

PUBLIC COMMENT - Agenda Item 11a

From: [Martha Silver](#)
To: [Martha Silver](#)
Subject: MTC Legislation Committee Item 3a public comment re: SB 1411
Date: Friday, April 10, 2026 9:54:39 AM
Attachments: [SB 1411 Support letter.pdf](#)

From: Adriana Rizzo
Sent: Thursday, April 9, 2026 6:01:43 PM
To: MTC-ABAG Info <info@bayareametro.gov>
Subject: MTC Legislation Committee Item 3a public comment re: SB 1411

Dear Chair Carlson,

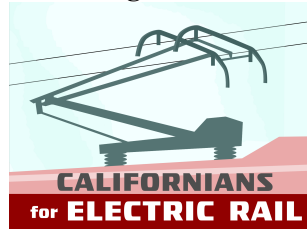
I am reaching out on behalf of Californians for Electric Rail, a statewide, all volunteer organization with members throughout the Bay Area.

Californians for Electric Rail supports SB 1411 and California High-Speed Rail, and want to see it reach the Bay Area and greater Los Angeles as soon as possible. We are glad to see MTC is considering supporting the bill. However, we are concerned about proposed amendments to remove approval by the Office of the Inspector General and other guardrails currently in the bill's language.

Even with last year's Cap and Invest guarantee, only a small portion of the total CAHSR budget is funded. In order to ensure adequate funding to complete the Central Valley IOS and connect it to the Bay Area, spending outside the IOS must be used judiciously and with an eye towards maximizing statewide benefits. We believe current bill language around the office of the inspector general promotes this outcome. While many of MTC's proposed bookend projects are worthwhile, many of them have experienced large cost escalations - for instance, grade separations on the Caltrain corridor. Funding all these projects with GGRF funds could come at the expense of CAHSR's arrival in the Bay Area if remaining funds are insufficient to support Madera to Gilroy tunneling work.

Attached is the SB 1411 support letter we recently submitted outlining our position and concerns around spending guardrails. We kindly request you retract your proposed amendments and support the bill as currently written.

Sincerely,
Adriana Rizzo
Californians for Electric Rail



April 8th, 2026

Senator Dave Cortese
Chair
Senate Transportation Committee
State Capitol, Room 405
Sacramento, CA 95814

Re: Support for SB 1411

Dear Chair Cortese,

Californians for Electric Rail is an all-volunteer, statewide organization dedicated to advancing fast, frequent, zero emissions electrified mainline rail around the state. We strongly support the California High-Speed Rail (CAHSR) program and want to ensure it is able to reach population centers as swiftly as possible. For these reasons, we support SB 1411.

CAHSR is projected to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 3 million MT of CO₂/year, about 1% of 2022 emissions and the equivalent of taking 700,000 cars off the road. When complete, CAHSR will be one of the fastest trains in the world at 220 mph. CAHSR has already created 15,000 jobs in the Central Valley, and will enhance tourism, job access, and the overall economy all around the state. CAHSR has already been a boon to local transit, as seen through the resounding success of Caltrain electrification, which made Caltrain the nation's fastest-growing transit agency in the country, and the Regional Connector, which has increased ridership on Los Angeles Metro's A and E lines. California High-Speed Rail is a transformative project that deserves continuing public investment.

California High-Speed Rail has long suffered from financial uncertainty. It was only with the 2025 Cap and Invest plan that California finally committed to funding the original \$40B cost for the project presented to the voters in 2008, nearly 20 years earlier. Since that time, the cost of the project has tripled due to the common "domestic worst practice" of writing a budget before design is complete¹, cost escalation due to routine project delivery issues², and inflation due to the long duration of the project, itself downstream of inadequate funding especially early in the project's lifecycle.

¹

<https://calelectricrail.org/against-patchwork-funding-how-multi-year-investment-frameworks-can-deliver-rail-faster-and-cheaper/>

²

https://transweb.sjsu.edu/sites/default/files/10-2025_Special%20Feature%20-%20Learning%20from%20CA.pdf?mkt_tok=NjYzLVVLUS05OTgAAAGdsPw2LDp5KnbGn_6QR-QulSrVWWtFynuKCGNsj6ZbAax_I5gQhmW_zi_S7rxoGBfD7AjEKfvAdPCLuajuziQO6jV4E-xsLeB5RBcscKwCVnY_ ;
<https://www.circulatesd.org/powerlessbrokers>

CAHSR has made admirable strides in improving project delivery and bringing down costs. For example, CAHSR was able to save \$2M in personnel costs³ and \$14B in future capital costs by bringing staff in-house and reversing design decisions made by consultants. Assistance from the legislature for further reforms, such as enhanced eminent domain authority and better processes to expedite third party permits, as suggested in the Draft Business Plan, are still needed. The latest Draft Business Plan shows further attempts to scale back costs via value engineering. California High-Speed Rail leads the state in project delivery reform, and deserves continued investment.

Despite these valiant efforts, the project has a large unmet funding need. The 2026 Draft Business Plan⁴ relies heavily on private financing leveraging the \$1B/year Cap and Invest guarantee to pay for the remainder of the project. The Business Plan indicates that Merced-Bakersfield service in the IOS will not be profitable, but that service that reaches the San Francisco or Los Angeles metro areas would be. Thus, reaching these areas as soon as possible is necessary to access private financing for the continued viability of the project.

The Draft Business Plan lays out a path to reach major cities with an incremental buildout that uses existing infrastructure in the interim. Given the long timeframe of geotechnical and design work, initiating pre-construction work outside of the Central Valley as soon as possible is needed to allow service to reach the Bay Area and Palmdale sooner. Gilroy-Palmdale should ideally be ready to start construction as soon as service in the Central Valley opens. For this reason, we support increased spending outside of the Central Valley and SB 1411.

Streets for All's recent EIFD report⁵ further bolsters the case for both the Authority's prioritization of earlier service to major metro areas, as well as optimizing Palmdale-Los Angeles tunneling for Metrolink blended service. The report finds that an enhanced infrastructure financing district around Los Angeles County high-speed rail stations could raise \$15-23B while being revenue-positive for the county — enough to fund the \$16.8B cost of interim service proposed in the Draft Business Plan and a substantial proportion of the full buildout. We are strongly supportive of this approach, which would accelerate CAHSR's arrival in Los Angeles, and would benefit from SB 1411.

Accelerated advancement to the Bay Area and Los Angeles Metro areas also provides considerable local benefit. The Draft Business Plan calls for electrifying the Metrolink Antelope Valley Line and Caltrain between San Jose and Gilroy. Californians for Electric Rail's *Electrolink* report⁶ found that electrification and level boarding make a Metrolink trip from Vista Canyon to LA Union Station under one hour, competitive with driving. The interim service plan, supported by SB 1411, would transform transportation and jobs access in the Antelope Valley, Santa Clarita, and Gilroy areas.

³ https://bcp.dof.ca.gov/2425/FY2425_ORG2665_BCP7284.pdf

⁴ <https://hsr.ca.gov/wp-content/uploads/2026/02/2026-HSR-Draft-Business-Plan-02282026.pdf>

⁵ https://data.streetsforall.org/blog/cahsr_eifd/

⁶ <https://calelectricrail.org/electrolink-modern-passenger-rail-service-for-southern-california/>

While SB 1411 will improve the overall financial viability of the project, CAHSR funding remains scarce and precious. Spending should be restricted to activities that support infrastructure that will be directly utilized by high-speed trains. Local transit and active transportation infrastructure or non-HSR transit operations, while very needed and worthy of state support, should not be eligible for CAHSR Cap and Invest dollars. While we believe that language requiring the Office of Inspector General to approve spending outside of the Central Valley provides sufficient guardrails on “maximize the efficiency of delivering the project”, we emphasize the importance of this provision.

Access to private financing and the overall financial fate of CAHSR is deeply contingent on the project’s \$1B Cap and Invest guarantee. The legislature must ensure that Cap and Invest allowances are designed to provide sustainable revenues to the Greenhouse Gas Reduction Fund, CAHSR’s largest source of revenue, through 2045.

SB 1411 accelerates California High-Speed Rail’s advancement to the state’s most populated areas, to the benefit of the public. It is essential to the project’s continued political and financial viability, and will deliver transformative regional transit improvements in the process. California High-Speed Rail is a testament to our state’s ambition and know-how, and we are proud to support both SB 1411 and the project.

Sincerely,
Adriana Rizzo
Founding Member, Californians for Electric Rail