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## **Wilk introduces bill to allow voters to cancel high-speed rail project**

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Santa Clarita Valley Assemblyman Scott Wilk wants to give voters a chance to derail the state's controversial bullet train and redirect billions of dollars in funding to water projects.

Wilk, R-Santa Clarita, introduced Assembly Bill 1866 this week to give voters in November the chance to terminate California's high-speed rail program, which he called a "boondoggle of epic portions."

"The high-speed rail is projected to be the largest public works project in the history of mankind and, if you look at the math behind it, it's just not economically viable," Wilk said in an interview Thursday.

An official with the California High-Speed Rail Authority, however, touted the benefits the project would bring.

"California's investment in high-speed rail will provide both near and long-term transportation benefits — in addition to increasing safety, protecting the environment, creating jobs, supporting disadvantaged communities, businesses and workers, and helping California continue to prosper in an increasingly competitive global economy," Authority spokeswoman Lisa Marie Alley said Thursday.

The proposed initiative, she added, "would threaten thousands of jobs that we are creating in the Central Valley right now, put dozens of California small businesses out of work, and could cost California billions of dollars for repayment of federal funds."

Voters approved the high-speed rail program in 2008 to connect Los Angeles Union Station and Anaheim to San Francisco, with links at other large state population centers.

Certain route alignments being considered call for the bullet train to pass through, or under, the Santa Clarita Valley.

Should voters strike down the program, up to \$8 billion could then be re-directed to fund efforts like water storage or desalination, according to information from Wilk's office.

"To enhance economic growth and improve Californians' quality of life, we need to have a robust water storage system and an 'all of the above' approach to water management," said Wilk in a statement when the bill was introduced. "It's time to derail the bullet train and commit resources to preserve our most precious natural resource: water."

Wilk, a regular critic of the bullet train, said the bill could face an uphill climb in the Democrat-dominated state Legislature, especially given the high-speed rail project's steadfast support from Gov. Jerry Brown.

"As long as I've got a platform to talk about this project, I'm going to do it," Wilk said. "People need to be aware of the fact that it's just going to be an incredible drain on precious taxpayer resources for a project that is never going to come to fruition."

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