

*District 2 Members of the San Jose High-Speed Rail Community Working Group
District 2 Neighborhood Leadership Council*

March 20, 2019

Mr. Brian P. Kelly, Chief Executive Officer and Board of Directors
California High Speed Rail Authority
770 L Street, Suite 620
Sacramento, CA 95814

Subject: Request for High Speed Train Alternatives to be Evaluated for the Monterey Corridor in San Jose

Dear Mr. Kelly and CAHSRA Board Members,

The District 2 Members of the San Jose HSR Community Working Group (CWG) have been working with the California High Speed Rail Authority (CHSRA) on behalf of the thousands of San Jose residents who live and work along the proposed High-Speed Rail (HSR) alignment in San Jose's Monterey Corridor. It is our understanding that the CHSRA is scheduled to identify a Preferred Alternative (PA) in September 2019, followed by the preparation of an EIS/EIR for the San Jose to Merced Segment, which includes the Monterey Corridor. The purpose of this letter is to request the study of a modified blended trench alternative that we believe will result in an HSR design that avoids or minimizes the adverse effects of the HSR on our community to the greatest extent feasible.

Significance of the Monterey Corridor

The Monterey Corridor area of concern in San Jose extends for a distance of approximately 7.9 miles between Capitol Expressway on the north and Bailey Avenue on the south. It includes Monterey Road, a major four- to six-lane arterial and the UPRR tracks that are utilized by Caltrain, Amtrak, and freight trains. Unless constructed in a manner that will minimize effects, the proposed construction of the HSR in the Monterey Corridor will result in unacceptable significant short- and long-term impacts to those who live and work along the Monterey Corridor. As a way of highlighting the importance of the Monterey Corridor, we note the following:

- Within a 500-foot wide band along the west side of the Corridor, there are more than 2,000 single-family, multi-family, and mobile home residences, many of which are directly adjacent to the UPRR tracks.
- Within a 500-foot wide band along the east side of the Corridor, there are more than 2,400 single-family, multi-family, and mobile home residences, many of which are directly across Monterey Road from the UPRR tracks.
- Assuming an average of 2.5 persons per dwelling unit, there are approximately 11,000 residents living along the Corridor.
- Within 500-feet of the Corridor, noise-sensitive land uses include the above-listed residences, Edenvale Garden Park, Ramac Park, and the Edenvale Library.
- There are hundreds of businesses in the Corridor whose access is directly to/from Monterey Road.
- Within the Corridor, there are three major east-west roadways that intersect with Monterey Road and cross the UPRR tracks at-grade: Chynoweth Avenue, Branham Lane, and Skyway Drive. These

roadways carry substantial volumes of traffic and Skyway Drive is an important emergency response route as San Jose Fire Station #18 is located at the northeast corner of Monterey Road/Skyway Drive.

- There is a large group of black walnut trees that line Monterey Road from San Jose to Gilroy that are designated Heritage Trees. The group of trees, known as Keesling's Black Walnut Shade Trees, is listed in the Santa Clara County Heritage Resource Inventory (approved by the Board of Supervisors 4/20/82) and the California Historical Resources Directory as a State Point of Interest (approved by the State Historical Resources Commission 7/02/85). A plaque marking this historic resource is located adjacent to the UPRR tracks 0.16-mile north of Skyway Drive.
- The Monterey Corridor is part of the El Camino Real, which is designated as California Historical Landmark #784.

Issues of Importance

In view of the above-listed substantial community and environmental resources that are present along the HSR alignment in the Monterey Corridor, we are focusing solutions that will achieve the following key goals to the greatest extent feasible:

- Avoid vehicular, pedestrian and bicycle safety, traffic operation, and emergency response impacts by grade separating Skyway Drive, Branham Lane, and Chynoweth Avenue from the HSR/Caltrain.
- Minimize noise & vibration impacts, both during construction and during the operational phase.
- Minimize right-of-way impacts, especially those that will require the acquisition of residences and/or businesses.
- Maintain access between Monterey Road and local businesses.
- Minimize disruption during construction by avoiding night-time work, requiring the use of low-emission construction equipment, and avoiding prolonged roadway closures/detours.
- Minimizing visual impacts, especially those associated with any elevated facilities.
- Preserving the historic Keesling Trees where feasible.

HSR Alternatives

We understand fully that there are trade-offs on a large project and that there is no such thing as a project with no effects. However, we believe that it is feasible to build an HSR project in the Monterey Corridor that achieves the objectives we listed above.

Similar to what is planned from the San Francisco to San Jose Segment, it is our understanding that a blended HSR/Caltrain system is being considered, which would allow the electrification of Caltrain to expand from south of the Tamien Station to Gilroy. The blended system would substantially reduce the footprint of the project (as compared to separate systems) and would allow for diesel-powered Caltrain engines to be replaced with electric trains, both of which we support.

To further reduce impacts, we request that one of the alternatives studied in the EIS/EIR be one where the HSR/Caltrain tracks are depressed in a trench along the Monterey Corridor between Capitol Expressway and Metcalf Road. This proposed alternative would consist of 3 tracks, with an existing freight track relocated at-grade to the east side of the UPRR right-of-way (i.e., away from the residences) as a first stage. This would

allow for the existing freight, Amtrak, and Caltrain service to continue uninterrupted, which we understand is mandatory. Once this occurs, construction of the 2-track HSR/Caltrain facility would take place in a trench, including retaining walls, in the vacant westerly portion of the UPRR right-of-way.

The advantages of this alternative would be substantial and would include the following:

- Most important, by depressing the HSR/Caltrain tracks, there would be no future at-grade crossings of Skyway Drive, Branham Lane, and Chynoweth Avenue by HSR/Caltrain, which would avoid the traffic, vehicular, pedestrian and bicycle safety, and emergency response impacts of an at-grade design. The only remaining at-grade crossing would be for the occasional freight trains and twice daily Amtrak trains.
- The noise and visual impacts of this design would be much less than an at-grade or elevated system.
- By only depressing the two HSR/Caltrain tracks, we assume that construction would be quicker and less costly than if all three tracks were depressed. Please let us know if this assumption is accurate.

If it is determined that this proposed alternative is not feasible for Capitol to Metcalf, we would respectfully request that it be considered for a shorter segment that would include the intersections of Skyway, Branham and Chynoweth to avoid the significant impacts not having grade separations at these intersections would create.

While we understand that an elevated design alternative, whereby the system is constructed on a viaduct, may have certain advantages, we believe that its visual and aesthetic aspects would be significant and unmitigable, as well as be incompatible with the surrounding uses and the corridor's designation as a California Historical Landmark. While such a design may be acceptable for an industrial or rural setting, it is not desirable for a corridor that is predominantly bordered by residences, especially when there are other feasible options. To this point, we note the permanent adverse visual effects from where BART is elevated on a viaduct through residential areas in various East Bay cities.

Conclusion

We thank you for your consideration of the requests stated in this letter. It is our hope that we can work together with you in achieving our goals and, at the same time, have an improved transportation system. Please contact Karen Lattin at kblattin@comcast.net if you have any questions regarding this letter.

Sincerely,

District 2 Members of the San Jose High-Speed Rail Community Working Group and
Leaders in the San Jose District 2 Neighborhood Leadership Council (D2 NLC)

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