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August 30, 2004

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BY: _____

Mr. Joseph E. Petrillo, Chair
California High Speed Rail Authority
925 L Street, Suite 1425
Sacramento, CA 95814

Re: Comments by the Sacramento Area Council of Governments (SACOG) on the Draft Program EIR/EIS for the Proposed California High-Speed Train System (January 2004)

Dear Chair Petrillo:

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this project which is exciting in both its purpose and magnitude. The following comments are submitted by the SACOG Board regarding the Draft Program EIR/EIS for the proposed high-speed train system.

General Comments:

The SACOG Board strongly supports the concept contained in the document that calls for the elimination of unnecessary stations and for choosing alignments which allow for the quickest possible running times between Northern and Southern California, consistent with financial and environmental constraints.

The SACOG Board joins those asking for a re-evaluation of the Altamont corridor because of its potential benefit of creating a quick and direct connection between the Sacramento and Bay Areas. The Altamont corridor would reduce Sacramento to San Francisco travel by 21 minutes compared to the Diablo Range Direct corridor and by 41 minutes compared to the Pacheco Pass corridor. We believe that the ridership potential in the Sacramento area may have been underestimated by CHRSA's consultants and the Board would urge that the ridership projections be re-evaluated.

Upon further study, if the Altamont option is unfeasible, the SACOG Board would urge adoption of the Diablo Range Direct alternative. This option adds only three minutes to the trip from Sacramento to San Jose and 21 minutes to San Francisco. The gain in ridership from the Sacramento area would more than offset the loss in ridership in the Gilroy area associated with the Pacheco Pass alternative.

Lastly, if neither the Altamont nor the Diablo Range Direct options prove feasible, it is imperative that significant improvements be made to the Capital Corridor to provide faster, more frequent and more reliable service between the Bay Area and the Sacramento Area, which is projected to double in population to 3.8 million by 2050. Improvements such as those identified in the document for the Lossan corridor between Los Angeles and San Diego would seem appropriate.

Mr. Joseph E. Petrillo

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There is significant potential, under current land use practices, of significant growth inducement and land consumption in the Central Valley, including the Sacramento area. The document assumes the project will result in an increase in population and jobs; it further assumes this will be done within a smaller urban footprint. The concern of the SACOG Board is that under current land use practices, the system could create a much larger footprint and foster sprawl on a large scale.

Since CHSRA does not have land use authority, the SACOG Board asks that the EIR/EIS evaluate a sub-alternative of the High-Speed Rail Alternative that assumes that additional growth consumes land as it does under current land use trends. The SACOG Board would further recommend that CHSRA provide recommendations for addressing the decentralized growth the system will almost certainly create. Along these lines, SACOG suggests that CHSRA make use of the PLACE³S software, which can estimate the effects of alternatives on travel demands.

The cost of the high speed system is \$33 billion to \$37 billion for full build out. It is important that decision makers be crystal clear on the costs and benefits of such a system. While it is understood that the project would be funded with private, State bond, and Federal "demonstration" dollars, it seems apparent that traditional State and Federal fund sources also will be tapped. The SACOG Board asks that the Program EIR/EIS carefully examine the extent to which this will occur and the tradeoffs involved in diverting existing State and Federal program dollars from their current uses.

Specific:

The SACOG Board strongly supports the Sacramento Valley Station/Railyards site as the location for the rail terminal for the SACOG region. Whether the Caltraction line or the UP line is selected, the Board endorses the downtown site over the Power Inn location.

The Board also wishes to indicate its preference for the Union Pacific (UP) alignment in the vicinity of Elk Grove and for the Caltraction alignment in the vicinity of Galt. The issue in both cities is noise and there appears to be sufficient spacing between the two locations to make the transition from one alignment to the other. Based on a review of current mapping, it looks feasible to utilize the Caltraction alignment from Stockton to north of Galt and then to turn northwest to connect with the U.P. alignment south of Elk Grove.

The SACOG Board further wishes to endorse the California High Speed Rail Authority's decision, reflected in the document, to grade separate all high-speed crossings. This is particularly important in the South Sacramento area, where development patterns lend themselves to the potential of unexpected vehicle and train conflicts, particularly in foggy, nighttime conditions.

The SACOG Board appreciates the opportunity to submit these comments and looks forward to working with CHSRA in its evaluation of a high speed train system for California.

Sincerely,



CHRISTOPHER CABALDON
Chair

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