City supporting high-speed rail bond

Las Vegas-to-Victorville line would reach Palmdale

VALLEY PRESS STAFF REPORT

PALMDALE — Palmdale officials joined with a broad coalition of backers at a hearing in Sacramento on Aug. 12 in support of a private activity bond issue for a proposed high-speed train between Las Vegas and Victorville and eventually Palmdale.

Mayor Steve Hofbauer and City Manager James Purtee provided testimony in the Tax Equity and Fiscal Responsibility Act hearing at the California Infrastructure and Economic Development Bank, also known as iBank.

They were joined at the hearing by representatives from Victorville, Apple Valley, LA Metro, the San Bernardino Association of Governments, Los Angeles County Supervisor Kathryn Barger’s office, San Bernardino County Supervisor Robert Loveingood’s office, rail manufacturer Siemens, Morgan Stanley and Virgin Trains (formerly Brightline), the rail operator.

“Both the executive director of the bank and the bond manager hearing officer commented that they couldn’t remember a hearing with such a large show of support,” Hofbauer said. “Everyone realizes the magnitude and importance of this project to the long term economic and quality of life future of our region.”

A long-proposed rail line linking Las Vegas to Southern California saw new life last year when Brightline, a Florida-based private passenger rail company, acquired XpressWest. XpressWest has a federally-approved rail corridor between Las Vegas and Victorville, with plans to continue the line to Palmdale where it will connect with other transportation services.

Brightline took over development, construction and operation of the proposed high-speed line, which would travel on a 185-mile right-of-way along Interstate 15 in its first phase, with no at-grade or pedestrian crossings.

In November, the Virgin Group announced a minority investment in the company, which will include new branding as Brightline becomes Virgin Trains USA.

The company has used similar private activity bonds to finance expansion of its existing rail system in Florida.

According to news reports, should Virgin Trains USA get the go-ahead for the bonds in September, a bond sale could take place in the first quarter of 2020 and trains could be running in 2023.

After the hearings, Hofbauer and Purtee were invited to tour the Siemens rail car plant in Sacramento. Siemens currently employs 1,500 people at their light and heavy rail manufacturing plant.

“It was fascinating to follow the light rail and heavy rail equipment through the various fabrication and assembly processes,” Hofbauer said.

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