

L.A.-Las Vegas train a good thing

By Michael D. Antonovich

I have consistently advocated and supported strong coalitions among private and public stakeholders to address our region's pressing transportation challenges. One such partnership has resulted in the first segment of the DesertXpress high speed rail project that will connect Southern California to Las Vegas — and will feature a rapid extension from Victorville to Palmdale, which will also link with Metrolink and the Palmdale airport. The DesertXpress will also connect with the California High Speed Rail Network that will run between Northern and Southern California.

By combining the technical know-how and creativity of the private sector with the responsible stewardship and policy support of the public sector, we are creating a sustainable, long-term alternative to the severe traffic congestion and environmental challenges facing the region.

Operating on all new, high-quality, fully grade-separated tracks largely within the I-15 right of way between Las Vegas and Victorville, DesertXpress will be the nation's first dedicated, interstate passenger-only electric high-speed

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rail system. The Palmdale extension will travel primarily within or adjacent to the right of way of the planned High Desert Corridor to Palmdale.

The DesertXpress breaks ground next year, followed by four years of construction and testing. The rail line will have trains departing from both ends every 20 minutes during peak periods and will operate at speeds of more than 150 mph.

The High Desert Corridor Joint Powers Authority is working in cooperation with colleagues from

San Bernardino County, the cities of Victorville and Palmdale, collaborating with the California High Speed Rail Authority. Las Vegas, the congressional delegations of both states and DesertXpress are committed to finalizing the route and completing the environmental clearances required in time to start building the 49-mile Palmdale extension prior to the 2013 opening of the initial leg between Las Vegas and Victorville.

Ready to break ground early next year with private financing, DesertXpress will create thousands of jobs while improving mobility, air quality and convenience. DesertXpress will be the poster child for what can be done when business leaders, elected officials, and community and environmental planners join forces to solve regional problems through public-private partnerships.

Michael D. Antonovich represents northern Los Angeles County on the L.A. County Board of Supervisors.