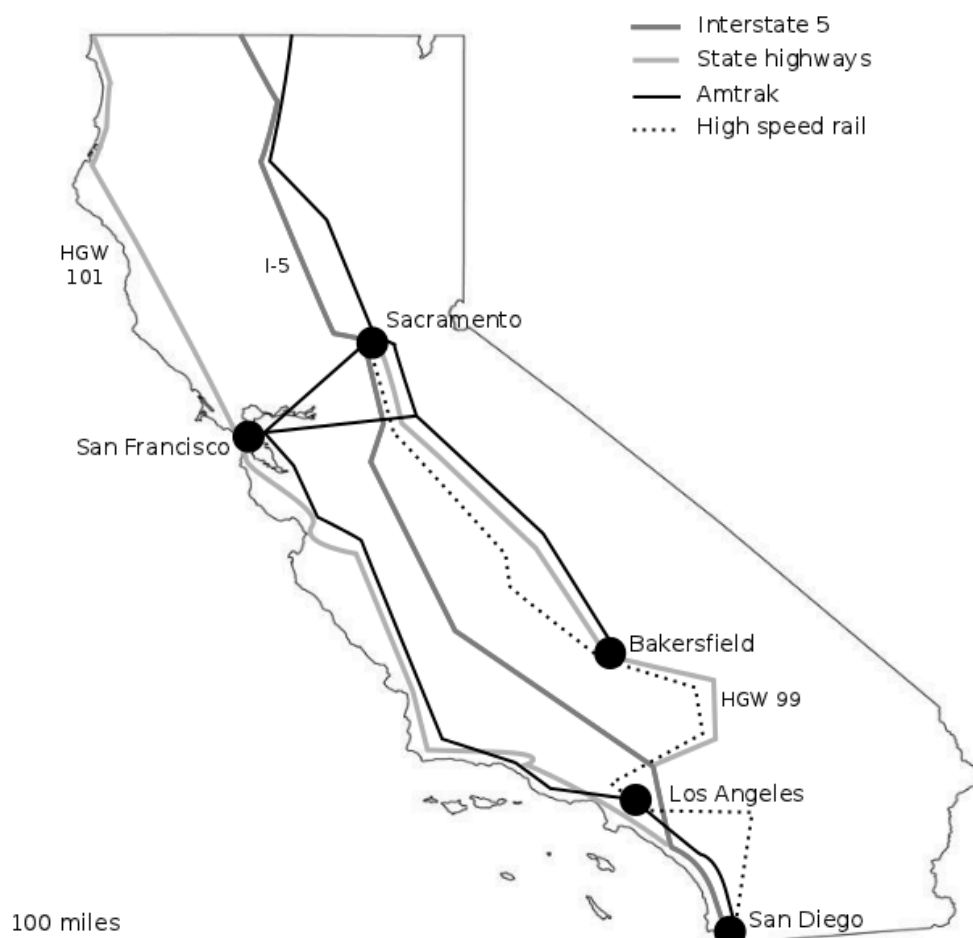
The high-speed rail will deserve ten principal stations and fourteen intermediate stations along 800 miles (1 200 kilometers). We can define principal stations as stations where more than four trains a day will stop and intermediate as stations where less than four trains a day will stop according to the CAHSRA forecasts (CAHSRA, 2012a).



C. Ruggeri, 2013  
 Source : California High Speed Rail Authority (2013) and U.S. Census Bureau (2011)

Figure 1 – The high speed rail project: sections and stations

The line follows the highway 99 and the Amtrak line but not everywhere. It is already a very dense corridor, especially the highway 99. One of the first projects in the nineties was to follow the Interstate 5. The interstate has a dense traffic but it is not a corridor with a lot of cities. The highway 99 corridor connects the seven major cities of the State according to the U.S. Census Bureau in 2011: Los Angeles, San Diego, San Jose, San Francisco, Fresno, Sacramento, and Bakersfield.



C. Ruggeri, 2013

Source : California High Speed Rail Authority (2012), Amtrak (2013) and Caltrans (2013)

Figure 2 – Transportation corridors in California

## **A. Stations and construction: how the controversy has started**

### *1. The Authority's project*

Along those 800 miles of tracks, three stations are potential stations: the Peninsula station between the San Francisco Airport (SFO) and San Jose, the West Hanford station (sometimes called the Kings/Tulare station) between Fresno and Bakersfield and the Norwalk/Fullerton station between Los Angeles and Anaheim. The Authority is not clear about the potential stations: what does potential mean? Nobody knows exactly what potential means: the station will be built when the Authority or local governments have the money or the station will be built if the ridership is sufficient. Those are two hypothesis formulated by actors from the CCHSRA, the county and the KCAG in Kings County where the Hanford station is a potential station. The Norwalk/Fullerton station seems already to have disappeared in the last report of 2012 (CAHSRA, 2012a).

Seven stations are in the corridor between Sacramento and the Los Angeles area, in what the Authority calls the « Central Valley » or the backbone of the project. The high-speed rail Authority has decided in the 2012 report (CAHSRA, 2012a) to start the construction in the Central Valley, between Merced, Fresno and Bakersfield. The Authority has changed its plans since 2011. In the 2011 report (CAHSRA, 2011b), the Authority didn't explain exactly where the works would start and how the construction would proceed. But the main issue of the 2011 report was the raising of the costs. In November 2011, the Authority announced a 91 billions of dollars budget. The governor's agency understood quickly that it was not acceptable to propose a train so expensive and less than a year later the budget was 68 billions of dollars in the 2012 report (CAHSRA, 2012a).

This cut in the budget had been done thanks to two solutions:

- The phased approach which consists in building the train in three phases, according to the funding available
- The blended system in metropolitan areas, which is a way to combine state and local funding. The blended system implies that the Authority and local transportation agencies (and governments) will finance an improvement of the local and urban rail system and tracks in the San Francisco Bay Area and the Los Angeles area. It could permit the high-speed train to run on those tracks for years. Then the Authority will probably build a whole high-speed rail line but it is difficult to know exactly if there will be high-speed rail tracks or upgraded tracks between San Jose and San Francisco on the Caltrain<sup>11</sup> line and between the San Fernando Valley, Los Angeles and Anaheim on the Metrolink<sup>12</sup> line.

---

<sup>11</sup> Caltrain is the regional rail line between San Francisco and the south of the Bay Area.

<sup>12</sup> Metrolink is a regional rail system around the Los Angeles area.

*The High-Speed Rail Project in California*  
*RUGGERI, Charlotte*



Figure 2 – Construction phases of the high-speed rail

*2. Urban areas: how many stations?*

In urban areas, the Authority plans more stations but the project becomes less clear in those areas. If we look at the Authority’s map, we can observe four stations in the San Francisco Bay Area, up to nine stations in the Los Angeles area and three stations in the San Diego area. But this map has been published in 2010 and the Authority has not released a new general and statewide map since 2010. In fact, in those urban areas, the Authority does not plan so many stations and studies cities to choose the good one for a station.

We can observe this process between Palmdale and Los Angeles, Los Angeles and San Diego and probably for Gilroy too. Therefore, Sylmar, San Fernando, Burbank, Glendale,

Industry, Ontario, Riverside and Murrieta are in fact potential stations and not stations as indicated on this map.

### California High-Speed Train Map, Statewide Overview



April 2010

Figure 3 – The high-speed rail project according to the Authority

To detect more precisely the alignments and potential stations in urban areas, we can focus on one example on the Los Angeles-San Diego corridor:

1. If we observe this segment, we can see that six stations are planned between Los Angeles and San Diego. After some meetings in Riverside in April 2013 with two city councilmembers, we know that between Los Angeles and Murrieta, probably only one city will be chosen to welcome a station. In Riverside, Ken Gutierrez<sup>13</sup> and Mike Gardner<sup>14</sup> both think that Ontario will be the Authority's choice because of the airport.

<sup>13</sup> Interview with Ken Gutierrez, April 18, 2013

<sup>14</sup> Interview with Mike Gardner, April 22, 2013

This high-speed rail station next to an airport could form a regional transportation hub between Los Angeles and San Diego. The Preliminary Alternatives Analysis Report of the Los Angeles-San Diego section (CAHSRA, 2011a) confirms this belief. For this area, the Authority studies twenty-three alternatives: nine between Los Angeles and Ontario, eight between Ontario and Escondido and six between Escondido and San Diego.

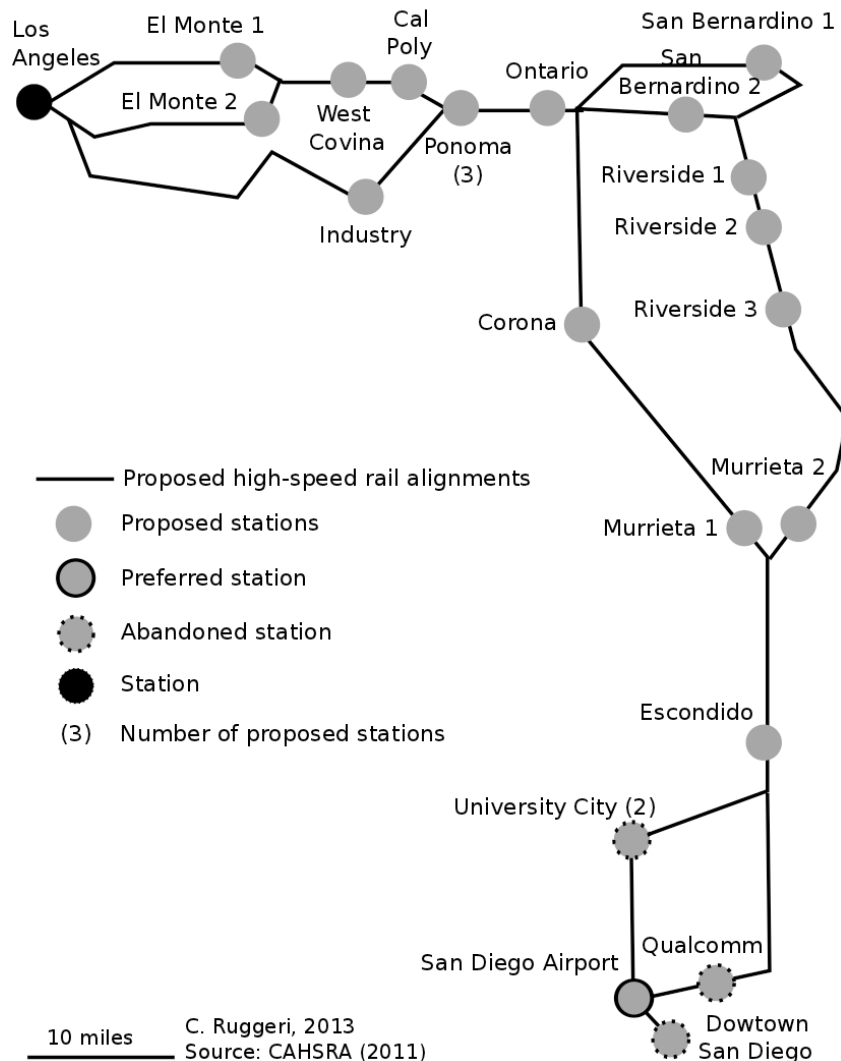


Figure 4 – The Los Angeles-San Diego corridor: alignments and stations alternatives

In this area, the Authority is still studying alternatives alignments and stations so the Authority follows a traditional planning process. But in the Central Valley, this process is more advanced and can be interpreted as a hesitant attitude, as a political strategy or as a way to mitigate the opposition. That is how the controversy was born.

### **III. LOCAL GOVERNMENTS: COMPREHENSION AND PERCEPTION OF A GIANT INFRASTRUCTURE PROJECT**

Since 2012, the Authority has been accelerating the process. The construction should start in 2013. During this year (Summer 2012-Spring 2013), the Authority has tried to take a new start. The project is controversial so the agency wants a wider approval, from local governments and population. The relationships with local governments have not been peaceful since 2004 for several reasons. On one side, we have the political strategy of the Authority trying to get the more political support from local governments, and on the other side, we have the political strategy of some local governments to get a station. Those strategies have led to changes in the planning process in order to please the supportive cities. At last, the Authority did not expect such an opposition in the Central Valley.

#### **A. The Central Valley: a political corridor?**

The Central Valley is the territory between the San Francisco Bay Area and Bakersfield, along the highway 99. It is a rural land with two major cities: Fresno in the north and Bakersfield in the south. In 2012, the Authority revealed its intention to start the construction of its high-speed train there (CAHSRA, 2012a). During the first fieldtrip in 2012, actors from the SCAG and Anaheim understood this choice as a way to avoid a strong opposition. According to them, the Authority selected the less dense area to reduce the planning conflicts with homeowners, business owners and landowners.

This research has been mostly conducted in the counties of Kings, Fresno, Madera and Kern; but therefore the results are incomplete because some meetings will be held in May and June 2013. Those counties show a graduated scale of positions towards the high-speed rail project. This scale reflects several elements: political strategies at different scales (state-scale, county-scale, urban scale) and geographical and economic backgrounds. If local governments from Fresno are a strong support, in Madera they lobby to have a station, while in Kern actors are divided between opponents and defendants. Kings county appears to be the strongest opposition territory.

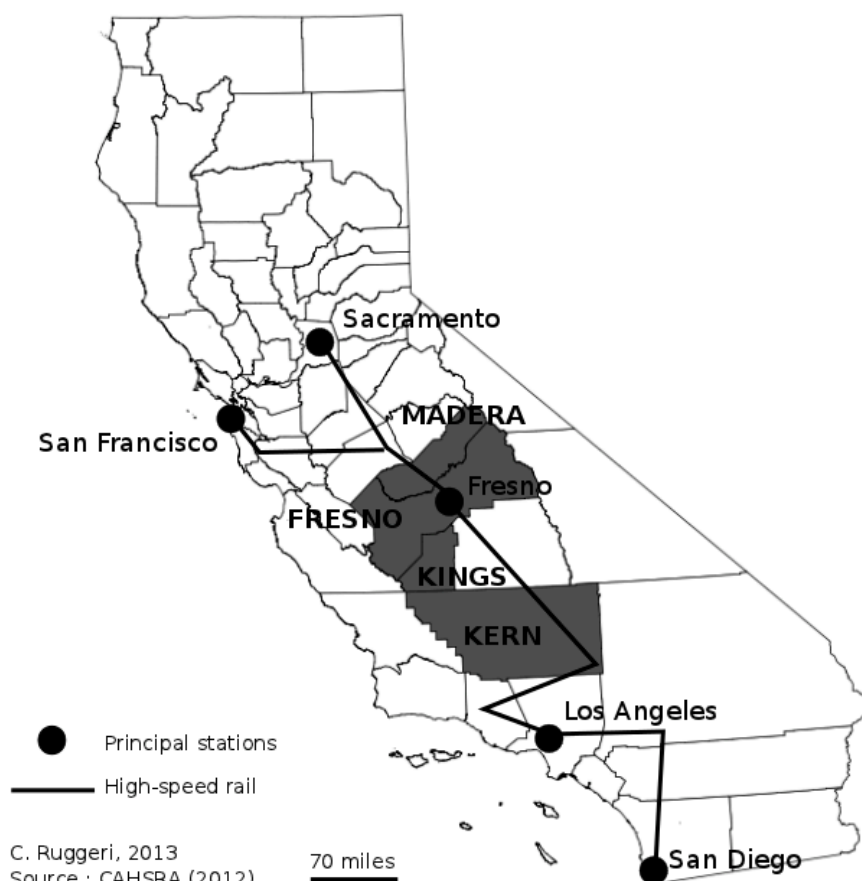


Figure 5 – The high-speed rail in the Central Valley: four counties, four positions?

### *1. A political decision*

The most supportive territory is in the county of Fresno. Fresno is the most important city of the Central Valley with 500,000 inhabitants<sup>15</sup>. The Mayor Ashley Swearengin publicly supports the project. In 2011, she addressed her comments and support for the Merced to Fresno and Fresno to Bakersfield sections in a public letter<sup>16</sup>. Indeed, when the Authority publishes the draft EIR/EIS for each section, everybody can address a comment to the Authority. With those comments, the Authority can work on the final EIR/EIS. The reasons of this strong support are above all economic:

As a strong supporter of starting the high-speed rail construction in the Central Valley (...) the project will further the economic development of our region through creation of jobs.

<sup>15</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, 2011

<sup>16</sup> Letter of Mayor Ashley Swearengin, October 13, 2011: [http://www.fresno.gov/NR/rdonlyres/7D6A5D4A-3AFF-4A9C-B616-53FDC6B0BD44/0/101311\\_HSRDEIR\\_MayorLetter.pdf](http://www.fresno.gov/NR/rdonlyres/7D6A5D4A-3AFF-4A9C-B616-53FDC6B0BD44/0/101311_HSRDEIR_MayorLetter.pdf)



Other members of the city council support the project like Oliver Baines, interviewed in April 2013, for the same reasons<sup>17</sup>:

I believe in progress and feel that the project will be an economic shot in the arm to all of California.

For them, starting the construction in the Central Valley makes sense. This area has been severely touched by the 2008 economic crisis and the construction will create jobs. Oliver Baines thinks that it will have fewer impacts than somewhere else and he considers these impacts as positive for the city:

(There will be) less impacts than in other parts of the State. True impact will be on a small part of the City of Fresno and agricultural lands. (...) Downtown Fresno will be a station stop and the train passes through town along the BNSF rail line which runs on the western side of the City of Fresno. (...) The Chinatown neighborhood is a ghost town right now and we are working on our downtown core, this will only help.

But beyond the city of Fresno, few actors defend the same position and understand the start in the Central valley in the same sense. Most of them describe this position as political and economic because it is cheaper to start here and the Authority needs the support of the Central Valley corridor cities, especially Fresno. Andrew J. Benelli, from the planning department of Chowchilla in the Madera county explains that it is not a bad idea to start here even if the ridership will not be sufficient. According to him, it makes sense because it is the cheapest segment<sup>18</sup>. John Guinn, city manager in Shafter (Kern county), analyzes this choice as a political one<sup>19</sup>. Without the support of Fresno, the Authority could not have maintained the highway 99 alignment. But, to thank this support, the Authority had to start the construction there. John Guinn, like Bruce Abanathie from the KCAG or Aaron Fukuda from the CCHSRA, agree on one argument: the Authority has chosen this segment because it seems to be an empty place and because the staff thought avoiding the opposition there:

An area considered by many in California as unimportant and without influence to fight any negative impacts<sup>20</sup>.

Even if the economic argument has its relevance, the political argument seems more efficient to explain this choice. Therefore, the opposition has increased during the last few months.

## *2. An unexpected opposition*

While people support the high-speed rail in Fresno and Madera territories, the situation is very different in Kings and Kern territories. In Kern, we can observe a division between rural

---

<sup>17</sup> Interview with Oliver Baines, April 19, 2013.

<sup>18</sup> Interview with Andrew J. Benelli, April 4, 2013

<sup>19</sup> Interview with John Guinn, May 6, 2013

<sup>20</sup> Interview with Bruce Abanathie, April 22, 2013

spaces where the project is rejected and Bakersfield, where the city council supports the train according to John Guinn from Shafter.

Kings county offers a stronger and unified opposition. The county and the MPO are opposed to the project. Two supervisors from the county have expressed their opposition during the board meeting of April 2013. One of them, Joe Neves, in an interview in March 2013, explained that the high-speed rail is<sup>21</sup>:

Unrealistic in its approach and lack of design. (...) The current plan is without detail from the Authority and fails to follow the directive of the voters that supported the high-speed rail project.

The city of Hanford, where a potential station is planned, has not given its public position for now. In this county, the opposition is well organized with the Citizens for California High-Speed Rail Accountability (CCHSRA), an association of homeowners, business owners and landowners<sup>22</sup>. In Kings county, the Authority has proposed two alignments, one through the east, one through the west. Between 300 and 500 hundreds people are concerned. This association has proposed an alternative alignment, the BNSF<sup>23</sup> alignment, which is already a rail corridor. According to the CCHSRA, this alignment would cause less farmlands and houses loss. But, in April 2013, the Authority has indicated that its preferred alignment is the western alignment<sup>24</sup>.

If the Central Valley corridor appears to be controversial, it is mostly because of political struggles. That is why we can describe it as a political corridor. Actors from others territories explain for example that begin the construction in one of the bookends or in the densest area (the Los Angeles-San Diego corridor) would have been more relevant in order to insure sufficient ridership and revenues.

## **B. The south: a relevant corridor**

The south corridor is the densest area in California and welcomes the two main cities of the state: Los Angeles and San Diego. A lot of actors, from this area or not, presents this corridor as the most relevant and thinks that the construction should have start there, even if it is more expansive. In this area, local governments are supportive and lobby to obtain a station or to obtain the one they want.

---

<sup>21</sup> Interview with Joe Neves, March 26, 2013

<sup>22</sup> Interviews with Aaron Fukuda and members of the CCHSRA on April 5, 2013 and April 15, 2013

<sup>23</sup> Burlington Northern and Santa Fe Railroad, a freight line

<sup>24</sup> CAHSRA board meeting, April 4, 2013

Between Los Angeles and Murrieta, several cities are in competition to get the high-speed rail station. Cities are advocating and lobbying for a stop. Ken Gutierrez, city councilmember from Riverside, explain this process in those terms<sup>25</sup>:

We're fighting to get a stop in Riverside. (...) We know there's gonna be a stop in Ontario because that's where the airport is. We know they can't build too many stops. They want a stop around Escondido or Murrieta. And maybe a stop in Riverside or Corona depends on which route they take. (...) We have advocated for a stop in Riverside and we still think it's a good idea. (...) That corridor makes more sense because that's where the people are. The 215 corridor is going to have a lot more ridership than the 15 corridor, and we have the perfect spots for it.

In Riverside, Ken Gutierrez and Mike Gardner, another city councilmember<sup>26</sup>, think also that their lobby has to be done in the right moment, not too soon, not too late. They take Anaheim as an example. Anaheim had indeed lobbied to get the high-speed rail line back. In the 2011 report (CAHSRA, 2011b), the Los Angeles-Anaheim section disappeared. The city has done a huge work to be on the map again, in the 2012 report (CAHSRA, 2012a). Ken Gutierrez from Riverside explains that they are in contact with the Anaheim staff to follow their example and to be on the map in the following years. But in this area, San Bernardino, Corona and Ontario are fighting too.

At last, we can describe the San Diego situation. Here, the Authority proposed six stations: one in Escondido in the north of the San Diego county, one in University City (two proposed locations), one next to the San Diego airport, one next to the stadium and one in Downtown. San Diego decided to be involved as soon as it was possible through Sandag, the MPO. After the 2011 draft report for the Los Angeles-San Diego section (2011a), the Sandag, has done a consultation work in each area where the Authority proposed a stop according to Daniel Veeh<sup>27</sup>. While University City rejected the proposed stop, Escondido accepted it. In San Diego, the airport location seemed to be the more relevant spot. Sandag addressed those preferred options to the Authority who accepted them. Daniel Veeh joked about it saying that in southern California, cities are fighting for a station while San Diego dropped one. This local strategy was definitely a way to obtain the most preferred location.

For now the opposition seems less strong in the southern corridor but the project is not as imminent as in the Central Valley. With the progress of the process, some opponents may wake up, especially as it is a very populated area.

---

<sup>25</sup> Interview with Ken Gutierrez, April 18, 2013

<sup>26</sup> Interview with Mike Gardner, April 22, 2013

<sup>27</sup> Interview with Daniel Veeh, May 9, 2013

## **CONCLUSION**

The high-speed rail project is now a project on tracks. The Authority has reached an agreement with the opponents in the Central Valley in May 2013, which could allow the start of the construction in 2013, or the beginning of 2014. The opposition won't disappear and the phasing approach delays the debate in the most populated and congested areas (San Francisco and Los Angeles areas), where the opposition could grow in the next months or years. For the supporters, the lobbying and the competition between cities are not over. For now, if some local governments seem to stay in the background, they will probably enter the debate soon.

## **BIBLIOGRAPHY**

- Cambridge Systematics Inc & SCAG, (2009), High-Speed Regional Transportation System Alternatives Analysis, Final Report, 175 p.
- California High-Speed Rail Authority, (2011a), California High-Speed Train, Preliminary Alternatives Analysis Report, Los Angeles to San Diego via the Inland Empire Section, 122 p.
- California High-Speed Rail Authority, (2011b), California High-Speed Rail Program Draft 2012 Business Plan, 230 p.
- California High-Speed Rail Authority, (2012a), California High-Speed Rail Program Revised 2012 Business Plan, Building California's Future, 212 p.
- California High-Speed Rail Authority, (2012b), California High-Speed Train, Final Merced to Fresno Section, Project EIR/EIS
- California High-Speed Rail Authority, (2012c), California High-Speed Train, Revised Draft EIR/Supplemental Draft EIS, Fresno to Bakersfield
- California High-Speed Rail Authority, (2012d), Bay Area to Central valley High-Speed Train, Partially Revised Final Program, Environmental Impact Report
- Catz SL, Christian A (2010) Thinking Ahead, High-Speed Rail in Southern California. UC Irvine, Institute of Transportation Studies, Irvine, 28 p
- The United State Conference of Mayors, (2010), The Economic Impacts of High-Speed Rail on Cities and their Metropolitan Areas, Economic Development Research Group, 28 p.
- Todorovich P. & Hagler Y., (2011), America 2050, High-Speed Rail in America, Lincoln Institute of Land Policy, 56 p.
- U.S. Department of Transportation and Federal Railroad Administration, (2009), Vision for High-Speed Rail in America, High-Speed Rail Strategic Plan, 26 p.