

InfrastructureUSA

Guest on THE INFRA BLOG

Jeff Morales, CEO, California High-Speed Rail Authority

Conversation with Steve Anderson, Managing Director, InfrastructureUSA

High-Speed Rail: It's About The Economy

One thing that's important to recognize is high-speed rail is not a new idea in California. There have been efforts going back to the 70s to start looking at how to develop a program and how it would work; it's picked up obviously considerable speed just in the last few years, but it is not just about a transportation project. It's about tying together the economies of the state, the two major economies in the Bay Area and in the L.A. basin, but connecting them also with the central valley and the growing cities of the central valley. Fresno is a city of over 500,000 people with a million in the county, Bakersfield is 350,000 and almost a million in the county and they're both growing rapidly. This is really about shaping the economy, shaping the development. The Mayor of Fresno, for instance, says the biggest threat to agriculture in California is sprawl. And one of the reasons that she is so supportive of high-speed rail is helping cities like Fresno develop in a way that is more sustainable, that is friendlier to the environment, and that can actually help preserve key agricultural properties at the same time that our population continues to grow.

Success Means Bold Decisions

One I would say: there is an important lesson in history, which you've raised in looking at how and why we got to where we are, where we are as a country, where we are as a state. Here, California is the 9th largest economy in the world. One of the reasons we are what we are is that previous generations made bold decisions with all the same sorts of controversies that we're facing today to make investments. Whether it was the state highway system, the water system, the University of California campus system, all of those were very tough decisions. There is not, I don't think, a single person in California who would look back and say those were mistakes and I think down the road people will look back at our program the same way as a generational sort of investment in the future of the state and that's what we need around the country as well. You mentioned the Northeast Corridor and I grew up on the East Coast and I've spent a lot of time on the Northeast Corridor, know it well, I see tremendous parallels between the Northeast Corridor and California and we need to be looking at investing in both areas for the good of the country and its competitiveness going forward.

Even conservative estimates of the population growth for California, say that over the next few decades we will be adding the equivalent of the state of New York to California. That's a pretty sobering statistic and it will not happen if we don't make investments in our infrastructure and allow for that growth to happen in a way that's sustainable, that continues the quality of life that we have in California, that can keep the economy

smoothly in the state. And so when we look at this investment again that's one of the factors behind it. Again this is an investment in the future of this state and because of the importance of California to the national economy, therefore investment in the national economy.

Dark Economic Times are Prime Time for Investment

Some of the most important and iconic investments in the state, the Bay Bridge in San Francisco/Oakland, the Golden Gate Bridge, were made in the middle of the depression, in the 30s, exactly when the economy needed a boost and imagine California without those facilitates today. It's easy to say let's wait and do it another time, but that's not the right decision and fortunately it's not what people did in generations before us, you know I have to really commend the President for his initiative, the Secretary for his leadership, and our legislature and our government for making this tough decision and move forward. And it's going to create huge opportunities in the long run in terms of helping shape our economies, making them more competitive, creating jobs, and in the near term we're looking at tremendous job creation in the construction of our system, an estimated 20,000 jobs a year being created. And also for us investing in what can be part of our economy going forward, you know high-speed rail industry, much the way the aerospace industry played such an important part in this state's economy, going back to the 50s and 60s and 70s. We're looking and talking to universities that are very excited about creating curricula geared to high-speed rail, because they see the opportunity to train a new generation of people who understand how to develop and deliver these systems.

www.InfrastructureUSA.org

212.414.9220

info@infrastructureusa.org