

The Las Vegas

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By K



It's called the Las Vegas Super Speed Train, and it comes with a no-risk guarantee from its Nevada backers. They will plan it, build it and take the financial eating if it goes bust. But some civic leaders in Southern California, where the proposed train would originate, see it as anything but a sure bet.

The train would make the 230-mile trip from Southern California to the Nevada gambling Mecca in about 70 minutes, travelling at speeds of up to 250 miles-per-hour. Funding for the project, estimated at \$2 billion to \$3 billion, is still up in the air, but backers say it would most likely come from a foreign government, such as West Germany or Japan.

"I think it would be a good alternative to cars and airplanes," said Richard Welch, senior management analyst for the City of Las Vegas. "Southern California is our largest market, and the train itself would become a major tourist attraction, drawing people who normally wouldn't come here."

But while its Las Vegas proponents see it as a financial boon to the desert gambling oasis, several Southern California officials view it as a high-stakes gamble in which the payoff would be for Nevada at the expense of California.

"I'm very concerned that while the train's California pas-

sengers would travel round-trip, their money would travel one-way," said Wes McDaniel, executive director of the San Bernardino Associated Governments (SANBAG).

Two types of technology are under consideration for the proposed train:

- The French TGV, which uses steel wheel cars on conventional tracks. It's electrically powered and runs at speeds of up to 185 mph, although in tests it has reached 236 mph, hence its name: *Tres Grande Vitesse* (very high speed). An operational system runs between Paris and Lyon.

- The West German Transrapid Maglev, which runs by magnetic levitation and cruises at speed of up to 250 mph. The trains have no wheels. Instead they float a few inches above a magnetized guideway, which is elevated much like Disneyland's monorail. A 25-mile test project was built in Lathen, West Germany, and plans are under way to have a system in operation between Hamburg and Hanover in the mid-1990s. The Japanese are also developing a maglev.

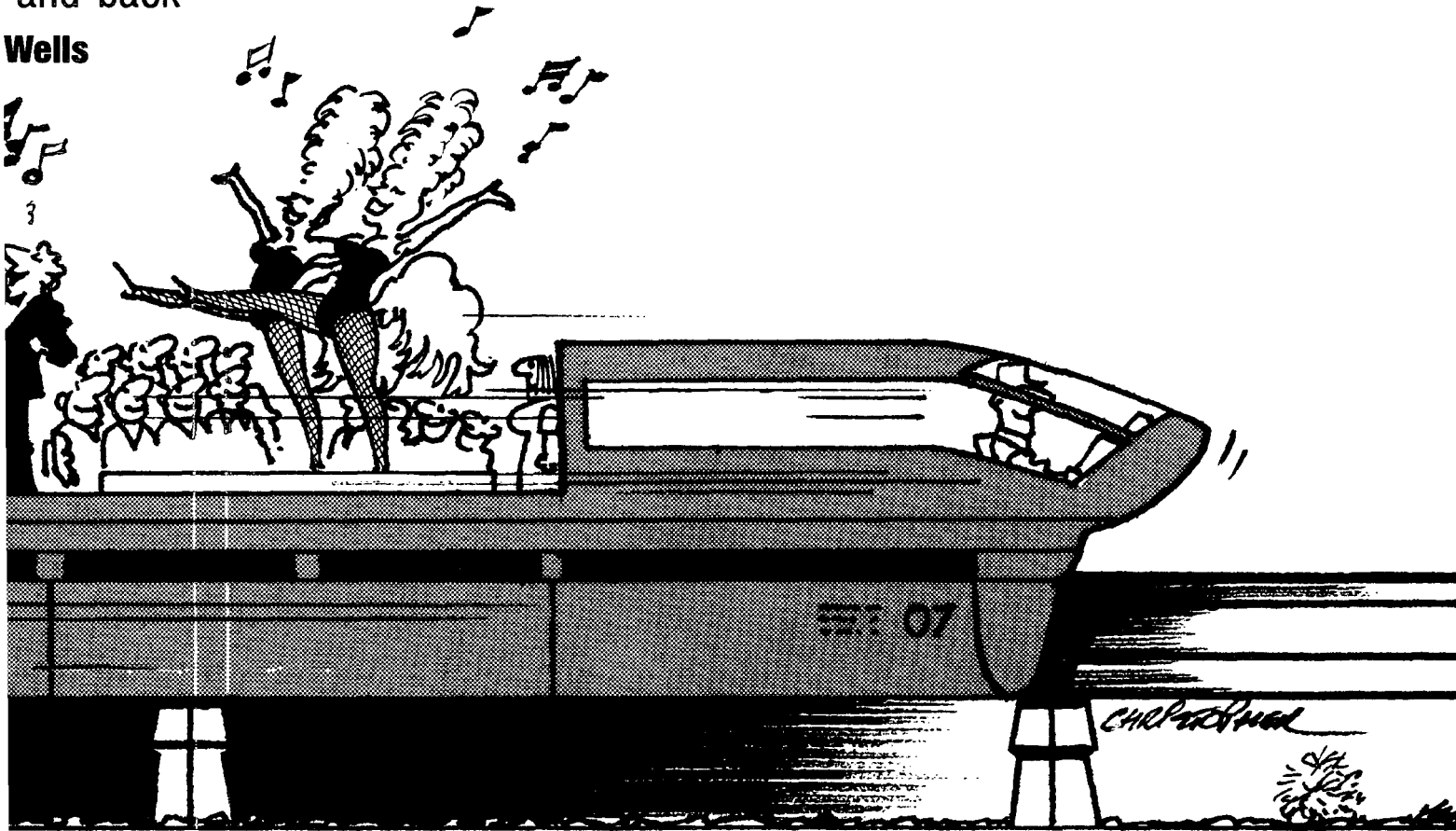
The idea for the Las Vegas train first surfaced during the gasoline shortages of the 1970s. Las Vegas officials were concerned their economy would be drastically hurt if Californians were unable to drive to Las Vegas. The city commissioned two feasibility studies on high-speed rail between 1981 and 1987 costing \$1.55 million and mostly paid for by

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the federal government. The studies indicated an initial annual ridership of four million, no major environmental concerns, strong economic benefits to Nevada, and an annual rate of return on investment of more than 20 percent. It also would create about 11,000 construction jobs, most in Southern California.

One of the first Californians to become interested in the project was Assemblyman Richard Katz, a Sepulveda Democrat, who authored legislation creating the California-Nevada Super Speed Ground Transportation Commission. The commission consists of 16 members, eight each from California and Nevada. California's representatives are from the counties of Los Angeles, Orange, San Bernardino and Riverside. The commission will select a route, determine the number and location of stations, select the type of train and award a contract for construction and operation.

Even though the commission has broad operating powers, its decisions must be ratified by both state legislatures. Also, the location of California terminals must be approved by the board of supervisors in that county.

Katz said he introduced the legislation because he found a lot of interest in the project in both states and because he was fascinated by the technology. "I also wanted to make sure that Southern California got something out of this

besides a train that goes to Las Vegas," he added.

But it's the location of one or more terminals in Southern California and the resulting problems of traffic congestion and increased air pollution that most concerns opponents of the project. Because of the high cost of acquiring rights-of-way in Los Angeles County, the western terminus was initially proposed as Ontario in San Bernardino County. Some local and county officials are concerned that with a projected ridership of four to six million persons a year, all converging on Ontario, the resulting problems would be enormous.

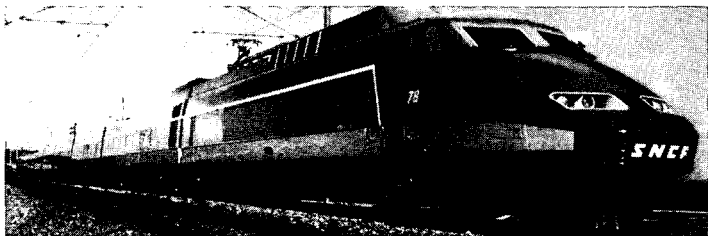
"What would be the impact on our freeways and local surface streets?" asked Ontario Mayor Howard Snider. "I think it will only create more congestion and pollution. I'm not convinced there will be any benefits to Ontario."

His concerns are echoed by San Bernardino County Supervisor Larry Walker of Chino, who represents the Ontario area. "I'm not absolutely opposed to it but I do want to know what positive impact it will have on my area. So far, they (the Las Vegas backers) have made no effort to build a project that would benefit the greater Ontario area," he said.

The project has even become a minor issue in the 25th District state Senate race, which includes most of the area where the train would run. Democrat Sandy Hester of Claremont, who opposes the project, has criticized her Republican

opponent, Assemblyman William Leonard of Redlands, because he is a member of the two-state commission. Leonard says he is "skeptical" about the train's value to California residents, but is serving on the commission because "I figure I can do more from the inside than the outside, even if I vote 'no.'" Leonard adds that he might see some value in the train if a line ran up to ski areas in the San Bernardino National Forest. "People could ski in the day and gamble at night," offered Leonard.

But backers of the train counter that there would probably be several stations in Southern California so all riders would not be converging on one point. Such cities as Ana-



French TGV

heim, Corona, San Bernardino, Riverside and Victorville have been mentioned as possible locations. They caution, however, that too many stops would increase the train's transit time.

"We are not going to put the terminals in places that people can't get to," said Paula Treat, who has been hired by the City of Las Vegas to lobby for the train in Sacramento. "Also, the train makes no sense unless we can alleviate any resulting traffic congestion. Part of the overall package will be to make the train easily accessible to riders."

One proposal calls for using the train for local commuter traffic on weekdays, when ridership to Las Vegas would be relatively light. A network of feeder transportation systems, such as bus and light rail, would shuttle passengers to and from the super-speed train terminals. But local officials are afraid they will get stuck with the multi-billion dollar cost of building and operating such a feeder system.

"The train's operators may invest in some local improvements, but they would be very localized since their only concern would be insuring a smooth flow of traffic from the freeway to the stations," said SANBAG's McDaniel. "But the congestion caused by the train would be around a 50-mile radius, and the commission is not going to address that."

Several San Bernardino County officials have suggested that to equalize benefits from the train, Las Vegas and Nevada finance public transportation projects in Southern California, an idea that makes Nevada officials bristle.

"We're not trying to force this down the throats of local agencies," Treat said. "We want to be as democratic as possible. But we are not going to be held hostage by anyone in return for building the train."

Las Vegas backers have tried to quiet some of the concerns by claiming the train would have equal benefits to both states. Welch said that of Las Vegas' 16 million annual visitors, 10 million come from outside Southern California and many would take a side trip to California on the train.

Supporting this theory is Peter Brynd, manager of governmental affairs for the Anaheim Chamber of Commerce. "Both Anaheim and Las Vegas are convention cities but Vegas is more adult-oriented. The family of a conventioneer could take the train to Anaheim for the day and still be back in time for dinner."

He suggested Anaheim Stadium, which has an Amtrak station nearby, as site of a super-speed train terminal. The stadium, home for the American League's California Angels and National Football League's Los Angeles Rams, is only min-

utes away from Disneyland and Knotts Berry Farm.

But many Californians don't buy this argument, pointing out that the backers' own 1987 report projects that 80 percent of the operating benefits would go to Las Vegas, suggesting the economic benefits would indeed be one-sided.

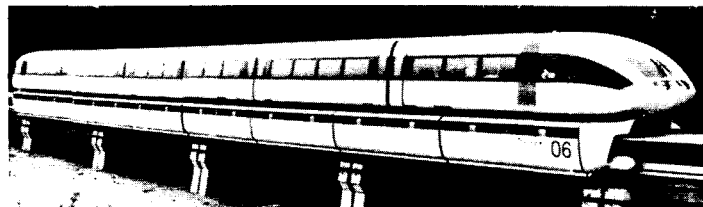
"It's a silly argument," Walker said. "They're not going to get the train through this county unless they can show us some significant benefits. All we've seen so far is a lot of smoke and mirrors."

Walker said he could support the train if it's terminus were in Los Angeles or Orange counties; if Las Vegas agreed to accept garbage from the "Inland Empire" area of Riverside and San Bernardino counties, or if they built a sports arena in the Ontario area. These last two suggestions were met with scorn from Las Vegas officials, including Mayor Bill Briare who said he is tired of a "what's in it for us" attitude expressed by some San Bernardino County officials.

Walker responded, "I've got news for the people from Las Vegas. If they're tired of our attitude, they can call the whole project off anytime."

However, all of the political considerations will be meaningless unless the commission solves the problem of how the train's construction and operation will be financed. Katz's legislation clearly prohibits using any California tax money.

"Financing is a little unclear at the moment," admitted Commissioner Bill Wells from Las Vegas. Several commissioners believe a package of private venture capital funds and



German Transrapid 06

money from a foreign government, especially West Germany, could be put together.

The West German maglev would cost an estimated \$2.5 billion to \$3 billion to build and \$76 million a year to operate, while the French TGV would cost an initial \$2 billion with annual operating costs of \$66 million.

Welch and the Las Vegas group tends to favor the maglev system, partly because they believe the West German government may help finance the project. "The West Germans have spent \$1 billion developing the technology," he said. "If they are going to recoup their investment, they will need a system in operation to prove their train can be commercially successful."

The commission's first meeting was in September (1988) and it is not required to make its recommendations until early 1992, although Treat said it could be as early as 1990. If approved, construction would take five to seven years.

Las Vegas' initial feasibility studies projected a total of 44 trains on the system, each with six 100-passenger cars. They would make 22 round-trips a day on weekdays and 32 on weekends. The round-trip fare estimated in 1984 dollars would be \$65.

While Walker gives the train only a 20 percent chance of succeeding, Katz is more optimistic. "California is on the cutting edge of new technologies," he said. "This project is very consistent with the vision many people have for California's future. The train has the potential for becoming the first showcase of its kind for the nation and the world." 🏠



Caring for the unwanted

A crisis in board-and-care homes

By Catherine Hedgecock and Richard Hanner

Strange things are happening in California's board-and-care homes:

- In a Placerville home, the operator gave his elderly residents Haldol, a powerful tranquilizer, so he and care-home workers could retire undisturbed to his private living quarters for a marijuana and sex party.

- In a Riverside home, a 74-year-old man was denied proper food and care for almost six months and died in his own filth after wasting down to 93 pounds.

- In a Modesto home, the operator ordered workers to withhold an elderly resident's nitroglycerin tablets. Although the resident complained of acute chest pains, the operator said the woman was "just faking it." Within a few days, the patient was dead of heart failure.

These incidents and hundreds more are substantiated in the dog-eared, largely hand-written public files of the state Department of Social Services. The department is drawing increased fire for how it licenses and monitors the 7800 care homes in California. Widespread abuse and neglect in such homes has triggered an examination by the Commission on

California State Government Organization and Economy, better known as the Little Hoover Commission. The commission's final report, due to be released soon, is expected to call for major changes in how the department regulates the board-and-care industry. According to a preliminary outline prepared by the Little Hoover staff, abuse of home residents is a "shocking problem," and the department's performance is "perceived to be inconsistent and untimely." The outline chides the department for failing to crack down on unlicensed care homes and contends standards for staffing and supervision in care homes are unacceptable.

Among the commission's probable recommendations: That the department certify all board-and-care home administrators (as the Department of Health Services now does for administrators of convalescent hospitals) where the more seriously ill residents are housed.

"We tackled convalescent homes a decade ago, and made great improvements," said Nathan Shapell, commission chairman. "But care homes have never received the attention they deserve. They have been largely ignored, and the people in them have been largely forgotten. It's time for some changes."

Catherine Hedgecock and Richard Hanner write for The Stockton Record.

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