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Jan. 8, 2007

Maglev Trains Proposed as Solution to Easing Traffic, Pollution

New Service Urged From U.S. Border To Ontario Airport

BY MICHELLE MOWAD

Sparked by his fascination with high-speed magnetic levitation trains and fueled by his frustration with traffic and pollution, renowned developer Sandor "Sandy" Shapery is seeking ways to ease roadway congestion.

Shapery, developer of downtown's iconic Wyndham Emerald Plaza, W Hotel and the 21-story Semptra Energy headquarters office building, has teamed with Greg Stein, former district director for U.S. Rep. Brian Bilbray, R-Escondido, to form

Southern California Transportation Solutions, or SCTS.

The nonprofit's focus is to move people and goods as quickly as possible throughout the region — without pollution.

Thirty years ago, Shapery's interest took off while watching a television documentary on magnetic levitation trains. Shapery then started clipping news articles and conducting his own research.

"Our continued growth ... depends on our ability to shorten the gap between the best proven technologies currently available and the technologies in use today," said Shapery from his office in downtown San Diego.

He said transit systems, including the local trolley, rarely interconnect. He also noted public and private sectors rarely overlap with a common goal, as well.

"You take small steps ... to get things going," Shapery said.

Magnetic Levitation

He said the SCTS is engaged in developing a legislative package to provide formation of

a regional authority to be tasked with creating a magnetic levitation or "maglev" project.

The proposal encompasses the project's design, development, funding, operation and maintenance.

Maglev is the term used to describe magnetic levitation, guidance and propulsion technology. Magnets fitted to passenger cars react with electromagnets on the side and undersides of a railway to lift and propel the train at speeds of up to 310 mph.

Maglev train technology is used in Shanghai, China.

"Why go 150 mph when you can travel at 300 mph with half the operating costs?" Shapery said.

Shapery envisions a maglev train using rights of way along railways and highways, including Interstate 5 and 405 from the U.S.-Mexico border to Los Angeles.

Possible stops include San Diego International Airport, San Diego's 10th Avenue Marine terminal, the Del Mar Fairgrounds, Oceanside's Sprinter rail stop, Los Angeles' Union Station and Ontario's airport.

The trip from Lindbergh Field to Los Angeles International Airport could cut transit times to 30 minutes at a cost \$40 each way.

Studies prepared by the Southern California Association of Governments indicate the rail line could generate sufficient revenue to fully support operations and maintenance costs.

Shapery said the population in Southern California is projected to increase by 1 million over the next few years. The increase will not only affect roadway traffic, it will create a stranglehold on already stressed airports, he said.

Statistics show I-5 and I-405, between San Diego and Los Angeles, are the busiest freeway corridors in the Western United States and if not expanded, average speeds

will slow to 16 mph to 23 mph within 15 years, said Shapery.

At an estimated cost of \$15 billion, a maglev train could extend the life of airports and ease highway congestion, he said.

He said one of SCTS' first goals is to add electrical equipment to existing diesel-powered rail lines to reduce pollution.

Moving Forward

Shapery and Stein want to get the dialogue moving. They have recruited the CEO of Advanced Transportation Solutions, Richard Polischuk; Vice President of Public Policy for the San Diego Regional Economic Development Council, Andrew Poat; and UC San Diego Extension Dean, Mary Walshok.

Moreover, they will sponsor a symposium

this year to feature participants from the UC campuses at San Diego, Riverside, Irvine, Los Angeles and Berkeley.

Shapery has provided funding, office space and general support to SCTS.

Stein, who recently completed his M.B.A. at UCLA and has worked with renowned economist Arthur Laffer, said SCTS is a new chapter in his life.

"I have turned my sights toward solving one of our region's most troubling and yet seemingly intractable problems, the continued mobility of goods and people on our highways, railways and airplanes," Stein said. "Traffic congestion, pollution, airport delays and inadequate government funding for infrastructure threaten our economy."