



December 10, 2009

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

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Executive Director

**RE: Merced to Fresno High Speed Train Project EIR/EIS
Opposition to Route A-3**

Dear Chairman Pringle:

Madera County Farm Bureau represents the farmers, ranchers and individuals who support the agricultural industry in Madera County. Revenue generated by local farming industries is the primary source of tax revenue and the main economic driver for the county.

The Board of Directors for Madera County Farm Bureau (MCFB) regards the California High Speed Rail (HSR) project as a pivotal step in the future development of the Great Central Valley. We remind you that one of the stated goals in the construction of HSR is to minimize environmental impacts and to stay near existing transportation corridors. Proposed Route A-3, which cuts through Madera's fertile Westside farmland is not in alignment with this objective, and forces Madera County agriculture to pay the price for nearby cities that benefit from HSR stops in their communities. It is imperative that routes for the HSR enhance the planning processes that are ongoing in the Central Valley and reflect the ideals and economic needs of those who live in the region.

Thousands of Central Valley inhabitants participate in Governor Schwarzenegger's "California Partnership for the San Joaquin Valley," a visioning process for growth in the area. One of the goals of the Partnership is to develop a long-range strategy for agriculture in the San Joaquin Valley that ensures its viability and sustainability. The objectives of this process are: to develop a long-range plan to maintain the viability of agriculture in the region, to minimize the proliferation of ranchette development on farmland, and to reduce the loss of farmland attributable to General Plan amendments.

Additionally, the City of Madera completed its Vision 2025 project, and city dwellers overwhelmingly advocated for the preservation of agricultural lands. Both of these processes are germane to the placement of HSR routes, as they exhibit the desire of Central Valley inhabitants to support the proliferation and sustainability of agriculture in our communities. Placement of High Speed Rail routes should respect the

Madera County Farm Bureau

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desires of tax payers and community voices who want to preserve an agricultural economy.

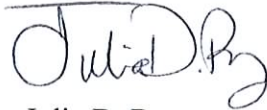
The farmers who farm today are doing so because it is a vocation they have chosen, not because it is an easy way of life. They continue to stay in business in the face of inexorable environmental regulation and uncertain water supplies. An entire population of voters is reliant upon farming as a means to provide for their families; and they have to fight to continue living an agrarian lifestyle.

A project like High Speed Rail must value the priorities of rural peoples on par with urbanites, especially in the Central Valley, where agriculture production leads in its contribution to the tax base.

As a voice for Madera County agriculture, we express strong opposition to the proposed route through Westside farmland (Route A-3). We have attached a description of the reasons for our position.

We welcome your inquiries and look forward to working toward a route selection that is a win-win for California and for rural counties.

Sincerely,



Julia D. Berry
Executive Director

cc: Carrie Bowen, Deputy Director, California High Speed Rail
Madera Board of Supervisors
City of Madera
City of Chowchilla
Madera Irrigation District
Chowchilla Water District
Merced County Farm Bureau
University of California at Merced

Attachment

Madera County comments in Opposition to Proposed Route A-3

The process by which Route A-3 was chosen does not represent the will of the landowners in the area. At a public meeting in Madera, crayons were provided for individuals to freely draw lines on a map to make suggestions for railways. It was at this meeting that an unknown participant randomly drew what is now seriously being considered as a possible route. Proposed Route A-3 has taken a life of its own with no input from those who will be drastically affected. Now, the agricultural industry is left holding the bag because of a loosely structured process that was driven by individuals who were not required to weigh the pros and cons of destroying agricultural lands. This line was obviously created by one who lacks comprehension of the critical role of farming and ranching in our economy and our way of life.

Secondly, the most visible representative of the farming community, Madera County Farm Bureau, was not contacted regarding the proposal of Route A-3. As a result, letters sent from the High Speed Rail Authority for access to private property have not been greeted warmly by recipients. These letters are the first contact with the affected parties, and landowners believe they have been blind-sided. A ground-swell of unhappy people is growing, and politically, HSR has created a problem. This will not bode well should HSR staff attempt to negotiate with private landowners, as the lack of outreach was handled poorly.

Route A-3 ignores property lines, diagonally cutting parcels. Madera County farmland parcels are organized on a grid; Route A-3 disrupts clean property lines by diagonally cutting through ranches, leaving landowners holding the bag. The proposed HSR Route A-3 will create islands of land that will be too small to justify the financial inputs required to farm, rendering these parcels unfarmable, therefore, unprofitable. Secondly, the HSR estimates that this route will only require 720 acres of farmland to come out of production. This is a gross underestimate, when factoring the setbacks that are already enforced upon agricultural practices by existing regulations, requiring that farming practices occur at a certain distance from urban centers, schools, homes, traffic, etc.

Transportation systems are not compatible with agricultural operations, due to existing stringent laws and regulations.

California has the most rigorous set of laws and regulations for the handling and application of fertilizers, herbicides, and pesticides in the country. For example, chemical sprays must be applied at a specific wind speed, according to law (between 2-10mph). Should the speed increase, farmers must shut down their spraying operations and wait for more favorable conditions. It is prohibited by law for a chemical to drift, especially onto a passenger or human transit vehicle. This is a constant

challenge with the presence of school buses on rural roads. Should there be a “suspected drift,” the bus in question must be swabbed by the County Agricultural Commissioner’s office, and the grower faces tens of thousands of dollars in penalties. However, buses only run at certain times of the day, whereas, HSR trains will be present throughout the day and night. Not yet considered is the effect of a 250 mph train near farms – certainly chemical applications will be subject to drift with this level of air transfer. Lastly, aerial spray applications, vital to many agricultural crops, will be impossible with the regular presence of a human transportation system, as it will create a public safety issue.

Irrigation canals and irrigation systems will be interrupted and costly to reconfigure. Irrigation water travels through canals by gravity pull. Should this flow be interrupted, expensive pumps will need to be employed to deliver water to homes and ranches. There are irrigation canals running east to west about every mile and it would be a massive project to bury each one at each crossing.

High Speed Rail wind impacts on flowering trees and bee pollination will cause a decrease in yields. Permanent crops such as almonds, pistachios and grapes are the top commodities grown in Madera County. Nut crops, such as almonds, require that bees be present to complete pollination. Without bee activity, which is provided by employing a bee keeper to bring hives to the orchard, almond trees will not produce a crop. Bees are very particular about the types of conditions that they will work in, including: temperature and *wind speed*. A high speed train traveling at 250 miles per hour is very disruptive to bee activity, not to mention lethal. Additionally, strong wind will blow blooms off of flowering trees, like almonds and grapes, when flower counts are directly related to crop yields.

Farmland is not replaceable, there is no true mitigation for farmland, as it is not a renewable resource. California loses 100,000 acres of farmland per year to transportation and development projects. Farmland is the only property that is privately held, from which families make their livings. There are 82,000 farms in California, and 64,000 of them are family farms. We implore you to recognize that farmland is not simply flat land for the taking. It is home to real people, and real families. There is an emotional tie to the land and a historical value that may not be replaced by “preserving” farmland in another area with mechanisms such as farmland easements. Urbanites need farmland also, as it provides the lifestyle that we all enjoy – the luxury of finding anything and everything we want at any given time at the grocery store or restaurant. Please do not squander this nonrenewable resource.