



March 8, 2021

Dear Assembly Transportation Subcommittee Members and Transportation Committee Members,

On behalf of our 3,400 Californian members and 28,000 members nationwide, the Rail Passengers Association is pleased to submit this letter of support for the staff recommendations of the California High-Speed Rail Authority Revised Draft 2020 Business Plan. As the largest and most advanced high-speed rail project in the U.S., this project's success is important not only to the mobility of Californians, but to the nation as a whole. The ability of California to effectively introduce high-speed train service along this corridor will affect the prospects for future Federal funding for a high-speed rail program. California has an opportunity to assume its traditional role as a national leader in infrastructure technology and, in doing so, help launch a federal program that will fund future passenger rail development within the state.

It is with these facts in mind that our Association endorses the Revised Draft 2020 Business Plan. Independent peer review confirms the Merced-Fresno-Bakersfield corridor will result in the highest forecast ridership increase at the lowest increase in cost versus other transit alternatives. This review found that the 171-mile line Interim Operating Segment running from Merced to Bakersfield, in coordination with improvements to existing passenger rail networks in Northern and Southern California, will create significant benefits:

- **Critical Economic Investment in the Central Valley.** 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.
- **Significant Ridership Gains and Saved Subsidy Costs.** 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.
- **Fight Climate Change by Reducing Emissions.** Improves air quality in the Central Valley and reduces GHG emissions by shifting from diesel to clean, electrically powered trains.
- **Improves Connectivity to Rail Service Throughout the State.** The Merced-Fresno-Bakersfield HSR Interim Service will leverage the maximum degree of connectivity to other rail services, while important project development work also continues in other parts of the state.
- **Saves Time.** Reduces travel times for rail passengers between Sacramento and the Bay Area to Bakersfield by up to 90 to 100 minutes.

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- **Improves Connectivity to Public Transit Throughout the State.** Improves access and connectivity to other California destinations through better connections with expanded ACE and San Joaquins rail services to the north at a multimodal hub in Merced and Thruway Bus Service at Bakersfield for travel to Southern California.
- **Proof of Concept for High-Speed Rail.** Allows for early testing of high-speed operations and passenger use and reduces ramp-up time for future extensions.

Rail Passengers is joining other stakeholder groups in supporting the recommendation that the \$4.1 billion in remaining Prop 1A HSR bond funds be directed to complete delivery of the 119-mile Central Valley Segment, and the remaining \$100 million in HSR bond funds be used for early design and completing environmental on in environmental review on San Francisco to Los Angeles Phase 1 segments of HSR. 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, extensions which will be critical to fighting climate change and working towards socioeconomic and racial equity in California in the next decade.

Sincerely,

Jim Mathews, President & CEO
Rail Passengers Association

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