

Vegas train gets federal clearance

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VICTORVILLE • Developers of the DesertXpress train from Victorville to Las Vegas cleared one more hurdle Thursday, as federal officials declared the route along Interstate 15 between Southern California and Sin City a high-speed-rail corridor.

While the move could quite literally pave the way for either DesertXpress or the competing Anaheim-to-Vegas Maglev project, Victorville Councilman Mike Rothschild said officials clearly favored his city's project during the Vegas press conference.

"They basically said they are disconnecting themselves from the Maglev," said Rothschild, who attended the meeting alongside U.S. Secretary of Transportation Ray LaHood, Caltrans Director Will Kempton and Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid, D-Nev.

After years of backing the magnetic levitation concept, Reid recently threw his support to DesertXpress, declaring it the more realistic project.

Thursday's designation puts a train to Vegas on the national project list, so that developers can seek federal funding. While officials with DesertXpress have always touted the project as privately funded, the Las Vegas Sun reports that they may now seek federal loans to chip away at the train's \$5 billion price tag.

Though Rothschild said people questioned the choice of Victorville as the train's terminus during the Vegas meeting, he said officials emphasized that the project will eventually connect to Palmdale and on to the state's planned train from Los Angeles to San Francisco.

Rothschild added that the federal clearance should keep DesertXpress on its tracks toward an early 2010 groundbreaking.

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