

Editorial December 16, 2011 [Link](#)

California voters turn against the train to nowhere. If politicians are good for anything, it ought to be reading polls. Yet there was Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood last week telling Congress that California's high-speed railroad is "not a cheap project" but "the people in California want this."

What people would that be? According to the latest Field poll, two-thirds of Californians want a new referendum on the project. And by a two-to-one margin, they say they'd vote to kill it.

In 2008 voters approved a \$10 billion bond to fund the 500-mile bullet train, but cost estimates have since exploded to \$100 billion from \$33 billion and the mirage of federal government and private funding has disappeared. The high-speed rail authority has reduced its ridership estimates to 37 million from 90 million. Oh, and the train won't connect San Francisco with Anaheim for another 30 years, if ever.

Mr. LaHood is nonetheless demanding that the state use \$3.9 billion in federal money to build the first 130-mile segment in the Central Valley, where there's supposedly less local resistance. However, no one is sure when the first segment running from Merced to Fresno would be operable since the state lacks the money to build and electrify the tracks. The authority's back-up plan is to run Amtrak trains on the track, but the state's watchdog Legislative Analyst's Office questions their claim that the tracks would improve Amtrak service.

Another unanswered question: how the authority plans to raise the \$90 billion or so to finance the rest of the train. The state has no money, Republicans in Congress have refused to appropriate funds, and private investors want a revenue guarantee, which the 2008 ballot measure prohibits. "As a result," the watchdog agency writes, "it is highly uncertain if funding to complete the high-speed rail system will ever materialize."

California Governor Jerry Brown is fond of putting questions to the voters these days, at least to raise taxes, so how about putting this railroad job to a new vote too?

