CALIFORNIA High-Speed Rail Authority

December 1, 2011

High-Speed Rail Authority Staff Recommends "Hybrid" Route Through Valley
Train stations in downtown Merced and downtown Fresno

Dear Community Member,

We want to let you know about this important announcement regarding the California High-Speed Train project. After reviewing extensive public comments and feedback from Central Valley residents and businesses, the California High-Speed Rail Authority staff is recommending that the "Hybrid Alternative" be identified as the preferred route for the Merced to Fresno section in the Final Environmental Impact Report/Environmental Impact Statement (EIR/EIS).

The Hybrid Alternative was one of three routes analyzed in the Draft EIR/EIS released in August 2011 for public review. Based on environmental data, community feedback and further analysis, the Authority staff recommends the Hybrid route as the best option. Overall the Hybrid route has the fewest environmental and community impacts, avoiding downtown Madera and the town of Le Grand, and it is the lowest cost, estimated at $500 million to $1 billion less than the other two alternatives.

The "Merced to Fresno Staff Recommendation: Preferred Alternative" report is available on the Authority's website at: http://www.cahighspeedrail.ca.gov/Merced_-_Fresno.aspx.

Hybrid Alternative - The Hybrid Alternative generally parallels the Union Pacific Railroad and State Route 99 between Merced and Fresno. To avoid impacts to downtown Madera, this route travels east to be adjacent to the Burlington Northern Santa Fe corridor. Station locations are proposed in downtown Merced between Martin Luther King Jr. Way and G Street and in downtown Fresno at Mariposa Street. (Hybrid route is shown in blue on back page map.)

Heavy Maintenance Facility and Wye Connection - No preferred alternatives for the Heavy Maintenance Facility or the Wye connection in the Chowchilla area have been identified at this time. Three options for the Wye connection (highlighted in orange on the back page), the potential route west toward the Bay Area, and all five Heavy Maintenance Facility site options, will be carried forward and addressed in the San Jose to Merced section environmental document. This report is being prepared separately and is anticipated to be released in late 2012 or early 2013.

Next Steps - The Board of Directors will receive a presentation from Authority staff on this recommendation and are expected to take action at the regularly scheduled **Board Meeting on December 13, 2011,** 10:00am in Merced City Hall, 678 W. 18th Street, Merced, CA 95340 (http://www.cahighspeedrail.ca.gov/monthly_brdmtg.aspx). The Authority staff is recommending that this route be identified as the preferred alternative in the Final EIR/EIS, which is now being prepared and scheduled for release in early 2012. There will be an opportunity for public comment at the board meeting before action on the matter, and then again following the release of the Final EIR/EIS in early 2012.

The Authority will continue to reach out to property owners, residents and businesses in the project area over the next few months and throughout 2012 to discuss the route, mitigation efforts, and ways that we can work together to move the project forward. If approved by the Board, the southernmost 24 miles along the Hybrid Alternative, from Ave 17 in Madera County through the City of Fresno to the downtown station, will be the first construction area included in the 130-mile initial construction segment.

Please feel free to contact the Merced to Fresno team directly if you have questions or need assistance at (415) 955-2938 or email **Merced_Fresno@hsr.ca.gov**.

Sincerely,

Jeff Abercrombie
Area Program Manager, Merced – Bakersfield

Staff recommended preferred alternative – Hybrid