



Tom Richards, Chair
California High-Speed Rail Authority (CHSRA)
boardmembers@hsr.ca.gov
770 L Street, Suite 620
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March 8, 2021


RE: Support for CHSRA Revised Draft 2020 Business Plan


Dear Honorable Chair Richards:


The San Joaquin Valley Regional Planning Agencies' Directors' Committee strongly supports CHSRA's Revised Draft 2020 Business Plan (released February 9, 2021) that includes pursuing Merced-Fresno-Bakersfield Interim Service with stops at Kings/Tulare and Madera to provide electrified, high-speed rail (HSR) service to Californians at the earliest possible time.


An independent peer review has confirmed that the Merced-Fresno-Bakersfield corridor, which includes HSR service and improvements in supporting Altamont Corridor Express (ACE) and San Joaquin's rail and bus services, obtains the highest forecast gain in ridership and does so at the lowest increase in cost. The 171-mile electrified Merced-Fresno-Bakersfield Interim Operating Segment will create significant benefits including:

- Leveraging the maximum degree of connectivity to other rail services, while important project development work also continues in other parts of the state.
- Generating significant economic benefits, with over \$38 billion in total economic activity and over 200,000 job-years of employment.
- Reducing travel times for rail passengers between Sacramento and the Bay Area to Bakersfield by up to 90 to 100 minutes.
- Providing much faster, more frequent, and more reliable passenger rail service than is currently available in this corridor.
- Improving access and connectivity to other California destinations through better connections with expanded ACE and San Joaquin's rail services to the north at a multimodal hub in Merced and Thruway Bus Service at Bakersfield for travel to Southern California.
- Improving air quality in the Central Valley and reducing GHG emissions by shifting from diesel to clean, electrically powered trains.
- Providing an overall infrastructure configuration offering significant benefits to both passenger and freight movement.
- Allowing for early testing of electrified high-speed operations and passenger use and reduces ramp-up time for future extensions.

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Rail passengers in California will greatly benefit from dramatic reductions in travel time between Southern California and the Sacramento and Bay Area regions. Direct connections in Merced to ACE and the San Joaquin will also translate into faster connections to the Capitols, Caltrain, BART, SacRT, Valley Link and VTA systems, which will also experience higher ridership. The success of this early interim HSR service is essential towards implementing the ultimate HSR rail system between the Bay Area, Sacramento, San Joaquin Valley and Southern California.

The San Joaquin Valley Regional Planning Agencies' Directors' Committee also strongly supports the Revised Draft 2020 Business Plan recommendation that \$4.1 billion in remaining Prop 1A HSR bond funds be directed to complete delivery of the 119-mile electrified Central Valley Segment, and the remaining \$100 million in HSR bond funds be used for early design and completing environmental review on San Francisco to Los Angeles Phase 1 segments. This funding is required to implement Merced-Fresno-Bakersfield HSR Interim Service and to extend HSR to San Francisco and Southern California in the future.

The San Joaquin Valley Regional Planning Agencies' Directors' Committee is very pleased to submit this letter of support for the staff recommendations of the CHSRA Revised Draft 2020 Business Plan. It is imperative that we move forward and complete the Interim Operating Segment as many Valley communities are currently under construction with existing high speed rail work efforts. Delivering a state-of-the-art passenger transportation system will have a lasting and positive economic impact to the San Joaquin Valley, and will benefit all of California. Thank you again for your on-going support and partnership in our region.

Sincerely,



Robert Poythress

Chair of the San Joaquin Valley Regional Planning Agencies Policy Council
Madera County Supervisor

cc: Brian Kelly, CHSRA CEO
Brian Annis, CHSRA CFO
Chad Edison, CalSTA
Assembly Transportation Committee
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