

Trump revokes \$4 billion from California high-speed rail project

By Frances Vinall, July 2025, in *The Washington Post*

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California Gov. Gavin Newsom accused the Trump administration of illegal conduct after it pulled about \$4 billion in federal funds from a high-speed rail project to link Los Angeles and San Francisco — the latest public clash between the president and the outspoken Democratic governor, who described the years-long project as soon entering its final stages. Transportation Secretary Sean P. Duffy announced the funding termination Wednesday, calling the project a “boondoggle” and stating “federal dollars are not a blank check.”

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Newsom on Thursday announced that California is suing the Trump administration over the move. The lawsuit alleges the termination of funding is “petty, political retribution, motivated by President Trump’s personal animus,” a news release said.

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For years, California has planned to construct the high-speed rail line so that passengers could travel between Los Angeles and San Francisco in under three hours. The route would normally take between 5 and 7 hours by car, according to a Google Maps estimate.

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The rail project was first green-lit by voters in 2008, with a deadline set for 2022. But it has since been fraught with delays and cost overruns.

The rail line could now cost up to \$128 billion, according to 2024 estimates from the California High Speed Rail Authority. Voters initially approved a starter budget of about \$10 billion.

The line is one of the only higher-speed rail projects in the United States.

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President Donald Trump, who previously sought to cut federal funding for the high-speed rail project during his first term, said on social media Wednesday that his canceling of the federal funds had “freed” taxpayers from funding “California’s disastrously overpriced, ‘HIGH SPEED TRAIN TO NOWHERE.’”

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But Newsom’s office defended the project, saying the CHSRA had prepared for laying tracks — the final stage — of construction, by taking care of land acquisition, environmental clearances and building supporting structures such as bridges, overpasses and viaducts.

“These are legally binding agreements,” said CHSRA CEO Ian Choudri, who was appointed in August and has promised to tackle delays and budget issues. “This is no time for Washington to walk away on America’s transportation future,” he added.

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According to a 2025 CHSRA project update, the final testing stage for the first segment of the line between Los Angeles and San Francisco — from Merced to Bakersfield — is scheduled to be completed by 2030. Less than a quarter of the project’s total funding appropriations come from the federal government, while the rest comes from the state.

Trump and Newsom, who is seen as a potential candidate for the 2028 presidential race, have publicly been at odds over several issues in recent months.

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In June, Newsom filed a lawsuit challenging the Trump administration’s unilateral deployment of the National Guard to Los Angeles amid demonstrations against Immigration and Customs Enforcement raids.

Trump also threatened to withhold federal disaster relief from the state after deadly wildfires ravaged parts of Southern California in January. (506 words)