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May 8, 2013

Ms. Cynthia Brown
Chief Section of Administration
Surface Transportation Board
395 E Street, SW
Washington, D.C. 20423-0001

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Office of Proceedings
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Part of
Public Record

RE: Comments Concerning California High-Speed Rail Authority's (CHSRA) Petition for Exemption – Docket No. FD 35724

Dear Ms. Brown:

On behalf of the Fresno Council of Governments, I write to respectfully urge the Surface Transportation Board to expeditiously grant the petition for exemption filed by the CHSRA for the construction of the 65-mile Madera to Fresno Section.

The Fresno Council of Governments (Fresno COG) is both the federally designated Metropolitan Planning Organization, and the state designated Regional Transportation Planning Agency for the Fresno County region. In both of these roles, Fresno COG is responsible for long range transportation planning and programming for our region.

As high-speed rail planning is happening throughout the nation and California's project is the first of its kind entering construction, I can appreciate that the Surface Transportation Board's (Board) decision has important implications from this point forward. As such, I do believe that careful consideration is warranted, but this should not result in lengthy delay. Expeditious approval of the petition for exemption is greatly needed for the reasons enumerated below.

The CSHR project will soon provide thousands of local jobs and contract opportunities for local businesses which are urgently needed. By putting local residents and businesses back to work, the project is not simply supporting those local companies directly contracting with the Authority, but other local businesses that benefit when residents have additional income to spend on items for themselves and their families.

Should the project face a prolonged delay, local businesses impacted by the high-speed rail alignment would be faced with great uncertainty. Many of these businesses have expressed a desire for a clear timeline for acquisition and compensation, and some would prefer an expeditious timeline. To have an extended period of uncertainty would be detrimental to the property owners and businesses. Those businesses that lease to others will find that their ability to retain/attract tenants may be further compromised. In addition, those businesses that have been making arrangements based on anticipated property acquisition schedules will lose trust with the process.

For these reasons stated above, I strongly and respectfully urge the Board to grant the petition for exemption for the Madera to Fresno Section.

Sincerely,

Tony Boren, Executive Director
Fresno Council of Governments

CC: Secretary Ray LaHood, DOT
Jeff Morales, CHSRA

- City of Clovis
- City of Coalinga
- City of Firebaugh
- City of Fowler
- City of Fresno
- City of Huron
- City of Kerman
- City of Kingsburg
- City of Mendota
- City of Orange Cove
- City of Parlier
- City of Reedley
- City of San Joaquin
- City of Sanger
- City of Selma
- County of Fresno