

Rail corridor may doom maglev plan

Key senator backs
high-speed rail linking
L.A. and Las Vegas.

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A potential corridor for passenger trains between Las Vegas and the Los Angeles area has become part of a federal initiative to modernize the nation's rail networks and develop high-speed service between cities.

Thursday's announcement, however, might doom a 30-year-old proposal to build a high-tech magnetic levitation, or "maglev," train from Anaheim to Las Vegas if Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid (D-Nev.) gets his way.

Reid, who no longer supports the maglev project, said during an event to publicize the rail corridor that he would try to scuttle \$45 million in federal funds earmarked for the proposal. The maglev project and a conventional rail line proposed by a private venture are trying to develop separate high-speed passenger trains that would parallel off-congested Interstate 15. Secretary of

Transportation Ray LaHood announced Thursday that a swath of land along much of I-15 has been declared a federal high-speed rail corridor — one of 11 such zones in the U.S. Projects proposed in those corridors are eligible for federal assistance, grants and loans.

Federal officials say the development of a successful high-speed rail system between Southern California and Nevada would dramatically reduce delays and traffic accidents on I-15.

"For transportation, it's the most important thing that's happened to Nevada since Interstate 15," said Reid, who likened the federal high-speed rail program to President Eisenhower's effort in the 1950s to develop the interstate highway system.

Last month, the Nevada senator withdrew his support for the maglev project in favor of a plan by DesertXPress Enterprises to build a European-style high-speed train that relies on conventional technology. The 150 mph system would

run about 200 miles from Victorville to Las Vegas and cost about \$3.5-\$4 billion to build.

The maglev project would extend 270 miles and cost an estimated \$12 billion. Maglev technology relies on electricity and magnetic force to propel trains on a cushion of air at speeds up to 300 mph.

"I've studied maglev enough," said Reid, who added that the DesertXPress is closer to breaking ground. "We're past the planning stage. We've got to move on and start construction."

Proponents of the maglev proposal said it was unlikely that Reid would be able to persuade Congress to reverse its decision to provide funding.

"We are relying on the law and how it reads. We believe that nothing will change," said Neil Cummings, president of the American Magline Group, a consortium of private companies involved in the project.

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