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Talk about Vegas-LA rail service revives

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Brightline West, manufacturer of high-speed trains such as this one in use in the Miami area, might get funding for its project to have passenger trains running along the Interstate 15 corridor from Las Vegas to Victorville, eventually going to Los Angeles.

Valley Press files

LAS VEGAS — Proposed federal infrastructure funding for rail projects has transportation planners taking another look at a Los Angeles-to-Las Vegas passenger route that Amtrak stopped in 1997 and at a high-speed rail line along the congested Interstate 15 corridor to Victorville.

President Joe Biden's \$2.3 trillion jobs bill would finance Amtrak plans to expand service nationwide and launch multiple new routes, including one between southern Nevada and Southern California.

The measure might provide funding for Brightline West's project that would have passenger trains whisking at up to 200 mph on a route generally along the busy interstate, the *Las Vegas Review-Journal* reported.

The fast-rail project between Las Vegas and Victorville has been considered since 2005, but it stalled several times, mostly over financing.

Regional Transportation Commission of Southern Nevada CEO M.J. Maynard endorsed the possibility of adding passenger rail service to Las Vegas as "another option for visitors to travel to Las Vegas, helping to alleviate congestion, improve our air quality and significantly enhance the overall visitor experience."

An average of 47,000 vehicles a day are counted on Interstate 15 at the Nevada-California state line, Maynard told the *Review-Journal*. That's nearly 2,000 per hour.

Clark County Commissioner Michael Naft called both the Amtrak and Brightline plans attractive and said the one that begins operating first likely will fare better.

"Clearly they both have benefits," Naft said. "Either option will help alleviate traffic from the 15, which we cannot tolerate more weekends of stacked-up traffic."

He referred to Sunday afternoon and post-holiday traffic jams that sometimes result in 17-mile backups for Los Angeles-bound motorists where three freeway lanes in Nevada narrow to two in California.

Amtrak CEO Bill Flynn issued a statement March 31 focusing on improving Northeast U.S. Corridor rail service, and said Biden's \$80 billion in funding also could bring intercity rail service to up to 160 communities in the US.

A map shows the Los Angeles-Las Vegas route and a route possibly linking Los Angeles with Phoenix and Tucson, Arizona.

Nevada Department of Transportation spokesman Ryan McInerney told the *Review-Journal* that Amtrak contacted the state in July about adding Las Vegas to service plans.

Amtrak service from 1978 and 1997 between Los Angeles and Salt Lake City included Las Vegas. It was called the Desert Wind.

Regional Transportation Commission studies in 2007 found strong "current and future demand" for passenger service. But it cited multiple performance problems, including delays caused by freight traffic congestion and a long-distance passenger schedule making stops in the California cities of Fullerton, San Bernardino, Victorville and Barstow.

A one-way trip took up to seven hours and 15 minutes, compared with about a four-hour vehicle drive.



