

Linking the North and South

California's High-Speed Rail Project

BY PATRICIA L. JONES, SR/WA

When completed in 2033, California's high-speed rail will blaze across the state at speeds up to 220 mph, linking Northern and Southern California, creating jobs and reducing the state's dependence on foreign oil to the tune of 12.7 million barrels per year. Not only that, its construction will afford great opportunities for right of way professionals.

All the right of way disciplines will be touched on during the course of this multifaceted project. It will afford us the chance to wear many hats, and because of the sheer number of parcels and potential complexity of each parcel from a right of way perspective, it is sure to be a once in a right of way lifetime opportunity.

The first high-speed trains will be operational around 2021. When the system is fully realized, riders will be whisked from San Francisco to Los Angeles in less than three hours, for a price comparable to that of an airplane ticket – with no arduous waits in line at security or cramped seating. The high-speed trains will function as part of a statewide integrated rail network with transit hubs connected to major cities like San Francisco, San Jose and Los Angeles.

The system will span 800 miles when completed, run on 100 percent clean electric power, and be safely grade-separated to ensure that high-speed rail's nearly impeccable safety record remains intact. Formal procurement has already begun on the design-build contract for the first stage of the multi-decade infrastructure project, located in California's Central Valley area. Construction on this 130-mile segment will begin in the Fresno area this fall and finish up in 2017. All in all there are 1,100 impacted parcels currently estimated within the segment.

The project has \$3.5 billion in federal grants in hand, plus nearly \$9 billion in bonds passed by California voters in 2008. The goal is an overall 30 percent participation by certified Small Businesses, Disadvantaged Business Enterprises and Disabled Veterans Business Enterprises. Prime contractors will network with small businesses, with procurement formats selected to encourage small business participation.

The project is expected to generate tens of thousands of jobs in a state where construction work has taken a beating in the recession. California's construction jobs have suffered in the last decade, and nowhere have the losses been more severe than in the Central Valley area, where major construction on the rail project will begin later this year. The initial construction segment is expected to create 100,000 job-years, not only in construction, but economy-wide as well.

When completed, the project will encompass all of the major population centers in California, including San Francisco, San Jose, Merced, Fresno, Bakersfield, Palmdale, Los Angeles, Anaheim,



Riverside and San Diego. The sheer breadth of this project guarantees that there will be other opportunities for right of way professionals within the whole state of California as the system expands north and south.

"It's a great honor for me to help build this historic project for the people of California," said Robert Rosas, Jr., a Senior Right of Way Agent for the Rail Authority. "Back in the early 1940s, the railroads provided opportunities for many individuals, including my grandfather. I am very proud to be working on a project that can offer similar opportunities to a new generation of right of way professionals."

It has been 30 years since right of way professionals have had a project of this magnitude in California on which to work. This is an exciting opportunity to demonstrate on a large scale the dual fiduciary responsibilities of the profession, which are to ensure everyone directly impacted by a public project is treated fairly and equitably, receiving the rights and benefits to which he or she is entitled, while keeping in mind obligations to all taxpayers.



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Patricia's right of way career includes over 22 years with the Caltrans Division of Right of Way, serving both district and headquarters offices. In 2007 Patricia joined HDR, Inc. as their Right of Way Manager, where she provided a broad range of right of way support services, primarily for local agency transportation projects. In 2011, Patricia became the Director of Real Property for the California High Speed Rail Authority.