WRITTEN TESTIMONY
CALIFORNIA HIGH SPEED RAIL AUTHORITY
DRAFT PROGRAM EIR/EIS PUBLIC HEARING

CONGRESSMAN DENNIS CARDOZA
18TH CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT, CALIFORNIA

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I appreciate the opportunity to provide comment to the California High Speed Rail Authority regarding the Draft Program EIR/EIS. I concur with the Authority's conclusion that our existing transportation system does not meet California's current transportation needs, much less the demands of a growing population. With growth in the state projected to increase by almost 50% by the year 2050, it is crucial that we act now to meet this state's transportation infrastructure needs. High Speed Rail offers a common-sense solution to our state's transportation, congestion, and air quality challenges and also provides a vision for our state's infrastructure and economic future.

High Speed Rail offers tremendous benefits to California's Central Valley. The Central Valley has experienced the highest growth rate in the state in recent years. This trend is expected to continue well into the future. Although growth in the Valley has brought economic opportunity, it has also brought with it congestion, poor air quality, impaired travel reliability and longer travel times. Additionally, the I-5 and Highway 99 corridors provide the major surface transportation link between the northern and southern parts of the state. As main arteries of the state's transportation system, it is especially important for the High Speed Rail Authority to consider the unique challenges and needs of the Central Valley when evaluating the Draft Program EIR/EIS.

The Central Valley ranks among the worst air quality regions in the nation. The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District, with jurisdiction over eight San Joaquin Valley counties, stretching from San Joaquin to Kern counties, has recently been designated as an extreme nonattainment area for ozone. The extreme nonattainment designation is shared only with the Los Angeles air basin. A High Speed Rail system, with links up and down the Valley will help to alleviate our air quality and congestion problems. I appreciate the Authority's analysis of air quality benefits and impacts, which estimate a significant decrease in criteria pollutants with High Speed Rail, and wish to underscore the importance of the Authority's consideration of air quality benefits as it evaluates the Draft Program EIR/EIS, particularly in extreme nonattainment regions.

The Draft Program EIR/EIS concludes that development, construction, operation and maintenance of the High Speed Rail will result in the creation of as many as 450,000 jobs in this state. As a member of Congress representing some of the highest unemployment areas in the nation, such as Merced County, I believe the potential this project brings for economic development in the Valley is especially important. All too often, the Central Valley lags behind economic development and job growth experienced in other areas of the state.

As you consider alignment options, I'd like to stress the importance of linking the entire Central-San Joaquin Valley with the other major urban areas of the state. Connecting Valley communities together and connecting the Valley to the other major urban areas of the state will bring greater economic, educational and cultural opportunities to the Valley.

Additionally, I strongly urge the Authority to incorporate the selection of a Main Repair and Maintenance Facility and related test tracks in Merced County at the Castle Airport, Aviation and Development Center, also known as the former Castle Air Force Base. The Draft Program EIR/EIS outlines the High Speed Rail system's needs for a Main Repair and Maintenance Facility. The Castle Airport, Aviation and Development Center is an ideal location for such a repair and maintenance facility. Castle meets the outlined criteria, and carries with it the added benefits of public ownership, available land and opportunities to connect with other rail and air services.

I commend the Authority Board members and staff for their diligent work on the Draft Program EIR/EIS. I recognize that there is much work to be done on the document and that funding is not assured for this project. This should not let us loose sight of the vision and of our goal. It is my hope that these funding challenges will provide the Authority with the opportunity to further improve proposals for financing of this project, particularly by reaching out to the private sector to develop public-private partnerships in order to fully realize the goals of High Speed Rail.

I appreciate the opportunity to provide my comments and look forward to working with the Authority on this project.