

Congress of the United States

House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND GOVERNMENT REFORM

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August 19, 2025

The Honorable Sean Duffy
Secretary
U.S. Department of Transportation
1200 New Jersey Ave., SE
Washington, D.C. 20590

Dear Secretary Duffy:

The Committee on Oversight and Government Reform is investigating federal funding sent to the California High-Speed Rail Authority (CHSRA or Authority). As part of our investigation, we are seeking to understand whether the Authority knowingly misrepresented the ridership projections and the associated financial viability of the California High-Speed Rail Project (CHSR Project) to secure federal and state funds. In 2008, Californians approved \$9.95 billion dollars of state bond funding to build an 800-mile high-speed rail network connecting Los Angeles, San Francisco, and the Central Valley to coastal cities with a completion date of 2020 and a cost of \$33 billion.¹ To date, not one route is complete and the CHSRA Project is facing financial collapse,² but now CHSRA is claiming they will begin service in Central Valley in 2032.³ Current cost estimates range from \$89 billion to \$128 billion.⁴ Despite this, the Biden Administration committed roughly \$4 billion in federal taxpayer dollars to the CHSR Project,⁵ including almost \$89.65 million dollars in the closing days of the Administration.⁶ The Committee requests a staff-level briefing, documents, and communications related to CHSRA.

¹ Lee Ohanian, *California's High-Speed Rail Was A Fantasy From Its Inception*, THE HOOVER INST. (Mar. 8, 2023) [hereinafter Hoover Inst.]; Newsroom, U.S. Dep't of Transp., U.S. Transp. Sec. Duffy Announces Review of California High-Speed Rail Project (Feb. 20, 2025) [hereinafter DOT Press Release], available at <https://www.transportation.gov/briefing-room/us-transportation-secretary-duffy-announces-review-california-high-speed-rail-project>.

² Josh Christenson, *California got nearly \$7B from feds for high-speed rail – but never laid any track, bombshell report shows*, NEW YORK POST (June 4, 2025).

³ Erik Galicia, *High-speed rail passenger service could start in Central Valley before 2033*, THE FRESNO BEE, (Aug. 18, 2025).

⁴ Maxwell Adler, *Trump Targets \$128 Billion California High-Speed Rail Project*, BLOOMBERG (Feb. 20, 2025); DOT Press Release, *supra* note 1 (“[t]oday, the Merced-to-Bakersfield segment alone would cost more than the original total. The latest estimate for San Francisco to Los Angeles is \$106 billion — more than three times the original cost estimate.”).

⁵ DOT Press Release, *supra* note 1.

⁶ California High-Speed Rail Auth., *Federal Grants*, available at <https://hsr.ca.gov/about/funding/federal-grants/>.

The CHSR Project has been characterized as “perhaps the greatest infrastructure failure in the history of the country.”⁷ Since the CHSR Project’s inception, transit experts have warned that the ridership and revenue projections were “inaccurate, misleading and in violation of the laws guiding the project.”⁸ Ridership forecasts are critical because “if the revenue from passengers is less than projected, there is a greater imperative for operating subsidies.”⁹ A 2008 report stated, “CHSRA 2030 ridership projections are absurdly high—so much so that they could well rank among the most unrealistic projections produced for a major transport project anywhere in the world.”¹⁰ A 2010 report from the Institute for Transportation Studies at the University of California at Berkley questioned the validity of the ridership’s modeling, stating that “we have found some significant problems that render the key demand forecasting models unreliable for policy analysis.”¹¹

On June 4, 2025, the U.S. Department of Transportation’s (DOT) Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) issued a Compliance Review Report outlining CHSRA’s “years of mismanagement, broken promises, and wasted federal taxpayer dollars.”¹² Following this comprehensive review, on July 16, 2025, Secretary of Transportation Sean Duffy announced the FRA “terminated approximately \$4 billion in unspent federal funding for California’s High Speed Rail Boondoggle.”¹³ The Authority’s apparent repeated use of misleading ridership projections, despite longstanding warnings from experts, raises serious questions about whether funds were allocated under false pretenses. Despite the massive cost overruns and lack of progress, CHSRA sued the FRA to prevent the termination of these funds, and the litigation is ongoing.¹⁴

The Committee requests a staff-level briefing as soon as possible, but no later than September 2, 2025, to better understand the allocation of taxpayer dollars. We also request the following documents and information, covering the time period January 1, 1995 to the present unless otherwise indicated, as soon as possible, but no later than September 2, 2025:

⁷ The Hoover Inst., *supra* note 1.

⁸ REASON FOUND., POLICY STUDY 415, CALIFORNIA HIGH SPEED RAIL: AN UPDATED DUE DILIGENCE REP. (Apr. 2013).

⁹ Wendell Cox, *California High-Speed Rail, Still Stuck at the Station*, UNLEASH PROSPERITY, at 9 (Apr. 2025).

¹⁰ Wendell Cox *et al.*, REASON FOUND., THE CALIFORNIA HIGH SPEED RAIL PROPOSAL: A DUE DILIGENCE REP., EXECUTIVE SUMMARY, RIDERSHIP PROJECTIONS (Sept. 2008), *available at* https://reason.org/wp-content/uploads/files/california_high_speed_rail_report.pdf.

¹¹ David Brownstone *et al.*, FINAL REP., INST. OF TRANSP. STUDIES, UNIV. OF CALIFORNIA, REVIEW OF ‘BAY AREA/CALIFORNIA HIGH-SPEED RAIL RIDERSHIP AND REVENUE FORECASTING STUDY’, at 2 (June 30, 2010).

¹² U.S. Dep’t Transp., Newsroom, Trump’s Transp. Secretary Sean P. Duffy Releases Report Exposing No Viable Path Forward for California’s High-Speed Rail Boondoggle (June 4, 2025), *available at* <https://www.transportation.gov/briefing-room/trumps-transportation-secretary-sean-p-duffy-releases-report-exposing-no-viable-path>.

¹³ Newsroom, U.S. Dep’t of Transp., Trump’s Transportation Secretary Sean P. Duffy Pulls the Plug on \$4B for California High Speed Rail’s Train to Nowhere (July 16, 2025).

¹⁴ Theo Burman, *California High-Speed Rail Protects \$4B in Federal Funding Amid Lawsuit*, NEWSWEEK, (Aug. 14, 2025).

1. All documents and communications from the California High-Speed Rail Authority, as well as any other California government entity or third party, submitted to the U.S. Department of Transportation to solicit or procure state and federal taxpayer funds for the CHSRA Project;
2. All documents and communications within the Department of Transportation analyzing the development and sustained viability of the project (including but not limited to ridership projections, acquisition of real property, environmental reviews, and contracting).

The Committee on Oversight and Government Reform is the principal oversight committee of the U.S. House of Representatives and has broad authority to investigate “any matter” at “any time” under House Rule X. To schedule the briefing and to arrange for the delivery of documents, please contact the Committee on Oversight and Government Reform Majority staff at (b)(6) Thank you for your attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "James Comer". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style. Below the signature is a horizontal line.

James Comer
Chairman
Committee on Oversight and Government Reform

cc: The Honorable Robert Garcia, Ranking Member
Committee on Oversight and Government Reform