

September 25, 2019

Lenny Mendonca, Chair
California High-Speed Rail Authority
770 L Street, Suite 620
Sacramento CA 95814

RE: Support for Merced-Fresno-Bakersfield Interim Operating Segment

Dear Honorable Chair Mendonca,

The Merced County Association of Governments strongly supports the Governor's Plan and CHSRA's policy recommendations (2019 Project Update Report released May 1) to pursue a Merced-Fresno-Bakersfield interim operating segment with stops at Kings/Tulare and Madera to provide high-speed rail service to Californians at the earliest possible time. The Merced-Fresno-Bakersfield interim operating segment will leverage the maximum degree of connectivity to other improving rail services, while important project development work also continues in other parts of the state.

The 171-mile line Interim Operating Segment extending north to Merced and south to Bakersfield coordinated with improvements aligned with the State Rail Plan north of Merced to Sacramento and to the Bay Area and bus connections south of Bakersfield to Southern California create significant benefits including:

- Provides much faster, more frequent and more reliable passenger rail service than is currently available in this corridor;
- Reduces travel times for rail passengers between Sacramento and the Bay Area to Bakersfield by up to 90 to 100 minutes;
- Enhances connectivity and accessibility to other passenger rail services;
- Provides the highest ridership and revenue potential of any Central Valley option;
- Improves air quality in the Central Valley by shifting from diesel to clean, electrically powered trains;
- Provides an overall infrastructure configuration offering significant benefits to both passenger and freight movement; and
- Allows for early testing of high-speed operations and passenger use and reduces ramp-up time for future extensions.

Rail passengers in California will greatly benefit from slashing 90 to 100 minutes off train travel between Southern California and the Sacramento and Bay Area regions in the north. Direct connections in Merced to ACE and the San Joaquins 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 service is essential towards implementing the ultimate high-speed rail system between the Bay Area, Sacramento, San Joaquin Valley and Southern California.

The Merced County Association of Governments is very pleased to submit this letter of support for the Merced-Fresno-Bakersfield Interim Operating Segment

Sincerely,



Stacie Dabbs
Executive Director

cc: Brian Kelly, CEO; Brian Annis, CFO; Chad Edison, CalSTA