

# The train in Spain is better than the plane.

By Andrew Nash

High speed trains are transforming Spain and countries throughout the world. High speed rail's benefits are clear, it's time for California to get on board.

California's transport system is a brake on innovation and growth, airport lines, flight delays, and traffic congestion, it's an endless series of hassles stealing our money and wasting our time – it's different in Spain.

Spain's first high speed train started operating in 1992 between Madrid and Seville. At the time many ridiculed it as a prestige project with little economic value. Well, they're not laughing now. Instead, based on the initial line's economic and environmental success, they are too busy building a high speed network connecting Spain's major cities and neighbors in France and Portugal.

One of the first benefits Spain noticed was that the share of people flying the Madrid – Seville route dropped from 75% to 25% overnight and the total number of travelers doubled. In addition to spurring economic development, reducing flights helped reduce greenhouse gases and airport congestion. The shift from plane to train has been repeated in many markets including Brussels - Paris, Paris - London and Paris - Lyon. In several cases airlines no longer even offer service.

Ah, but the airlines won't give up without a fight. Well, not really; European airlines have taken an "if you can't beat them – join them" approach. Lufthansa uses high speed rail on feeder routes to Frankfurt airport providing through ticketing and baggage handling. KLM-Air France is a partner in the new Netherlands high speed rail company. Can't we do the same in California? High speed rail makes good economic and environmental sense for both airlines and society.

But, it's not only people, high speed's newest market is freight. Several railways now offer express delivery and will soon move more substantial goods. Again, railways are working with private sector partners like FedEx and UPS to create efficient networks, and again they are economically and environmentally sustainable. Imagine the number of trucks we could remove from California highways with a similar system.

Spain is also overlaying regional rail trains on its high speed network just as California is planning. These trains are a supercharged version of Caltrain's highly successful Baby Bullet trains, imagine San Jose to San Francisco in 20-minutes! This is being successfully operated now, so ignore the doomsayers who say it won't work.

Finally, high speed rail is revitalizing economies. A fine example is England's high speed line from the Channel Tunnel to London – a case study of top quality planning, engineering and environmental sensitivity. The line was specifically routed through southeast London to encourage economic development in a depressed area. So far the EURO 10-billion project has generated EURO 40-billion in investments, and played a major role in securing the Olympics for London. Can't we use high speed rail to revitalize California too?

So, repeat after me, the train in Spain is better than the plane: faster, more economic and better for our environment. What's California waiting for?

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