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Tuesday, November 29, 2005

Maglev train awarded \$45 million

By MIGUEL GONZALEZ

Staff Writer

VICTORVILLE — After nearly two decades and more than \$50 million, the California-Nevada Super Speed Train Commission is receiving another \$45 million courtesy of Congress.

Commission Chairman Bruce Aguilera said the new money will go toward more environmental studies, engineering — and projects to raise more money. Construction, he said, could begin in less than three years. A meeting is planned Jan. 25 to determine how to spend the money.

Since 1988, the commission has envisioned building an electromagnetic high-speed train that will travel around 300 mph, whisking travelers from Anaheim to Las Vegas in 86 minutes.

If completed, the project would also include stops in Primm, Nev.; Barstow, Victorville, and Ontario.

Dr. Steven Frates, a senior fellow at the Rose Institute of State and Local Government at Claremont McKenna College, said that aside from the novelty factor, it is dubious that there is an economic value for a high-speed train between California and Nevada.

"The obvious factor here is that this project will cost billions and billions of dollars," Frates said. "That money could be better used for building more roads that will benefit more people, especially those of lower incomes."

Frates said that the only people who are benefiting from this project are the engineering and environmental studies companies.

"You have a high-speed train competing with high-speed planes that already travel to Las Vegas on a daily basis. There might be a market for it, but it's rather unlikely."

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Victorville Mayor Mike Rothschild, a commission member, said that maglev systems will help to eventually replace most cars and trucks.

"If you can travel at 300 mph many people are going to choose this mode of transportation," he said. "The hard part is to spend money now for something that will not be functional until some years down the road."

According to Neil Cummings, president of the American Magline Group, the commission's private partner, the program has received around \$52.5 million in funding. Most of that money has been used to pay for environmental studies, engineering, and land acquisition.

Aguilera said the commission might be interested in generating more funds for the project by selling bonds or stock.

"I think the federal government is going to wait and see what we are going to do with the \$45 million before we get more money from them," he said. "The plan is to start construction on phase one of the 269-mile project in less than three years."

The first phase would link Las Vegas and Primm, about a 40-mile stretch at a cost of about \$1.2 billion.

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