

April 9, 2024

**RE: SPUR Comments on Draft 2024 High Speed Rail Business Plan**

Dear Chair Richards and Board Members,

SPUR has been a long time champion of high speed rail in California. We envision a future for the state that includes abundant, sustainable mobility, thriving cities and shared economic prosperity. High speed rail is essential to this vision and over the course of the last decade SPUR has authored dozens of articles, reports and letters either in direct support of California's high speed rail project or the many Bay Area projects and plans that interface with and leverage off of the proposed system. We appreciate the recent milestones and progress the Authority has achieved in the Central Valley and we celebrate the significant infusion of new Federal funding to the project.

At the same time, we hold the view that the state must be clear-eyed about the immense challenges faced by the Authority as it works to deliver the full Phase 1 program originally defined through 2008's Proposition 1A and proactively work to address those challenges. While the draft 2024 Business Plan lays out a schedule and approach to completing construction and operationalizing high speed rail service in the Central Valley, there is no corresponding roadmap for how, or when, high speed rail will reach the rest of the state - including the San Francisco Bay Area.

The draft Business Plan is both candid and deeply sobering. Based on the information presented we believe that there are two crucial steps the Authority, the Legislature and regional stakeholders in the Bay Area must consider next:

**First, if California is to realize its high speed rail ambitions the Authority must begin working with the Legislature and Governor to identify a plausible strategy to fund the full Phase 1 system.** The overall outstanding funding need identified in the 2024 Draft Business Plan is immense- totaling nearly \$100 billion dollars. There is simply no current or foreseeable state or federal funding program that will address this gap. Patching together smaller competitive grants and funding sources is not a viable approach for an endeavor of this scale and

complexity. Completing high speed rail without a stable and predictable long term funding strategy is simply not possible.

**Second, in the absence of the certainty provided by such a funding strategy, it is time to begin thinking about how the High Speed Rail Authority's relationship to its many partner agencies and projects in the Bay Area should evolve.** The presumption of future high speed rail service has been integral to the planning and delivery of rail projects throughout the Bay Area - from the electrification of the Caltrain corridor to the development of the Portal rail connection into Downtown San Francisco to the reimagining of Diridon Station. Over the last decade these projects have benefited from the Authority's funding contributions and technical participation - and they have significantly advanced high speed rail by building stakeholder consensus and leveraging local, state and federal resources that would otherwise be unavailable to the Authority.

**The growing lack of certainty around the timing and funding of the Phase 1 system raises difficult questions about how regional rail projects in the Bay Area should respond and proceed.** Planning and building regional rail projects to accommodate future high speed rail service comes with significant added complexity and real costs. How can the Authority contribute its share of funding to time sensitive infrastructure projects in the Bay Area when its resources are focused on the Central Valley? What added design accommodations and project costs can reasonably be borne by regional projects today in anticipation of a future rail project that lacks a clear schedule and funding plan? How can shared decision making and interagency partnership work effectively when so many aspects of high speed rail's program are uncertain? The Authority and its regional partners in the Bay Area must begin answering these and other questions - both reaffirming and evolving their commitment to a shared rail system.

We appreciate the ongoing work of the Authority to deliver high speed rail in California and thank you for this opportunity to provide comment.

Sincerely,

Sebastian Petty  
Senior Transportation Policy Advisor, SPUR