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Vegas, Midwest Seek the \$8 Billion for Fast Trains

By THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

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WASHINGTON (AP) -- The Republicans attacking President [Barack Obama's](#) economic [stimulus package](#) point to a project they dub the "Sin Express" -- a high speed rail link between Anaheim, Calif., site of [Disneyland](#), and Las Vegas.

Not so fast.

In fact, competition for the \$8 billion in mass transit construction is just beginning. Backers of numerous other planned high-speed rail corridors around the country are making their case for the money.

They notably include a Midwest initiative long supported by someone with even more clout than Sen. [Harry Reid](#), D-Nev., who strongly supports the Anaheim-Las Vegas line. That would be former Illinois Sen. Obama.

It was Obama's White House that, in the final hours of negotiations over the \$787 billion stimulus bill, sought and won the big sum for high-speed rail projects, far above what either the House or Senate had passed. Reid was happy to agree but there's no guarantee the Anaheim-Las Vegas line will win dollars, to be determined by the Transportation Department.

Also in the running are proposed high-speed corridors in the Northeast, the Northwest, Florida and the South.

Howard Learner, president of the Chicago-based Environmental Law and Policy Center, a group promoting a Midwest high-speed rail network, said his area is in excellent position to capture a good chunk of that money. The [Federal Railroad Administration](#), he said, has recognized the Midwest initiative connecting Chicago and 11 metropolitan areas within 400 miles as the system most ready to go.

He and others brushed aside claims that the \$8 billion was set aside for Reid's favorite. Obama, who expressed strong interest in high-speed rail investment during the campaign, and his chief

of staff [Rahm Emanuel](#), are both from Chicago. Obama's transportation secretary, [Ray LaHood](#), also is from Illinois. So is the Senate's no. 2 Democrat, Richard Durbin.

Quentin Kopp, chairman of the California High-Speed Rail Authority, said he was "delighted to see that the momentum has shifted in favor of high-speed train transportation." He outlined \$2 billion in state projects that could be initiated before the Sept. 30, 2012, deadline for committing the \$8 billion. Those include electrification of the line from San Jose to San Francisco, home to House Speaker [Nancy Pelosi](#).

But Reid's involvement in crafting the bill still made him and the Las Vegas line a target.

"Billions of dollars for a sin express train from Los Angeles to Las Vegas. Necessary? I don't think so," said Rep. Mike Simpson, R-Idaho.

"Tell me how spending \$8 billion in this bill to have a high-speed rail line between Los Angeles and Las Vegas is going to help the construction worker in my district," said House Republican leader [John Boehner](#), whose district is just north of Cincinnati.

Actually, some of the money might ride his way. One offshoot of the Midwest network would connect the Ohio cities of Cleveland, Columbus and Cincinnati.

Advocates of the Anaheim-Las Vegas line envision using the futuristic magnetic levitation or maglev technology, where trains zoom on an air cushion created by powerful magnets instead of wheels. Obama recently cited the maglev system in Shanghai, China, as an example next-generation transit.

"Our prospects are certainly good," said Neil Cummings, president of American Magline Group, a private partnership that is promoting the Maglev train that will carry passengers the 268 miles between the two cities at speeds of up to 310 miles per hour. Last year Congress approved \$45 million for environmental and other studies.

Anaheim Mayor Curt Pringle, a member of the California-Nevada Super Speed Train Commission, said that beyond the goals of connecting two tourist destinations, easing congestion and improving the environment, the link is important because of fast population growth in the two areas. "I think this one will compete well."

Cummings said they could begin the first phase of the project, linking Anaheim and Las Vegas with local airports, within the next 18 months. The estimated completion cost is about \$12 billion.

The original House and Senate stimulus bills contained \$1-3 billion for rail projects. But when the two chambers met to negotiate a compromise, Emanuel proposed a significant boost. Obama's chief of staff told reporters that the White House decided to come in at the end of the legislative process as a dramatic way of promoting infrastructure investment that had a national quality.

On the Net:

California project: <http://www.cahighspeedrail.ca.gov/>

Rail Passenger Association of California and Nevada: <http://www.railpac.org/home/>

Midwest High Speed Rail Association: <http://www.midwesthsr.org>