# Las Vegas-to-California High-Speed Rail Breaks Ground, Office Attendance Rises, Construction Industry Adds Jobs

By Randyl Drummer

## High-Speed Rail Project Breaks Ground

Officials broke ground a high-speed rail system planned to connect Southern California and Las Vegas, a project that could potentially spark real estate development between two major metropolitan areas.

The Brightline West system, estimated to cost $12 billion and be ready to carry passengers by 2028, is billed by its developer to be the first complete high-speed rail line in the nation, reaching average speeds of about 115 miles per hour and a top speed of around 200 mph, Brightline said in a statement.

Brightline, already the operator of a fast train between Miami and Orlando in Florida, plans to lay 218 miles of track, mostly along Interstate 15 between Las Vegas and Rancho Cucamonga, California, where it would link with a Metrorail commuter rail connection to downtown Los Angeles. Brightline also plans a station in Victorville, in the Southern California High Desert in San Bernardino County.

Brightline West is one of four passenger rail projects that were awarded billions of dollars in federal grants in December. Brightline received a $3 billion grant from federal infrastructure funds, and was recently approved to sell another $2.5 billion in tax-exempt bonds, on top of federal authorization in 2020 to sell $1 billion in similar bonds, according to the company.

"Partnering with state leaders and Brightline West, we’re writing a new chapter in our country’s transportation story that includes thousands of union jobs, new connections to better economic opportunity, less congestion on the roads, and less pollution in the air," U.S. Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg said during the Monday groundbreaking ceremony.

## Office Attendance Increases

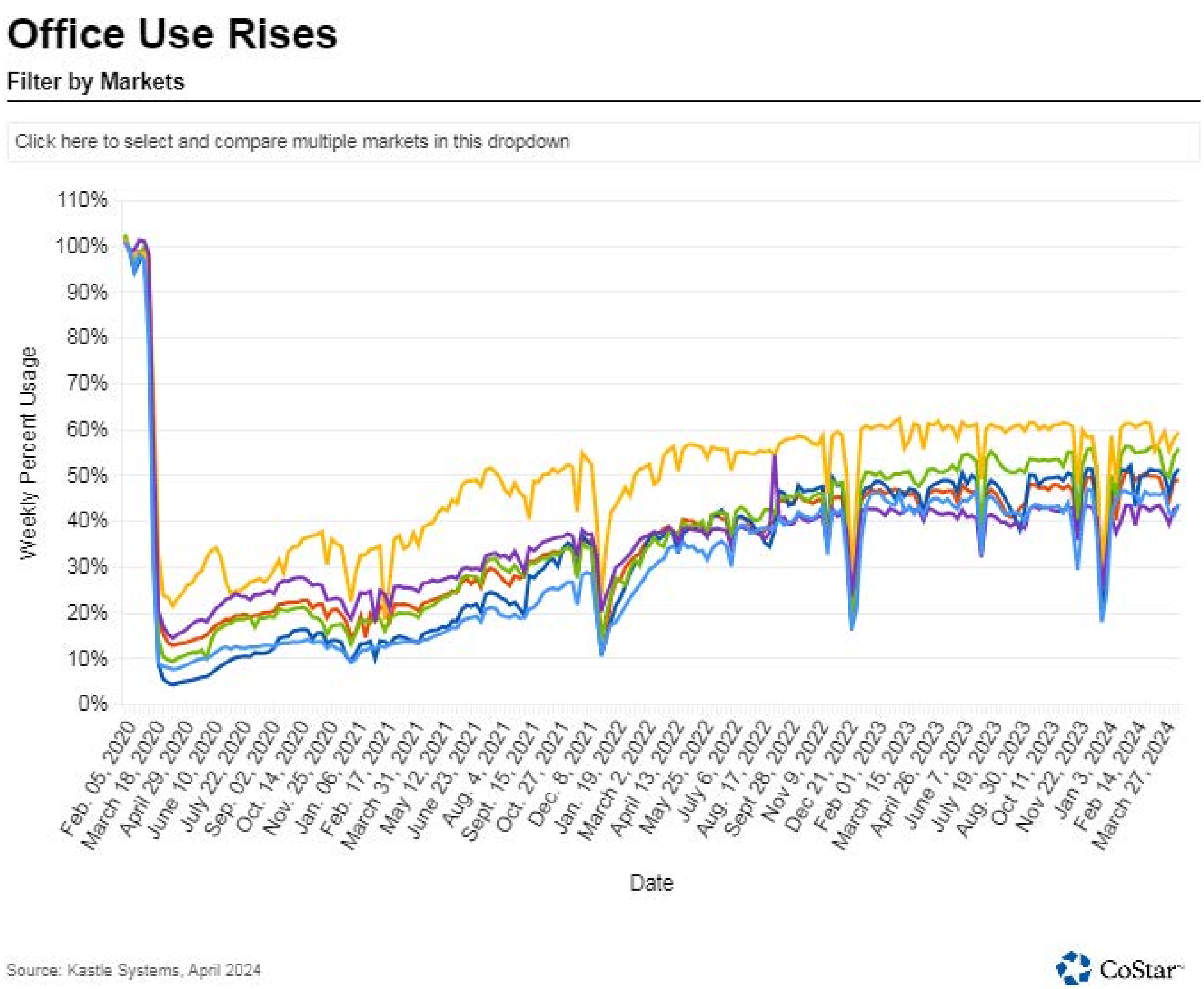
Office attendance in 10 large U.S. cities tracked by Kastle Systems averaged 51.9% of pre-pandemic levels for the week ended April 16, up from 50.6% a week earlier and remaining in line with numbers of the past year showing visits hovering around 50% in Kastle Systems’ tracking.

The security technology firm’s tracking for the cities based on anonymous keycard data from clients’ office properties peaked in late January with an average of 53%.

Texas cities held three of the four highest occupancy rates among the 10 cities, led by Austin reaching 77.3% on Wednesday of last week, the highest of all cities. Chicago ranked second-highest, reaching 70.1% office occupancy on Tuesday, its highest occupied day of the week.

Tech-centric San Jose, California, had the lowest occupancy on its peak day at 48.9%, slightly below Philadelphia at 49.8%.

Figures for barometer cities have generally been on the upswing in 2024. Even the cities most frequently found at the bottom of the 10-city listing such as Philadelphia, and San Francisco have consistently posted just above 40% of pre-pandemic attendance since mid-January, after lingering at high-30% levels last year.




## Construction Industry Adds Jobs

The U.S. construction industry added 39,000 jobs during March, the highest total since January 2023, according to federal employment data released by the Associated General Contractors of America.

Construction employment increased in 39 states in March from a year earlier, while 36 states and the District of Columbia added construction jobs between February and March, according to the report.

California added the most workers during the month, gaining 33,900 construction jobs for a 3.8% gain from the year-earlier period, followed by Texas, which added 28,600 workers for a 3.5% increase, and Florida, which added 23,000 workers for 3.7% growth, according to the report.

New York lost the most construction jobs as employment fell 2.5%, a total of 9,700 jobs, over the past 12 months, followed by Washington, down 3.6%, or 8,400 jobs, and Maryland, down 2.9%, or 4,700 jobs, from the year-earlier period.

Employment rose in every project category tracked by the association. Officials warned that a dearth of available workers may imperil timely completion of many projects.

“Most states have experienced no letup in demand for construction projects, as these numbers reveal,” Ken Simonson, the association’s chief economist, said in a statement. “In fact, even more states would have posted an increase in construction employment if contractors could find enough qualified workers.”