



**California High-Speed Rail Authority
April 8, 2010 Authority Board Meeting – San Jose
Merced to Fresno Route Alternatives
Speaking Points**

Good morning Chairman Pringle and Authority Board members. My name is John Pedrozo and I am a member of the Board of Supervisors of Merced County. I am here today to speak about the Alternatives Analysis Report being provided by Authority staff specific to the Merced to Fresno route alignment alternatives. This is Item 12 on today's agenda.

I would like to thank your staff for their work to date in advancing the California High-Speed Rail system and agree with their recommendations from the December 3, 2009 Authority Board meeting – which was to eliminate routes A-1 and A-4 on the Merced to Fresno section.

As you know, I have been a strong supporter of high-speed rail for Merced County, encouraging the system development with a train station in downtown Merced and advocating for the heavy maintenance facility and the 1,500 jobs it brings to our community. I have been a proponent of a route on the Union Pacific (UP) Railroad corridor, located adjacent to Highway 99. This is the best option for our region given that it has the lowest impacts to residential and land uses and provides the fastest travel time between Merced and Fresno.

Early in 2006, the California High-Speed Rail Authority introduced a route alternative named A-1 which followed the BNSF Railroad corridor. I opposed route A-1 given that it negatively impacted the residential communities of Planada and Le Grand and had negative impacts to agricultural land in the region. The County Board of Supervisors and the City of Merced did not support route A-1 for these same reasons and instead unanimously supported A-2. The Authority staff also saw numerous challenges with route A-1 and recommended that route A-1 **not be** considered for further review at the December 3, 2009 Board meeting.

Today I am here in two capacities - one representing the County of Merced and two representing the Greater Merced High-Speed Rail Committee which consists of the County of Merced, the City of Merced, Merced County Farm Bureau and other regional cities, educational institutions, non-profits, community based organizations, elected officials and private business representatives from the region. We have actively supported the A-2 or Union Pacific alignment and are in opposition of the A-1 or Burlington Northern Santa Fe alignment.

The reintroduction of A-1 is not acceptable for the following reasons:

- The A-1 alignment causes substantial impacts to Merced County's agricultural resources. A-3 seems to also do this mostly in Madera County and for a small portion of Merced County. This is a result of the route disrupting existing parcel shapes and ownership patterns and potentially disrupting agricultural activities, including agricultural processing and packaging facilities.

Board of Supervisors

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- Both A-1 and A-4 have the greatest potential impacts on endangered species migration and habitat corridors in Merced County most notably for San Joaquin kit fox, protected wetlands, four species of vernal pool shrimp, grasslands, recovery areas and other critical habitat. We are very familiar with the Federal and State permitting process of this region due to our work on the development of UC Merced and strongly believe that the time required by the Army Corps and EPA to permit the A-1 alignment would be close to 10 years based on the impacts to wetlands and other jurisdictional waters. Additionally, A-1 faces the challenges of authorization from US Fish and Wildlife Services for incidental take of several species listed under the Endangered Species Act. Based on our experience, carrying through A-1 will cost the Authority more money and significantly more time. There are too many obstacles to approving A-1 and these obstacles will result in increased project delays, project costs and mitigation outlays.
- In terms of construction costs, it is our understanding that A-1, A-3 and A-4 result in the highest new construction costs.
- A-1, A-3 and A-4 have slower travel times than A-2. A-4 has the slowest travel time and A-1 has the second slowest travel time of all options. It is the Committee's understanding that when building a high speed rail system, a straight line is preferred and is the most efficient in terms of speed. The A-1 alignment curves east and increases the travel time given it is the least straight alternative presented that connects Merced to Fresno. The A-4 alignment loops around the A-2 option substantially increasing travel time - more than any other option.
- The A-1 alignment will adversely affect the unincorporated communities of Le Grand and Planada by displacing many residents within these communities and disrupting the plans for these communities. These communities play an important role in supporting the agricultural economy of Eastern Merced County as well as providing services and affordable housing for County residents.

The County looks forward to playing an important role by assisting the authority in protecting the routes that are selected from incompatible development. To do so, the County must amend its General Plan to designate the selected sites on the County's General Plan Circulation Element. The A-2 alignment advances the goals of the County's General Plan than either the A-1, A-3 or A-4 alignments. Because of the adverse effects of alternative routes A-1, A-3 and A-4 to agricultural resources, wildlife habitats and affordable housing areas, it may be very difficult for the County to recognize either of these alternatives in its general plan.

As an elected official, Mr. Pringle, I am sure you can appreciate the commitment and collaborative efforts it takes to get consensus and bring cities and counties together to agree on an outcome and commit to the best regional solution. I must say that our region along with Stanislaus County and dozens of cities surrounding our region are committed to supporting the A-2 alignment.

In closing, we are committed to meeting regularly to discuss the commonalties and challenges that our community must overcome and continue to work with your staff to educate local stakeholders about the process and impacts of the high-speed rail system. I am submitting to you a resolution unanimously passed by Merced County Board of Supervisors supporting the A-2 alignment on February 23 of this year. Additionally, I am submitting for the record, a letter from Congressman Dennis Cardoza as well as a resolution from the City of Merced in support of the A-2 alignment. We have also been working with an environmental permit expert from Cox, Castle & Nicholson, LLP who has provided a white paper on the "Consideration of Alternative Alignment A1 and A2 for the Merced to Fresno High-Speed Train Project" for our review.

Lastly, our Committee recognizes that the ARRA federal funding comes with strict deadlines. We want to ensure that our region remains competitive so we are here to ensure that you and the Authority Board members know that our community strongly believes that A-2 is the most expeditious alignment and the one that faces the least environmental, agricultural, land use and legal challenges and impacts to our community.

Thank you for your time and consideration today.

John Pedrozo
Merced County Supervisor and Greater Merced County High-Speed Rail Committee