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March 3, 2014

Ms. Cynthia T. Brown  
Chief, Section of Administration  
Office of Proceedings  
Surface Transportation Board  
395E. Street, SW  
Washington, DC 20423-0001

ENTERED  
Office of Proceedings  
March 5, 2014  
Part of  
Public Record

Re: STB Finance Docket No. 35724 (Sub-No. 1).

California High-Speed Rail Authority's Petition for Exemption of Fresno to Bakersfield HST Section.

Dear Ms. Brown:

I am very concerned about my local Amtrak service once the proposed new High Speed Rail (HSR) is constructed and operating. I respectfully submit this letter of opposition to the California High-Speed Rail Authority's (Authority) Petition for Exemption, filed September 26, 2013.

I most often use the Hanford to San Diego Burlington Northern Santa Fe (BNSF) line of Amtrak. This section uses a bus on the Bakersfield-Los Angeles Union Station leg of the trip. There is no passenger train service between these two cities. We often choose to use the bus service of Amtrak's for the Hanford to LA Union Station legs because of the time schedule. Too bad the HSR from the onset did not plan to give Californians as well as U.S. citizens a section of track between Bakersfield and LA Union Station that is now missing and needed. I use the Hanford station for my trips north as well. I embark and terminate at the Hanford station. I most likely will need to drive 80 to 100 miles to get to the nearest HSR station. The Hanford Amtrak Station is only ten miles from my home. This fact alone makes the HSR project less green for me to use. Amtrak's station locations make the present line, BNSF, very covenant and accessible.

Right now Amtrak has stations in Fresno, Hanford, Corcoran, and Wasco. The new HSR will bypass these current Amtrak stations. The Authority has no funding or plans or both to construct these stations. Corcoran with its lack of a hospital finds the SJVA corridor a life saver. The citizens there can board in Corcoran and detrain in Hanford to attend to their health needs at the hospital there. Fresno also has a number of hospitals to serve them. The HSR system will not have a station at any of these towns; therefore, the HSR will not meet policies set forth in 49 USC section 10101 element 8. Eight states: "... to operate transportation facilities and equipment without detriment to the public health and safety."

The Authority needs to show you, the Surface Transportation Board (Board), and the citizens of the state and country how future operation on the new rail line will sustain and not diminish or have an adverse effect on passenger train service or convenience for the train-traveling public living in or near these towns.

According to AB 1779 the San Joaquin Joint Powers Authority (JPA) takes over the administration and the operation of SJVA. This is to happen as early as June 30<sup>th</sup> this year. It will be JPA's duty to make the present SJVA line and the new HSR track profitable. When the JPA shifts SJVA rolling stock to the new HSR tracks, the frequency on the BNSF tracks will be severely reduced. Every departure/train moved to the HSR tracks will diminish the service to Hanford, Corcoran, and Wasco stations. So every train that is

moved to the HSR track cuts convenience, availability, accessibility, and frequency for the current Amtrak stations. Since the JPA is a new operator the Board and the Authority will need to look at its' plans in depth. Only then can the Board evaluate their plans, "...to meet the needs of the public..." stated in element 4 of 49 USC Section 10101.

The San Joaquin Valley Amtrak (SJVA) is the fifth busiest Amtrak corridor in the nation. Even the Authority states this in their Revised Draft EIR/ Supplemental EIS July 2012 in Vol. I, 1.14. This represents almost 1,000,000 passengers annually. This number of passengers served is due to the convenience of the stations and the reasonable fares. Once the JPA takes over for Caltrans, San Joaquin operations will only have a guaranteed subsidy for three years after that. The SJVA BNSF service is subsidized by almost 50% now. The current fare would need to go up 100% on any conventional train on the HSR tracks because the new HSR can't be subsidized. On the BNSF after three years, we do not know what the JPA will charge, but we do know the service will be diminished if not terminated. I refer you to element 1 of 49 USC section 10101. One states: "...to allow, to the maximum extent possible, competition and the demand for services to establish reasonable rates for transportation by rail."

In conclusion, the credit for the SJVA corridor currently being used so heavily is because of its'; many stations, convenience; low fares, availability to middle to low-income people; accessibility for public health and safety and at this time meets the needs of the public. The almost one million people served are a testament to that. In this number there are a large number of short trip riders. These will not be possible with HSR stations so far apart; people will be forced to drive. So you see, a reduction or change in any single one of these elements would diminish or have an adverse effect on passenger train service in this corridor.

The Authority simply makes inadequate and unsupported assertions in its Petition. You should require far more details from the Authority. Based on what little the public knows, I fear the Authority's new line will be harmful to the train-riding public. Until the Authority is required to substantiate its claims and put my and any public concerns to rest, the Board should refuse to grant the Authority's request for an exemption.

Respectfully submitted,

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