

Denying California rail money damages more than state, it hurts the nation



A crane lowers 146-foot, concrete and steel girder, weighing 166,000 pounds, into place as the Tuolumne Street bridge in downtown Fresno was replaced to facilitate the high-speed rail station being built in the city. It will include a stop in Merced when complete. **JOHN WALKER**
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BY KISH RAJAN | MARCH 28, 2017 9:43 AM

President Donald Trump has a fantastic opportunity in California. It's a project that will create immediate jobs in construction, engineering and manufacturing, and also open the door to more high-paying tech jobs. This project offers all the things Trump promised during his campaign.

But instead of embracing the opportunity, the Trump administration is doing everything it can to stop the upgrade and expansion of the Caltrain rail service in Northern California. Last month the administration decided to [withhold a \\$647 million federal grant](#) that was meant to help pay for the upgrades.

Trump wasn't alone. The entire California Republican delegation in the House opposed the federal grant as well. Rep. Devin Nunes (R-Tulare) told Politico the federal government shouldn't be paying for a train project in "one of the richest places on the planet."

This is a prime example of politics trumping (pardon the pun) common sense. For the moment, let's take environmental concerns off the table – even though an electrified train system would reduce pollution and an improved rail line would get more people out of their cars and into public transportation.

From a purely economic-growth point of view, the decision to withhold this money is misguided. The median price for a home in Palo Alto (the heart of Silicon Valley) is [almost \\$2.5 million](#). That puts Palo Alto, and the rest of Silicon Valley, out of reach for most people. But the tech industry is still experiencing job growth – [3.5 percent in 2016](#), a slower rate than in previous years but still outpacing total Bay Area job growth.

Many people are dealing with this reality by enduring "megacommutes" of more than 90 minutes each way – often from the Northern San Joaquin Valley. According to [a recent study](#), 5.3 percent of solo drivers in the Bay Area now spend three hours or more per day commuting, compared to 4.6 percent of Los Angeles commuters.

Without upgrading and expanding the rail line, that traffic is going to get much worse. That will put tech-industry jobs completely out of reach for people living in areas like Merced, Modesto and Fresno, and take more time out of the days of hardworking people living closer to the Bay Area.

How is this a good thing?

Tech-industry jobs are among the highest paying in America. If we can move more workers, more efficiently, into Silicon Valley, these companies can grow more quickly, hire more people at good wages and expand the economy.

We want to expand access to tech jobs, not limit it. Good tech jobs can't only be available to those who can afford to live in Silicon Valley. They should be accessible to people

beyond the Bay Area bubble without commuters having to sit in their cars for several hours a day to balance work and home.

Not only will the rail line make tech-industry jobs more accessible, it will create good jobs in the short run as workers build and upgrade rail lines and cars. [According to Dan Richard](#) of the High-Speed Rail Authority, all of the steel and all of the concrete for the project is being sourced domestically. Translation: more American jobs.

When it comes to economic growth and job creation, politics needs to take a back seat. Expanding the rail lines in Northern California will help grow the tech industry, which will help the American economy.

As tech companies grow, they create jobs for people across the state and country. The sharing economy, which now provides additional [income to 7 percent of the population](#), got its start in Silicon Valley. With more people gaining entrance to what the area has to offer, there's no limit to the kind of job-creating companies they'll be able to come up with.

It's hard to start a new tech company from Modesto or Merced, but it can be easier if you have access to the money and people now populating Silicon Valley.

The tech industry is a major engine of growth for our country. It employs 6.7 million people and accounts for 11.6 percent of private-sector payrolls, [according to the Computing Technology Industry Association](#). Let's keep that good thing growing. To leave the work unfinished would be a blight on the whole country.

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