

## Calif. awarded \$2.25b for high-speed rail

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By Michael Doyle and E.J. Schultz / The Fresno Bee

As President Barack Obama voiced strong support for high-speed rail in his State of the Union address Wednesday, federal officials announced that California will get a big share of the \$8 billion fund for projects nationwide.

California will get \$2.25 billion to help build a high-speed rail system connecting Southern California to the Bay Area through the San Joaquin Valley, as well as additional funds for other rail projects. Other states getting high-speed rail funding include Washington, North Carolina and Florida.

The state had applied for \$4.7 billion, but officials were satisfied with the grant.

"This award is fantastic news for California and for our state's high-speed rail project," California High-Speed Rail Authority Chairman Curt Pringle said in a statement.

But the state still has to raise billions of dollars more to finish the Anaheim-to-San Francisco first phase, estimated to cost \$42.6 billion.

The authority has a \$9 billion voter-approved bond at its disposal, but is counting on matching the money with up to \$19 billion in federal money by 2016, according to a recent review of the plan by the nonpartisan Legislative Analyst's Office, which called that expectation "highly uncertain." Additional money would come from private and local investments.

Wednesday's grant includes \$2.25 billion to begin work on four corridors: Los Angeles-to-Anaheim, Fresno-to-Bakersfield, Fresno-to-Merced and San Francisco-to-San Jose. In addition, the state is receiving \$99 million for smaller corridors serving conventional trains.

California officials had touted their project as "the only true high-speed train," with top speeds of more than 200 mph.

"California is far ahead of any other rail corridor in the country," said Democratic Rep. Jim Costa of Fresno, a longtime high-speed rail advocate.

The White House funding announcement does not specify where the money must be spent among the California corridors, nor was it immediately apparent how that funding distribution decision will be made. The state's application targeted specific amounts for each segment — the most for the Los Angeles-to-Anaheim run. The state pledged to match the grant dollar-for-dollar with public and private money.

So far, the Southern California route has the advantage of drawing a lot of local financial support. The Valley's selling point is that its rural stretches are the only place where the train can reach top speeds, rail officials say.

Wednesday's grant will help purchase rights-of-way, construct track, improve stations and complete environmental and engineering documents. The additional money for nonhigh-speed rail systems will include funds for constructing new tracks for service between San Diego and San Luis Obispo as well as constructing a crossover between Davis and Sacramento.

The White House was keeping a tight lid on specific funding decisions until after the president's speech, although some state decisions were made available.

Washington and North Carolina are both getting roughly half-a-billion dollars, while Florida will hear its good news directly from Obama and Vice President Joe Biden at an expected appearance Thursday.

All told, 13 major corridors will receive awards Thursday to help develop new high-speed rail infrastructure or begin the transition to high-speed rail.

Twenty-four states submitted 45 different corridor applications for high-speed rail funding, which was included as part of a \$787 billion economic stimulus package approved last February.