

United States Senate

April 1, 2025

Honorable Sean Duffy
Secretary
U.S. Department of Transportation
1200 New Jersey Avenue, SE
Washington, DC 20590

Dear Secretary Duffy,

Congratulations on your confirmation as Secretary of Transportation. I look forward to working with you to improve our nation's roads, bridges, and infrastructure and keep America moving.

As the chair and founder of the Senate DOGE caucus, I greatly appreciate your leadership investigating the California High-Speed Rail project to "determine whether roughly \$4 billion in taxpayer money should remain committed to the proposed project."¹ After conducting my own reviews, I have been calling for the cancelation of this financial train wreck for over six years.²

The California gravy train is nearly \$100 billion over budget and more than a decade behind schedule.³ Ground was broken on the project ten years ago⁴ and construction is costing about \$1.8 million a day,⁵ yet no tracks have even been laid.⁶

A new analysis by the State Assembly reveals the project will be further delayed unless an additional \$7 billion is provided immediately to fill a "funding gap" that "could grow."⁷

¹ "U.S. Transportation Secretary Duffy Announces Review of California High-Speed Rail Project," U.S. Department of Transportation Newsroom, February 20, 2025; <https://www.transportation.gov/briefing-room/us-transportation-secretary-duffy-announces-review-california-high-speed-rail-project>.

² "Squeal Award: A Financial Train Wreck," Office of Senator Joni Ernst, February 26, 2019; https://outreach.senate.gov/iqextranet/view_newsletter.aspx?id=105581&c=JErnst.

³ Colleen Shalby, "Despite some progress, state's high-speed rail is \$100 billion short and many years from reality," Los Angeles Times, March 21, 2024; <https://www.latimes.com/california/story/2024-03-21/high-speed-rail>.

⁴ Ralph Vartabedian, "Ground broken on controversial California bullet train project," Los Angeles Times, January 6, 2015; <https://www.latimes.com/local/lanow/la-me-ln-california-bullet-train-groundbreaking-20150106-story.html>.

⁵ Ralph Vartabedian, "How California's Bullet Train Went Off the Rails," New York Times, October 9, 2022; <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/10/09/us/california-high-speed-rail-politics.html>.

⁶ Theo Burman, "California High-Speed Rail to 'Finally' Begin Laying Track," Newsweek, January 7, 2025; [https://www.newsweek.com/california-high-speed-rail-construction-update-newsom-track-down-2010759#:~:text=step%20towards%20completion,-.What%20to%20Know,%22early%20commitments%20on%20trainsets.%22&text=California%20has%20spent%20over%20\\$5,adding%20to%20costs%20and%20planning](https://www.newsweek.com/california-high-speed-rail-construction-update-newsom-track-down-2010759#:~:text=step%20towards%20completion,-.What%20to%20Know,%22early%20commitments%20on%20trainsets.%22&text=California%20has%20spent%20over%20$5,adding%20to%20costs%20and%20planning).

⁷ Ashley Zavala, "California high-speed rail project needs \$7 billion by next summer," KCRA-TV Channel 3 News, March 26, 2025; <https://www.kcra.com/article/california-high-speed-rail-project-needs-7-billion/64302207>.



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*A decade after the groundbreaking of California's high-speed rail, the state recently celebrated the completion of this bridge with no rails that connects to nothing in the middle of nowhere.⁸
A new state analysis says \$7 billion or more is needed immediately to keep the project moving.⁹*

With a \$36 trillion national debt, we can't afford billion-dollar boondoggles like this, which is why I included a provision in the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (Section 11319 of Public Law 117-58) requiring the Department of Transportation (DOT) to annually disclose all projects that are \$1 billion or more over budget or five years or more behind schedule.¹⁰

The law states:

SEC. 11319. ANNUAL REPORT.

(a) DEFINITION OF COVERED PROJECT.—In this section, the term “covered project” means a project or activity carried out with funds provided by the Department, including a project carried out under title 23 or 49, United States Code—

- (1) that is more than 5 years behind schedule; or
- (2) for which the total amount spent on the project or activity is not less than \$1,000,000,000 more than the original cost estimate for the project or activity.

(b) REQUIREMENT.—Not later than 1 year after the date of enactment of this Act, and annually thereafter, the Secretary shall submit to Congress a report on covered projects of the Department, which shall include, for each covered project—

- (1) a brief description of the covered project, including—
 - (A) the purpose of the covered project;
 - (B) each location in which the covered project is carried out;
 - (C) the contract or award number of the covered project, if applicable;
 - (D) the year in which the covered project was initiated;
 - (E) the Federal share of the total cost of the covered project; and
 - (F) each primary contractor, subcontractor, grant recipient, and subgrantee recipient of the covered project;
- (2) an explanation of any change to the original scope of the covered project, including by the addition or narrowing of the initial requirements of the covered project;
- (3) the original expected date for completion of the covered project;
- (4) the current expected date for completion of the covered project;
- (5) the original cost estimate for the covered project, as adjusted to reflect increases in the Consumer Price Index for All Urban Consumers, as published by the Bureau of Labor Statistics;
- (6) the current cost estimate for the covered project, as adjusted to reflect increases in the Consumer Price Index for All Urban Consumers, as published by the Bureau of Labor Statistics;

⁸ CA High-Speed Rail X account, @CaHSRA, May 1, 2024; <https://x.com/CaHSRA/status/1785798979222925439>.

⁹ Ashley Zavala, “California high-speed rail project needs \$7 billion by next summer,” KCRA-TV Channel 3 News, March 26, 2025; <https://www.kcra.com/article/california-high-speed-rail-project-needs-7-billion/64302207>.

¹⁰ Division A, Title I, Subtitle C, Section 11319 of Public Law 117-58, the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, signed into law November 15, 2021; <https://www.congress.gov/117/plaws/publ58/PLAW-117publ58.pdf>.

- (7) an explanation for a delay in completion or an increase in the original cost estimate for the covered project, including, where applicable, any impact of insufficient or delayed appropriations; and
- (8) the amount of and rationale for any award, incentive fee, or other type of bonus, if any, awarded for the covered project.

To no one's surprise, the report itself is behind schedule. The first installment was due in November 2022.

Despite repeated requests from my office over the past several years, not a single report has been issued to date.

Since I am keeping my own running list,¹¹ I can assure you there are plenty of boondoggles being funded by DOT before you became secretary deserving of your attention and a place in this report.

As a former member of Congress, you can appreciate how frustrating it is working to pass a bill into law only for unelected bureaucrats to grant themselves a veto over it, presumably because complying with the law would reveal the bottomless money pits where they are burying billions of taxpayer dollars.

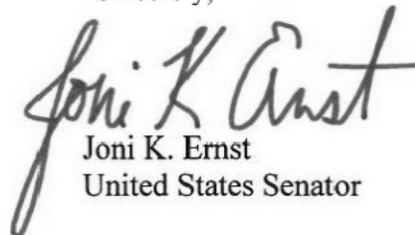
The billion-dollar boondoggle report is needed now more than ever to better inform DOGE's efforts making government smaller and more efficient. The money saved from these projects could be put toward much more deserving infrastructure projects and paying down the debt.

Thank you again for reviewing the funding for the California high-speed train project.

I request, and would greatly appreciate, your directing DOT to immediately comply with Section 11319 of the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act by providing the list of every transportation project currently \$1 billion over budget or five years or more behind schedule, so that you, Congress, DOGE, and taxpayers can evaluate and fully review the projects.

Please let me know if you have any questions or if I can be of any assistance with your efforts.

Sincerely,



Joni K. Ernst
United States Senator

¹¹ "All Aboard the Boondoggle Express! Government Gravy Trains Going Off the Rails," Office of Senator Joni Ernst, February 2025; https://www.ernst.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/february_2025_squeal_award_-_all_around_the_boondoggle_express.pdf.

