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California
High-Speed Rail Authority Recommends
Hybrid Route for Merced to Fresno Segment

LOS ANGELES—The preferred route for the Merced to Fresno segment of the California High Speed Rail system is a hybrid of two options proposed in August, according to a Dec. 1 report from the California High Speed Rail Authority.

Of the three options proposed in the draft environmental impact report/statement (EIR/EIS) released in August (2 IIPR 27, 8/22/11), CHSRA staff opted for a north-south alignment that mixes two options, first by hewing to an artery comprised of State Route 99 and a Union Pacific Railroad (UPRR) corridor north of Fresno and then swinging east along a Burlington Northern Santa Fe freight line.

In its contribution to the public comment process, the Madera County Farm Bureau expressed its opposition, saying the route ultimately chosen would have a significant impact on agricultural property in the area.

The bureau favored an alternative that shadowed the UPRR/State 99 route more closely.

CHSRA said its choice would save \$1 billion as compared with Farm Bureau's preferred choice. CHSRA said the "hybrid" alternative would have less impact on natural and community resources while posing the fewest barriers to construction.

CHSRA staff also said the alternative would avoid impacts on downtown Madera.

The board of directors will vote on making the preferred alternative a part of the final EIR/EIS for the segment at a Dec. 13 meeting, according to the authority.

CHSRA staff also designated locations in downtown Fresno and downtown Merced for train stations.

By Stephen Scillano

The staff recommendation on a preferred alternative for the Merced-to-Fresno segment can be found at <http://www.calhighspeedrail.ca.gov/assets/0/152/232/323/a8fd34c0-46c3-4ccd-8eaa-73ae31d43967.pdf>

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