

Bid to kill Calif. project takes step to Nov. ballot

Jason Plautz, Environment & Energy Publishing, 1-24-12

Opponents of California's high-speed rail line may begin collecting signatures for a ballot measure that would effectively end the state's rail project, Secretary of State Debra Bowen announced today.

The "No Train Please Act" would eliminate the California High-Speed Rail Authority and block state spending on a high-speed line, absent another constitutional amendment. The measure's supporters must collect 807,615 signatures by June 21 to qualify for the Nov. 6 ballot.

According to an estimate from the state legislative analyst and director of finance, the state would save up to \$650 million a year if the measure passed. However, the cancellation of the line would also require the state to return \$3.3 billion in federal grants, which would "reduce somewhat the level of economic activity in the state over the next several years," according to Bowen's office.

The measure joins several legislative efforts to block the project, which has seen public support crumble amid rising cost estimates.

Assemblywoman Diane Harkey (R) sponsored a bill that would halt the sale of bonds for the line authorized in a 2008 proposition, while state Sen. Doug LaMalfa (R) plans to offer a pair of bills that would both freeze high-speed rail funding and let voters revote on the project. State Sen. Joe Simitian (D) has said he would like to freeze funding for a year to look at solutions to some of the project's problems.

U.S. House Majority Whip Kevin McCarthy (R) and several other California Republicans are backing a bill that would freeze the project for a year while the Government Accounting Office reviews the project.

A Field Research Corp. poll conducted last month showed 64 percent of respondents want another chance to vote on a \$9 billion bond measure for the trains, with 59 percent saying they would reject it.