

# High hopes for state's high-speed rail

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The author is a Salinas resident and alternative mode traveler. Her "We Could Car Less" column is published and posted online on Monday.

The first phase of California's \$64 billion high-speed rail project from San Francisco to Los Angeles has left the station. The first operational section will be from San Jose south to just north of Bakersfield, with an estimated travel time of 100 minutes. This segment should be in service by 2025, according to Adeline Yee of the California High Speed Rail Authority. The next segment will run from Merced through Fresno to Bakersfield and is expected to start service in 2029. The high-speed rail station closest to Salinas will be in Gilroy.

High-speed rail is expensive, but it is also expensive to build more freeways and airports. High-speed rail is not as environmentally destructive as cars and jets.

By 2050, the population of California is projected to be more than 50 million. France is about the same land size as California and has a similar economy. How do the French travel in country? By train. France runs 14,000 trains each day, 800 of those are high-speed trains. In contrast, Amtrak runs 70 trains a day in California; two of those go through Salinas. In the entire USA, Amtrak runs only 300 passenger trains a day.

High-speed rail is not new or experimental; it is proven safe and effective. Japan has had high-speed rail since the 1960s. France started in the 1980s. Most of Europe has high-speed rail. Asia is using it and building more. Even Uzbekistan has high-speed rail, running from Tashkent to Samarkand.

High-speed rail will improve air quality. Bakersfield has the worst air pollution in California, according to the American Lung Association, with Merced the second worst and Fresno third. Central Valley cities are growing rapidly, often with long automobile commutes to work. If we do not build the high-speed rail, what will be the air quality in 2050?

High-speed rail will reduce in-state air travel and pollution. High-speed rail is ideal for trips between 200 and 500 miles and can replace short airline trips. Air travel is more efficient for long journeys, because most of the expense and pollution is generated during takeoff and landing. Using airport tarmac and gate availability for long flights, rather than short flights, is more cost effective and generates less pollution.

High speed rail can decrease automobile dependence. When travelling by railroad, business travelers and tourists arrive at their destination without a car, and will tend to use other modes of transit. Automobile congestion is hurting the tourist experience in Monterey and Santa Cruz counties. If, say, in 10 years we have rail service connecting to the Gilroy high-speed rail station, tourists could come car-free to our lovely area.

High-speed rail is safe. When the 8.9-scale Fukushima earthquake struck Japan, the high-speed trains were slowed to a stop by an automatic safety system. Train travel is one of the safest forms of travel for the passenger. Most railroad-related injuries occur at railroad crossings where cars and people cross the tracks. High-Speed Rail is building overpasses so the the train tracks do not intersect with surface roads. These bypasses will benefit the freight and slower passenger trains and make our cities safer for all modes of travel.

Rail travel time is more productive. Trains are comfortable, have outlets and tables for your electronic office and you can even hold a meeting on a train. When I travel by train, I watch my fellow passengers texting, sleeping, watching movies or even drinking a beer, all activities that – I hope – you can't do while driving.

Californians voted for it. In 2008, Proposition 1A on the statewide ballot was passed to approve state funding for high-speed rail. Federal programs also provide funds in addition to the state funds.

**TAMC panel:** Transportation Agency for Monterey County Rail Policy Commission will meet at 3 p.m. Monday at 55 Plaza Circle, Salinas. The status of the planned Coast Daylight train service between San Francisco and Los Angeles will be reviewed. A presentation about high speed rail is also planned. Online: See [www.tamcmonterey.org](http://www.tamcmonterey.org) or call Christina Watson at 831-775-0903.

**TAMC panel II:** The TAMC Bicycle and Pedestrian Committee meets at 6 p.m., Wednesday at 55 Plaza Circle, Salinas. Online: See [www.tamcmonterey.org](http://www.tamcmonterey.org) for details or call 831-775-0903.