

# InfrastructureUSA

## Guest on THE INFRA BLOG

**Frank Vacca, Chief Program Manager, California High-Speed Rail Authority  
Conversation with Steve Anderson, Managing Director, InfrastructureUSA**

### **High-Speed Rail is Already Under Construction in California**

There's nothing more exciting than the high-speed rail program and project. Not only does it bring great benefits to riders and to the regions, but it's exciting. I mean, the equipment is state of the art and it's just luxurious inside to ride; it's smooth, it's a way to travel where you can relax and you can do work and you can look at movies and you can do all kinds of things and still get you there competitively. State-of-good repair is not exciting and upgrading is not exciting, but new construction for high-speed rail is exciting. It's exciting for everyone, and it's a great mode. Our younger generation really embraces very quickly and understands it, and I think as they mature and become middle America today, you'll see that interest and that support throughout the country. We're very excited here at California High-Speed Rail to be the leader in the development of that first true high-speed train. I believe California will be the first high-speed-rail system in North America. I think this year has been a great motivation for our program. We've overcome all the legal challenges before us. We are under construction. We have the first billion-dollar contract, and the designs are mature enough to start construction. They've started to do demolition along the right of way, and we're about to let our second construction contract at \$2 billion. So there's nothing, no obstacles, in front of us right now. We're under construction, and I foresee our first construction segment should be completed by 2019. We are just months from letting our high-speed train set procurement contract for the purchase of high-speed trains, so that their arrival will coincide with the completion of our first construction segment.

### **San Francisco to Los Angeles: Building in Segments**

You can't wake up one morning and have 500 miles of railroad constructed. It takes time, and you do a segmental approach, not unlike the Highway System. So we are doing segments. Right now the first construction segment is in the Central Valley; it's 130 miles in length. It's really critical that we do that segment first because there is no other area in the country that we can test our new trains at 242 miles an hour. So the Central Valley becomes our first construction segment and also becomes the test track for our high-speed trains. Coincident with that, we will be moving forward on the northern section on the peninsula between Gilroy and San Francisco, and on the southern segment between Burbank and Palmville. We'll be working on three major segments at the same time, and then once they get closer to completion we'll fill the gaps to finish the entire program. So it's a segmental approach, but we'll have multiple segments being built at the same time. Right now our business plan envisions a 2027 timeframe, but as a result of a cap-and-trade budget that came to fruition this summer we're looking at accelerating that, and hope to get that under 2025 to have the system in operation. The system is designed for 220-mile-per-hour operation and a 2-hour-and-30-minute trip time without any station stops on our express trains. So I would say

that all the trains will be under 3 hours between Los Angeles and San Francisco. Depending on how many stops will determine whether it's 2:40 or 2:50.

### **HSR Projects in Progress Around the Country**

The California high-speed rail program is a significant transformational project for California. It's not just a transportation project, but it also ties regions. It will change the economy and meet the need for the future of the 50 million inhabitants and constituents of California. Leadership is one key thing. The leadership of Governor Brown is pivotal in maintaining this program and continuing it. So around the country the leadership in each of the areas is critical. In addition, the segments are critical in terms of demand and going forward for each segment. Texas high-speed rail is a great program that's moving forward on environmental right now between Houston and Dallas. Express West is also another high-speed rail program that is continuing to make progress. We are coordinating with both of those programs to make sure that we are in lock step with our development so that we have a system in the U.S. that is coordinated. Florida is moving forward with their program between Miami and Orlando, and Orlando to Tampa, so that's making progress. There are three or four major programs that are really starting to move forward and make progress towards operation.

### **We Need Strong Infrastructure Leadership**

The infrastructure situation in this country is becoming critical in all modes of transportation. We're getting a very aged infrastructure. We're not maintaining the infrastructure we have, and we're very slowly adding new infrastructure. It's an important discussion to have nationally. It's not sexy, it's not fun, because it's meat and potatoes; it's foundational in nature. From a leadership perspective, you need leadership that has a vision and understands the importance of a sound infrastructure to our economy. And the second major obstacle is that it's expensive, and that commitment is difficult sometimes in the financial environment that we're in. So you have a couple of major obstacles to get over in order to ensure that our infrastructure starts taking the forefront of attention. That needs to be done in this country and we need leaders, and leadership, to bring that forward in the policy perspective because it is so foundational for our economy, for transportation, and for all walks of life and for everyone here. We're looking for leadership to move that forward, but it's not an easy task.

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