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Bullet train board OKs federal stimulus proposal

SAN FRANCISCO
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- **Says it has 'shovel-ready' projects for federal funding**
- **Central Valley segment is one of them**

California high-speed train officials Thursday approved a list of shovel-ready construction projects likely to qualify for \$8 billion in federal stimulus funding for high-speed trains – including a segment in the Central Valley.

The nine-member California High-Speed Rail Authority Board gave the go-ahead to add the projects to the state's official request for a portion of the high-speed and intercity rail funding under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) by the expected Aug. 1 submittal deadline.

Federal rail officials have established initial criteria for stimulus money to complete individual projects that are "ready to go" with preliminary engineering and environmental work completed and that demonstrate "independent utility."

"We are confident that California's system is well ahead of every other high-speed train project in the country and should be a leading candidate to receive stimulus funding," says Board Chairman Quentin Kopp. "Ours is the only one with billions of dollars in voter-approved state funding committed to the project, with environmental clearances already in place and with construction elements already identified and ready to go."

The project elements selected by the Board on Thursday are spread throughout California's planned 800-mile system.

They include:

- The entire Los Angeles-to-Anaheim and San Francisco-to-San Jose corridors, where the Authority is expected to have completed the project level environmental document, and qualified and selected design build teams to begin construction of the sections by the 2012 deadline.
- Identification, selection and negotiation of right-of-way acquisition in the Merced-to-Bakersfield section, including the system's planned maintenance facility, which Mr. Kopp says is likely to be in Merced.

Authority staff also will work before the deadline to identify other "shovel ready" projects that advance the Authority's high-speed rail plan and that meet the federal criteria, according to CHSRA Executive Director Mehdi Morshed.

States across the country are vying for a share of the bullet train money added by President Obama just before Congress approved the massive plan to invigorate the economy.

The California High-Speed Rail Authority is responsible for building high-speed train service covering 800 miles at speeds over 220 MPH. Voters approved Proposition 1A on the November 2008 ballot putting a down payment on what will be America's first high-speed train system.

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