

# **House Majority Whip Kevin McCarthy seeks to block California high-speed rail money**

**Michael Doyle, Sacramento Bee, 10-8-11**

WASHINGTON – A top House Republican on Friday sent another warning signal to California's high-speed rail project by introducing a bill to freeze federal funding.

The bill, by House Majority Whip Kevin McCarthy, R-Bakersfield, would stop the Obama administration from spending additional high-speed rail funds in California through September 2012. Whatever its long-term prospects, the measure sounds a loud political alarm.

"Responsible stewardship of taxpayer dollars is always important, and now more than ever," McCarthy said in a statement Friday. "We cannot afford to throw money we don't have at a project most don't have confidence in."

Nine House members, all California Republicans, joined as co-sponsors of the bill. Some, including McCarthy, have previously backed high-speed rail proposals but now consider California's project imprudent.

The Obama administration has announced \$3.6 billion in federal funds for the California High-Speed Rail Authority. Some of that has already been spent and can't be touched by the new bill.

But the legislation freezes \$715 million of the total that has not yet been formally "obligated" to the state. The bill also freezes any other federal money that has not yet been spent.

Other states have been successfully competing for federal high-speed rail funds. The three-page bill, though, confines itself to California.

"This legislation attempts to throw the baby out with the bath water," said Rep. Jim Costa, D-Fresno. "In a time when our economy is struggling, this purely political proposal makes no sense."

In addition to the funding freeze, the legislation directs the nonpartisan Government Accountability Office to evaluate the California project. The four-month study would examine ridership projections, future funding needs, ticket prices and other criteria, and would compare California's project to those in other states.

"We understand and share this interest that taxpayer dollars are spent responsibly, with transparency and accountability," rail Authority spokeswoman Rachel Wall said Friday. She added that the authority would release a detailed business plan Nov. 1.

The California project's first two sections would connect Bakersfield to Fresno and Fresno to Merced. Officials are now completing required environmental studies. Rail authority officials insist initial construction will start in Fresno in 2012.