



P R E S S R E L E A S E

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High-Speed Rail Authority & Fresno Mayor meet with Central Valley Dignitaries

The High-Speed Rail route and its effects on the Central Valley were the hot topic at an open forum held in Fresno at Harris Construction in late January, 2012. The attendees of 'The Empowering Series' event included a Who's Who of Central Valley Council members, City Managers, Public Works Departments, Senior Land Planners, Right of Way Agents, business leaders and more, all there to personally delve into the details of the High-Speed Rail plan and verify if it's a project they want to support for the Central Valley or not.

Presentations were made by California High-Speed Authority personnel, including Tom Richards, VP of the California High-Speed Rail Authority (HSRA) Board of Directors; Jeff Abercrombie, HSRA Project Manager (Merced to Bakersfield); and Lance Simmons, HSRA Deputy Director of Communication.

All three HSRA speakers were clearly, and passionately, pro high-speed rail. The attendees asked many point-on questions and learned valuable information about the oncoming High-Speed Rail construction, route details, and financing. The attendees were also clear in stating that the marketing and communication from HSRA has failed – with Simmons realizing that more details and positive news about the rail's process needs to make its way to the Central Valley.

However, the most passion and conviction for the project came when Fresno Mayor Ashley Swearingin took the podium. She spoke of connecting the Central Valley to San Francisco and Los Angeles as a "Game Changer."

The mayor went on to suggest that projects of this size can appear too enormous to tackle; they have to be planned, paid for, believed in, and built; and they aren't going to benefit us now. The benefit will have to wait, for perhaps our children, our children's children, and beyond. The long-term benefits however outweigh the difficulties of bringing this project to fruition, and she and a team are studying

the California high-speed rail project to verify its worthiness, sustainability, and long-term impact for the Central Valley and its future generations.

One Empowering Series attendee, Clovis City Council member Bob Whalen, was so motivated by the information Swearingin presented, he posted the following on his FaceBook page: "I cannot think of a public entity with less credibility than the California High-Speed Rail Authority (HSRA) right now. I was inches away from becoming a vocal opponent despite the benefit such a line would have to our region. At [The Empowering Series] meeting on Thursday I berated the new Communications Director for HSRA for being the front man in a confidence game. Then I stopped and listened to Fresno Mayor Ashley Swearingin. If you, like me, are heading to a "no" faster than a bullet train - stop, wait for the Mayor to lay out her case over the next couple of months. If you are already a "no", don't become an entrenched "no" (no, at any benefit). If you are a "yes", don't become an entrenched "yes" (yes, at any cost). Wait for the Mayor. There is no political upside to her being an advocate for it. She is in it because she truly believes it is the right thing for this region and our State. For her good work in this Valley, I think she has at least earned the right to be heard on this unpopular issue."

The Empowering Series will meet again soon. Its forums bring together top panelists from throughout California for specific civic and educational audiences covering topics ranging from school bond elections to the local impact of high-speed rail. The Empowering Series events are hosted quarterly by Harris Construction and Acquisition Partners of America in Fresno, California.

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Established in 1914, **Harris Construction** has a long tradition in Fresno and is a prominent leader in the building and construction services industry throughout the Valley. While keeping pace with the constantly changing demands of architecture, materials and building techniques, Harris has successfully completed projects in the education, food processing, healthcare and civic markets. Over the last decade, Harris has completed projects with a combined value of over 1.2 billion dollars.