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CSAC Policies & Priority Issues for Implementation of the California High-Speed Rail Project

CSAC has supported the California High-Speed Rail Project (HSR Project) since February 2007 when the CSAC Board of Directors approved a resolution expressing support for the allocation of state bond funds for the further development and completion of the Project as described in the High-Speed Rail Authority's (Authority) completed business and implementation plans as well as the approved environmental documents to date.

Since that time, the HSR Project has changed in terms of the design, implementation, and cost of the proposed Project. Counties have had over five years of experience working with the Authority on the HSR Project and specific local impacts that necessitate additional CSAC policy and identification of priority issues critical to the successful implementation of the HSR Project.

Policies & Priority Issues

Communicate with Openness, Transparency, & Accountability. It is imperative that the Authority work and communicate with counties and other affected parties in an open, transparent, and consistent fashion. As is required of county staff, the Authority staff and its consultants must be educated and up to date on the issues specific to a particular county and must be ready to discuss the issues openly and be accountable for the commitments and decisions made during meetings with counties. The Authority should provide regular updates to counties and other interested and affected parties regarding the need for and current status of the project as well as the status of financing and funding for the High-Speed Train. The Authority should prioritize the need to address local impacts early in the environmental review process prior to the Final Environmental Impact Report (EIR)/Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) so as not to diminish local agency review time and comment on items not adequately addressed in the Draft EIR/EIS.

Robust Environmental Review. While CSAC supports streamlined environmental review processes for projects with little to no environmental impact or for projects critical to public safety, the California HSR Project is the largest public works project in decades and deserves the full spectrum of environmental review.

Public Comment. Counties need adequate time and resources in order to provide meaningful and comprehensive comments on environmental documents, changes to the business and implementation plans, etc. The Authority should provide longer public comment periods than required by law considering the complexity of the proposed HSR Project. Further, similar to what has occurred with the Bay Delta Plan, the Authority should provide counties financial resources to support enough staff to provide meaningful and comprehensive feedback on the proposed HSR Project.



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Conflicts with General Plans & Other Local Plans. The Authority must understand and respect the role of local elected officials in land use decisions. The proposed HSR alignment is in direct conflict with some local general plans and elements of general plans. Specifically, the proposed alignment is inconsistent with flood zones, urban growth boundaries, etc. The Authority should work to ensure conflicts with local plans are minimized and adequate mitigation is evaluated for unavoidable impacts.

Direct & Indirect Economic Impacts. The HSR Project will create both positive and negative and direct and indirect economic impacts in California and specifically in the local communities where the HSR Project is located. For example, the California economy depends on dairy and agricultural production in the Central Valley and counties and other local communities depend on the tax revenues dairy and agricultural production generates. Both direct and indirect economic impacts should be acknowledged and mitigated to the extent possible.

Mitigation of Local Impacts. The Authority must mitigate local impacts to the greatest extent feasible. For instance, the Initial Operating Segment (IOS) through the Central Valley has the potential to significantly affect and displace hundreds of local commercial, industrial and agricultural businesses. The Authority should work to mitigate those impacts. For example, securing the permits necessary to move a dairy is costly and time consuming. The Authority can work with its state agency partners, the Governor, and the Legislature to streamline the permitting process to relocate dairy and agricultural production. The cost of the relocation for dairy, agricultural production, and businesses, including the cost of environmental review, should also be borne by the Authority as a part of the cost for the entire HSR Project.

Additionally, the proposed HSR Project can potentially, depending on the final alignment, affect air quality, water quality, hydrology, mineral resources, utilities, service systems, noise, etc. The project can interrupt existing mass transit services and create a different or increased demand for critical emergency services. These impacts must also be adequately addressed and mitigated.

Ongoing Funding for Capital, Operations, & Maintenance of High-Speed Train, Existing Regional Rail, and California's Multi-Modal Transportation Network. Other transportation systems and modes should be insulated from a reduction in revenues in order to support the HSR Project. All other modes of transportation are facing significant funding shortfalls simply for preservation and safety purposes, let alone for expansion needs. Current revenue streams, such as state gasoline excise taxes, which support state highways and local streets and roads, are declining revenue streams and cannot keep pace with the needs. The HSR Project must pay for itself including long-term operations and maintenance. The HSR Project must also complement existing regional rail systems so as to maximize the benefits from the new High-Speed Train service. The State must continue to maintain the current role of these existing successful rail systems.