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High-speed rail and infill: A great marriage for California

HIGHLIGHTS

High-speed rail can work hand-in-hand with infill development near train stations

Urban sprawl must end to reduce greenhouse gas emissions



Gov. Jerry Brown speaks at the high-speed rail groundbreaking ceremony in Fresno last January. | **Gary Kazanjian** - Associated Press

BY CURT JOHANSEN

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We know that the most damaging contributors to our climate are greenhouse gases emitted primarily by cars and trucks. More fuel-efficient and electric vehicles can help, but are not enough.

As other countries have found, high-speed rail can be part of the solution – with the right land-use policy. High-speed rail is about providing California travelers a choice they do not have. It also offers Californians more choice about where and how they live by spurring new infill development in urban areas near high-speed rail stations and other locations connected by transit.

As a real estate developer focused on sustainable projects, I see the results every day of decades of unhealthy sprawl development. Fortunately, positive changes are evident throughout the state, with hundreds of mixed-use, transit-oriented communities being built.

For all its problems, sprawl has created hundreds of thousands of acres of urban infill land in nearly 500 cities ready to help house California's estimated population of 50 million by 2050. The majority of these infill sites can be linked by transit to high-speed rail.

This is a game changer for California. If you live in Fresno, you'll be able to commute to a job in Silicon Valley. A traffic-clogged drive from Anaheim to Los Angeles becomes a short, high-speed rail trip.

Some opponents say high-speed rail will worsen urban sprawl. They are wrong. High-speed rail will bring people back to the city center and become part of a statewide system that encourages transit-oriented development.

Urban sprawl must end if we are to curb greenhouse gas emissions. This will be achieved only by forward-thinking developers and cities discontinuing their destructive practices of annexation and rezoning of prime farmland. This shift is already happening in many parts of California, and high-speed rail will provide a major boost to these efforts.

People want choices. Some prefer fast-paced, big-city life. Some prefer small cities, with their charm and a slower pace. And still others prefer the rural life. California accommodates many lifestyle choices, and savvy developers know that there is growing consumer demand for more walkable neighborhoods with better connections to jobs. Our current housing options are not adequately meeting this demand. The marriage of high-speed rail and infill development offers more lifestyle choices and a healthier future.

Curt Johansen is president of the Council of Infill Builders, a nonprofit group of California real estate professionals.

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