

03/01/2021

To,

Dan Leavitt

San Joaquin Rail Commission
949 E Channel St.
Stockton, CA 95202

**RE: MHLA Support for the California High-Speed Rail Authority Revised Draft
2020 Business Plan**

Dear, California High-Speed Rail Authority:

On behalf of the Merced Hotel & Lodging Association (MHLA), I would like to express our support for Governor Newsom's vision and plan for high-speed rail in California, particularly the important infrastructure investments in transportation in the heart of California—the Central Valley. High-speed rail will provide a commitment to clean, low- and no-carbon transportation strategies that help reduce pollution in the Central Valley, home to the some of the nation's worst air quality and highest asthma rates.

Our Association's commitment includes continued strong support for the high-speed rail project, which includes pursuing Merced-Fresno-Bakersfield Interim Service with stops at Kings/Tulare and Madera, providing electrified, high-speed rail service to Californians at the earliest possible time.

Merced, Fresno and Bakersfield are home to nearly one million Californians; and the respective counties—Merced, Fresno, Kern—have a population in excess of two million people. The cities in the Central Valley are among California's fastest growing communities, ripe with opportunity to carry California into a sustainable future.

Governor Newsom's commitment and vision for high-speed rail is memorialized in the Revised Draft 2020 Business Plan with the inclusion of a Central Valley segment that cuts travel time in half between cities in the Valley compared to today's rail service or traveling by car. The plan frames a high-speed rail line that provides connections in Merced to the Altamont Corridor Express (ACE) train service and the San Joaquin service to Oakland and Sacramento in the north and the Central Valley and Los Angeles in the south.

While the project is transformative for the Central Valley, it maintains important targeted investments adopted by the High-Speed Rail Authority in the Bay Area and Los Angeles. This is key to opening up Valley-to-Valley access to provide opportunities for companies to expand to the Central Valley and offering affordable housing prospects that align with the Governor's overall goals to ensure statewide coordinated investments.

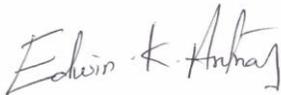
Merced Hotel & Lodging Association (MHLA)

High-speed rail also connects Merced and the Central Valley to the Megaregion efforts from the Bay Area—providing a regional perspective to how we address housing, workforce and educational issues. This includes leveraging State investments in dynamic institutions such as UC Merced.

Merced to Bakersfield HSR Interim Service will generate significant economic benefits, with over \$38 billion in total economic activity and over 200,000 job-years of employment. Corridor-wide ridership increases from 2.6 million passengers in 2017 to 8.8 million passengers in 2029 that results in reduced State subsidies for passenger rail services. Electrified high-speed rail improves air quality in the Central Valley and reduces GHG emissions by shifting from diesel to clean, electrically powered trains.

The Merced Hotel & Lodging Association has been and remains supportive of high-speed rail and looks forward to a continued partnership in doing its part to provide solutions to California's long-term challenges.

Sincerely,



Edwin A Kainth
President

Merced Hotel & Lodging Association (MHLA)
A NON-PROFIT Organization

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