



All aboard high speed rail to Chowchilla!

California has been going about planning high speed rail all wrong, and Sacramento appears to be taking notice. Yesterday, the nonpartisan Legislative Analyst's Office (LAO) released a [report](#) recommending major changes in the way California implements high speed rail. In addition to a complete reorganization of the governing structure of the High Speed Rail Authority, the LAO recommends an entirely different "starter route" for the system. Currently, the system is slated to begin construction in the Central Valley from [nowhere to nowhere](#), in a rushed decision solely to meet [federal funding deadlines](#). With Florida bowing out of high speed rail, California now gets \$300 million of that money to build an extra 20 miles of track to bring the train to...you guessed it: [more nowhere](#)(no offense, citizens of Chowchilla).

This Central Valley starting point was a disaster to begin with. What the Authority should have done was begin the line on a sensible segment where high speed rail may actually pencil out, such as Los Angeles to Anaheim or San Diego, or San Francisco to San Jose, as I pointed out in an [earlier post](#) and as the LAO now recommends. The Authority leadership should have had the courage to tell Californians that there wasn't enough money to begin the whole system, that environmental review and community opposition will likely suffocate the line in the most optimal urban corridors, and that the federal government will have to be flexible in awarding funds with deadlines.

By laying forth the challenges publicly and honestly, the Authority could educate the public on the stakes and get high speed rail proponents mobilized and ready to tackle the barriers. The legislature and federal government could speed up the planning timetable by allowing faster environmental review, and the business community and other proponents could rally to overcome local opposition, as currently embodied by the residents of the [San Francisco Peninsula and their political advocates](#). Instead, the Authority continues to try to sell a statewide vision of rail that is simply not feasible at this point.

I hope the LAO report stirs some major changes in the way the project goes forward. If done right, high speed rail could be a major boost for California's economy, environment, and quality-of-life. But it won't happen on this current trajectory.