

Merced County Farm Bureau

April 8, 2010

Chairman Curt Pringle
California High-Speed Rail Authority
925 L Street, Suite 1425
Sacramento, CA 95814

Re: California High Speed Rail Authority Board Meeting

Dear Mr. Pringle:

My name is Jeff Marchini and I am the current President of Merced County Farm Bureau. I am also a landowner and businessman who will be directly impacted by proposed route A-1 on the Fresno to Merced connection for the California High Speed Rail (HSR).

As a lifelong resident on the Eastside of Merced I care deeply about the impacts you will impose on us by your decision on this route. As a business owner in Merced County I contribute to the \$3 billion industry created by agriculture production. The University of California Cooperative Extension also use an economic multiplier of four to include economic growth which is created from packing, processing, packaging, transporting and marketing agricultural products. This number equates to \$12 billion in revenues from agriculture and related activity in Merced County. With those numbers it should not surprise anyone that Merced County has the sixth most productive agriculture industry in the United States.

As of February 2010, Merced County Farm Bureau (MCFB) has submitted a letter of support for proposed route A-2 which will run along the existing transportation corridor (Highway 99/Union Pacific Railroad). This logical option was unanimously supported by MCFB, Merced County and the City of Merced. Madera County and Madera County Farm Bureau have also given their support to route A-2. This plan also follows Merced County's General Plan, unlike A-1 which will wreak havoc on businesses, water infrastructure and farms outside of the HSR's planned right-of-way. Clearly these two Counties understand the importance of protecting the existing infrastructure we have in the Valley.

MCFB has been at the table trying to provide dialogue on this issue because we believe HSR can be a huge asset to our state, but that is only if the plan follows the language set by the 2008 Bond which states that the HSR shall only exist in a "manner that minimizes urban sprawl and impacts on the natural environment." We believe the route A-

1 does not follow the established language because the route from Madera into the City of Merced is entirely agriculture land or related businesses.

The text of the Bond also includes language which states “(T)he alignment for the high-speed train system shall follow existing transportation or utility corridors to the extent feasible and shall be financially viable, as determined by the authority.” According to the Corridor System Management Plan from the California Transportation Commission “A transportation corridor is not limited to the highway but encompasses all transportation components, taken as a whole, through a geographical area, on a major travel path.” We at Farm Bureau understand that A-2 is along a very active transportation corridor because of Highway 99 and the Union Pacific Railroad. However, the Burlington Northern Santa Fe (BNSF) Railroad runs long Santa Fe Road, a country road rarely traveled by anyone other than locals in the agriculture industry.

Along A-1, MCFB also has major concerns with the specific crops that will be destroyed by the approval of this route. From the Madera/Merced border into the City of Merced there are over 400 parcels that are within the HSR right-of-way boundaries. Of these parcels over 42 percent are considered permanent crops. The County defines permanent crops as any product that does not have to be replanted after a harvest which includes all nut and fruit trees, grapes, and alfalfa. One of these crops, Almonds, is a \$254 million industry in Merced County and it needs to be carefully protected, especially when the County is already facing serious water issues and extreme unemployment numbers.

Not only are we farmers, but we are businessmen trying to make sure that revenues still exceed the costs, while continuing to looking for the most cost-efficient ways to run our businesses. As population is projected to dramatically increase in California, we at Farm Bureau understand that transportation is a serious concern, but one commonality we all have is our need for food and fiber as a means of survival. As the President for Merced County Farm Bureau, we are asking you to please consider in all the factors when deciding on a route for the Fresno to Merced section. We are active in dialogue and we understand the benefits HSR will bring to our community, but the long-term ramifications could be more severe than we ever imagined if we do not address all of the concerns brought to light by farmers in the Valley. Thank you for giving us this opportunity to speak and we look forward to more open-dialogue in the future.

Sincerely,

Jeff Marchini
President