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Inland cities jockey for position for high-speed rail stops

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**By DUG BEGLEY and ALICIA ROBINSON
The Press-Enterprise**

Riverside and Corona each seek to secure a station on California's planned bullet train system, but only one of the cities can win.

The trains, which eventually will link Sacramento and San Diego if the full system is built, would connect commuters to downtown Los Angeles in less than 40 minutes from any of four possible Inland stops, and to San Diego in less than one hour.

The system is expected to cost \$45 billion. Trains would reach their highest speeds, up to 220 mph, between Southern California and the Bay Area.

That fast access to major destinations in Southern California and beyond is why both cities want their own stops. The stations where the trains will stop would be the equivalent of small airports, complete with nearby eateries, shops and other stops for travelers, Riverside County Transportation Commission Deputy Director John Standiford said. Landing a station means millions of dollars in construction, a boost in sales taxes and thousands of construction jobs in the next decade.

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SHOT AT A PATH: Officials in Riverside County are divided over where a proposed high-speed train connecting Los Angeles and San Diego should travel. State and some local officials prefer following Interstate 10 to Interstate 215 before heading to Murrieta. Others, notably in Corona, want the trains to turn south at Interstate 15.



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Since voters in November approved a plan for the state to borrow nearly \$10 billion as startup money for the high-speed rail system, elected officials in the inland area have planned to get stops on the high-speed line in their cities or nearby.

Stops at Ontario International Airport and Murrieta are planned, as well as a possible stop in San Bernardino. It's the fourth stop that's the issue.

Lake Elsinore, Corona, Temecula and Riverside County elected officials have said they prefer a path where high-speed trains follow I-15 south from Ontario.

Riverside city officials, meanwhile, are talking to the state commission tasked with building the bullet train system, including discussions of three possible paths for the trains before they follow I-215 toward Murrieta and Temecula.

State officials identify I-215, the Riverside-preferred route, as the primary option, based on recent reports. But officials indicated they are willing to consider I-15 through Corona.

"They recognize that each community has its dynamics," said Genoveva Arellano, spokeswoman for the proposed San Diego to Los Angeles line of the train system.

It will be at least 15 years before any high-speed trains zip through Riverside County, but officials in Corona and Riverside agree now is the time for cities to stake their claims.

Different Paths

In Riverside, already a local hub of Metrolink service to the cities of San Bernardino and Los Angeles and Orange County, three possible routes for high-speed trains will be studied. City officials last month approved a plan by the California High-Speed Rail Authority to consider routes along Iowa and Chicago avenues and Main Street. All of the lines would follow I-215, but require additional rights of way since none follows existing railroad lines.

"I think we are still in the early stages of which route will have the greatest impact in serving our citizens with the least amount of disruption," said Councilman Chris Mac Arthur, vice chairman of Riverside's transportation committee.

It's crucial Riverside land a stop regardless of where it is in the city, he said.

"For a high-speed rail line not to serve the largest city and the county seat would be a disservice to the residents of Riverside and our surrounding community," Mac Arthur said in an e-mail.

"The high-speed rail line would assist our three outstanding universities and (Riverside Community College) and create jobs for our community."

Corona officials see the same opportunity, Mayor Steve Nolan said. City officials suggest a stop near Cajalco Road, with a spur line to connect the train stop to Corona's North Main Street Metrolink station.

"I'm sure there are going to be two competing schools of thought, but ... I don't think you can beat that 15 corridor with (access to) Temecula, Murrieta, Corona, the Temescal Valley," Nolan said.

Eventually, the planned Mid-County Parkway and possible tunnel route into Orange County also would have quick access to high-speed trains, Corona officials said.

But following I-15 also leaves Riverside and potentially San Bernardino off the line.

"Riverside's going to have plenty of access to it like everybody else," even without a station there, Nolan said.

Local officials have suggested connecting the high-speed line to San Bernardino via a spur from the main track, but others questioned the feasibility of a 30-mile link.

Corona Public Works Director Kip Field said he has begun discussions with Norco and Riverside County about the route, and lobbying may begin in earnest later this summer as the rail authority prepares to study possible routes.

At a June 10 Corona committee meeting, Redevelopment Director Darrell Talbert said a stop on a high-speed rail line would make the city a meeting place between Los Angeles and San Diego.

Bloodless Battle

Both cities have an obvious interest in a station, said Standiford of the county transportation commission. But that does not mean the cities will be at odds with each other, or risk weakening Riverside County's commitment to hosting bullet trains, he said.

"It shows local support and interest in moving the San Diego to San Bernardino leg forward," Standiford said. "I think it is good that people are showing that interest."

County transportation commission staff remains neutral on where the line should go, Standiford said.

"What we really want to see is both the I-15 and I-215 routes considered," he said. "We won't know which route is better until we see something that looks at the pros and cons of what the various alignments are."

Arellano, who is managing public outreach for the Southern California high-speed rail stretch, said each community is free to make its pitch.

"I don't think (the association is) expecting Riverside County to come forward with one voice," Arellano said.

Since state officials sketched out a high-speed rail route through Riverside County that followed I-215, the cities of Corona, Lake Elsinore, Murrieta and Temecula have grown. Standiford said those population centers in the western part of the county might make a line down I-15 very attractive.

Wherever it goes, he said, the Inland area line is poised to be popular.

Arellano agreed, noting the Inland area's importance in Southern California.

"Riverside County is in a pivotal position," she said. "They are the curve in the line and are kind of the intersection point."

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