

Big Money for Fast Trains!

The most eagerly anticipated question of the federal stimulus program was answered on Thursday when the White House announced winners in the competition for \$8 billion of funding for high speed rail. California's years of work on high speed rail were vindicated by an award of \$2.35 billion, the largest granted to any state. Among California's advantages in the competition were that California is the only state that is near construction of true (200+ mile per hour) high speed rail and that California pledged to match every dollar of federal stimulus funds with one dollar of Proposition 1A bond funds.



Though California had submitted a list of specific project segments for federal funding, the federal award is mostly discretionary. This large degree of flexibility should be helpful to the California High Speed Rail Authority's program management, but it does raise the specter of intense competition among Bay Area, Central Valley, and Los Angeles high speed rail backers. Expect to hear more from the Bay Area Council as California gets into the process of picking where to spend high speed rail stimulus funds.

... And A Clutch Win for the Transbay Terminal!

Locally, one of the biggest questions was whether \$400 million of stimulus funds would be granted to construct the underground portion at the Transbay Terminal in San Francisco –the so-called "train box" that will house high speed rail tracks and platforms. The twists and turns sometimes seemed more like a soap opera than like transportation planning, but project supporters never took their eyes off of the opportunity for stimulus funds to build a huge shovel ready project that will be the northern high speed rail terminus.

When stimulus awards were announced, funding for the train box was conspicuously absent. Just a few hours later, however, House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood clarified that \$400 million of California's funds will be set aside for the train box, brightening the day of many supporters. With these stimulus funds and a just-announced \$170 federal loan, the entire Transbay Terminal – the above-ground bus portion and the below-ground rail portion – can be built as one project, bringing tremendous construction efficiencies. Congratulations to the Transbay Joint Powers Authority and its business partners Webcor and Arup, and congratulations to the thousands of construction workers who will soon be building this legacy project.

... More on Rails: MTC Votes to Stay the Course on the Connector

Last week the fate of the BART – Oakland Airport Connector seemed uncertain. This week the project was cast a life line by the MTC when they voted to continue their support of the Connector, keeping federal stimulus dollars allocated to the project but giving BART until February 17 to address concerns brought up by the Federal Transit Administration.