



InSight

WITH **DR. GLORIA C. DUFFY**
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How I Will Use the Bullet Train

Because my husband Rod Diridon is one of the leaders of the effort to build a high speed train in California, I have carefully not taken a public position on the question of whether, how and when to build this system. At the Commonwealth Club, we have sponsored several neutral panel discussions about the issue over the past few years, reflecting the range of views on the topic, as the Club does with many controversial issues.

Now that the California state legislature has voted to proceed with the system, I am able to express my views on the train and the debate that has surrounded it. I have been puzzled and bemused by the tone and quality of this debate. That is, in part, because I am one of the people likely to use such a train frequently. I see northern and southern California as closely tied together economically and culturally, and I will welcome a way to get to Los Angeles that does not involve transit time to an airport, an hour wait at the airport, security checks and other inconveniences. I will also welcome a clean form of transportation that does not create carbon emissions on the scale that short-haul aircraft trips do. I think I am more typical than not, in my propensity to use the planned train.

Though a Bay Area native, I attended college in LA, at Occidental College. Many of my friends also went south to attend UCLA, USC, Pomona or other institutions, as today's young Bay Area residents also do to attend college or perhaps graduate school in law, medicine or film. After graduate school in New York, my first job was at the Rand Corporation, in Santa Monica.

Over the years, I have traveled back and forth to LA constantly, for school, business, conferences, and professional meetings, to give speeches; for consulting projects; as a funder to review projects for possible grants; and to attend art exhibits, fundraisers, social events, memorial services, retreats and film openings. For the past seven years, I have served on the Board of Trustees at Occidental College, so I attend board meetings or events there at least five times a year. I am an investor in some properties in LA and had an LA attorney in a legal case. I have departed for and returned from many international trips through LAX. I frequently fly in and out of LAX, Burbank, John Wayne Airport, Long Beach and other Southern California airports.

So the debate about who would use the bullet train between the Bay Area and the nation's second largest city has seemed strange to

me. Many of the people I know – attorneys, bankers, filmmakers, writers, architects, entrepreneurs, investors, journalists, physicians, politicians, artists, philanthropists, educators, speakers at The Commonwealth Club and others – move constantly between the Bay Area and Southern California and I know would also welcome a high-speed rail option. And this does not even include those who travel for pleasure, to visit Disneyland or the beaches or family members who live in LA.

The other aspect of the debate that has baffled me has been the discussion of the cost of the system. The figure of \$68 billion needed to construct the system has often been cited, along with doubts about where the funds would come from. Of course, 30 other countries have made the investment to build this kind of system, indicating their belief in the cost-effectiveness of the system. My reaction to the debate in this country, after using high speed rail systems in Japan and Italy, is that we are a bit provincial.

All large public works projects are costly, and virtually none of them have had all of the funding identified before the projects have begun. The high-speed rail system will be 432 miles long. The cost of building the Golden Gate Bridge in today's dollars would be \$1.2 billion, and it is only 2.7 miles long. Building a single mile of freeway through an urban area costs approximately \$39 million, while a mile of freeway through a rural area costs approximately \$8 million. Building any transportation or infrastructure system is expensive.

How will high speed rail be paid for? By tax dollars, private investments through bonds and the boost to the California economy provided by higher employment during construction. Once the system is operating, it will generate user fees and provide economic benefits through more efficient movement of people and expanded commerce. As Alan Greenspan was fond of pointing out, better infrastructure is what has always allowed quantum leaps in the U.S. economy, from the initial building of the railroads to the development of the Internet. All of these new technologies have made our economy more efficient, and the same will be the case with high speed rail linking the two most important economic centers on the West Coast. 🌿

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