Several months ago I used this column to introduce a huge train robbery underway in Northern California. Or should I call it a bridge robbery? Either way, a lot of money was involved and, until then, it was a relatively low-level theft.

But then, as people around the state began to learn about the issue, they kicked their feet and the bubbles began percolating under the Bay Bridge. But since then, has the problem been resolved? Predictably, no.

So, for all you politicians who say that transportation is your top priority, listen up. Caltrans says that for every day the Bay Bridge cost overruns do not get resolved, $400,000 is lost and gone forever. We're now up to spending $6.2 billion on a bridge that should have been completed long ago for half that amount.

For those of you who don't know what I'm talking about, the bridge linking San Francisco to Oakland is in dire need of repairs and seismic retrofits. During the dot-com boom when the state was billions of dollars in the black, Bay Area politicians managed to secure $3 billion in state transportation money to make the appropriate upgrades to this widely used corridor. Fair enough.

What should not have happened is a panel of Bay Area opinion leaders decided to use taxpayer money to build what can now be called the Disney Concert Hall of bridges. They decided on a design that was beautiful and ornate but does not fit within their budget. Billions of dollars later, the seismic projects are unfinished, and the costs keep rising while legislators squabble over who should pay for the overruns. If the bridge is completed with this design, it will cost L.A. County up to $500 million from our own transportation budget.

Bay Area lawmakers have two options: stick with the expensive design and increase tolls to pay for the cost overruns, or take Gov. Schwarzenegger's advice and go with a simpler, less expensive design.

Unfortunately, they're taking neither route. Instead, Bay Area lawmakers are insisting that the cost overruns come out of Caltrans (meaning all state taxpayers).

This is unacceptable. The main function of a bridge is to get people across a body of water. If a group of people want to construct a showpiece bridge, they must plan fairly to pay for it--as San Pedro residents did recently with the Vincent Thomas Bridge, which is now illuminated with blue lights, making for quite a sight each night in the Los Angeles harbor.

An executive for a Day by Rusty Hammer, President & CEO, LA Area Chamber of Commerce

The Business Perspective is a weekly award-winning opinion column by Rusty Hammer, President & CEO, LA Area Chamber of Commerce

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