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March 2, 2021

Tom Richards, Chair
California High Speed Rail Authority
770 L Street, Suite 620
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: Support for the Revised Draft 2020 Business Plan

Dear Chair Richards,

The Merced County Association of Governments 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. Independent peer review has confirmed the Merced-Fresno-Bakersfield corridor, which includes HSR service and improvements in supporting Altamont Corridor Express (ACE) and San Joaquins rail and bus services, obtains the highest forecast gain in ridership and does so at the lowest increase in cost.

The 171-mile electrified 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 will create significant benefits including maximizing connectivity to other rail services, reducing travel times, improving air quality, reducing emissions, and generating significant economic benefits in a highly disadvantaged region.

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 HSR service is essential towards implementing the ultimate HSR rail system between the Bay Area, Sacramento, San Joaquin Valley and Southern California.

MCAG 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.

MCAG is pleased to submit this letter of support for the staff recommendations of the CHSRA Revised Draft 2020 Business Plan.

Sincerely,

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Stacie Guzman
Executive Director