



SB 527 – Salton Sea Funding

Senator Melissa Melendez

Background

This year, the Legislature will vote on appropriating the remaining \$4.2 billion in Prop 1A bond funds. It will be the first vote on High Speed Rail (HSR) funding since 2014.

Currently, HSR receives 25% of cap-and-trade dollars through an automatic continuous appropriation. This is approximately \$500-\$750 million annually, in a typical year. Prior to January 1, 2021, cap-and-trade funding had to be spent for purposes related to reducing greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. As of now, this restriction is gone.

Citizens Against Government Waste [suggests](#) the HSR has “become a mismanaged fiscal horror story” importantly noting construction costs were initially budgeted at \$35 billion for the project. Today that cost estimate has ballooned to around \$100 billion.

In a [report](#) focused on high speed rail projects operating around the world, BBC News mentions California, specifically noting the HSR has been “beset by cost overruns.” The originally planned line has been tremendously reduced to just 171 miles of line through the San Joaquin Valley. According to the [Los Angeles Times](#), the project is approximately 62% above the original contract price tag. The Times released a review of the project this year, discovering that California “has approved 273 change orders” for the contractor. This adds up to about one change every week for the past five years.

Problem Being Addressed

SB 527 would instead shift these dollars to a vital need: addressing the environmental and health impacts of the Salton Sea. [According](#) to the CA Department of Parks and Recreation, it is one of the world's largest inland seas and lowest spots on earth. Sadly, the Salton Sea has experienced rapid evaporation, drought years and high temperatures. In 2015, it was [reported](#) that the South Coast Air

Quality Management District issued an odor advisory due to the Sea releasing hydrogen sulfide. Unfortunately, Imperial County, where about half of the Salton Sea resides, has one of the highest asthma-hospitalization rates in the state.

Which code section is affected?

SB 527 amends the Health and Safety Code. It shifts annual proceeds of Greenhouse Gas Reduction Fund from the High-Speed Rail Authority to the Salton Sea Restoration Fund in Section 2932 of the Fish and Game Code.

Summary

This measure simply makes these dollars available to the Salton Sea Restoration Fund.

NBC Palm Springs [reports](#) a strong sense of urgency is needed in funding clean-up for the Salton Sea. It is estimated to cost \$9 billion dollars to mitigate the negative impacts the Salton Sea is having on the environment and the respiratory health of those who live nearby.

The HSR has spent enough taxpayer dollars, with little return on investment. Transferring funds originally planned for the train to the Salton Sea Restoration Fund shows the State of California prioritizes the health of its citizens over a failed project.