

California Cotton Ginners Association
California Cotton Growers Association
California Floral Council
California Grape and Tree Fruit League
Fresno County Farm Bureau
Kern County Farm Bureau
Kings County Farm Bureau
Madera County Farm Bureau
Merced County Farm Bureau
Nisei Farmers League
Raisin Bargaining Association
Tulare County Farm Bureau
Wasco Area Growers

September 2, 2010

Chairman Curt Pringle
California High Speed Rail Authority
925 L Street, Suite 1425
Sacramento, CA 95814

Dear Chairman Pringle:

This letter is to be presented to the High Speed-Rail Authority Board on behalf of several agricultural stakeholders in the Central Valley. Many of these entities have been individually engaged in the public process for quite some time; however we have combined efforts by identifying universal concerns on behalf of the agricultural industry.

Many of these concerns have been repeatedly raised in meetings with the High Speed Rail Authority Board Members and staff:

1. Cost estimates must account for future lost revenue to agribusinesses
2. Proposed routes render many parcels unprofitable
3. Irrigation systems will be detrimentally effected
4. Pollination will be decreased
5. Farmland is not a renewable resource

Current cost estimates do not take into account the true valuation of the land. Agricultural investments are very asset intensive. In order to justify this outlay of capital, a grower expects a rate of return over the life of the crop or livestock operation. The sales price of land does not take into account the future value that the land will produce. For example, if a grower recently planted walnut trees, the grower would have an expected income for the 40 years that the trees are in production. Forcing the grower to sell is effectively taking that future revenue out of their pocket.

Proposed routes ignore property lines, diagonally cutting parcels. Routes which do not follow existing transportation corridors disrupt clean property lines by diagonally cutting through ranches, leaving landowners holding the bag. Some of the proposed HSR routes will create islands of land that will be too small to justify the financial inputs required to farm, rendering these parcels unfarmable, therefore, unprofitable. A piece of farmland can easily become landlocked and accessible only through a neighboring property. Secondly, the HSR estimates that this route will only require 2,350 acres of farmland to come out of production from Sacramento to Bakersfield and along the Highway 152 corridor. This is a gross underestimate, when factoring the setbacks that are already enforced upon agricultural practices by existing regulations, requiring that farming practices occur at a certain distance from urban centers, schools, homes, traffic, etc. The reality is that tens of thousands of acres will be impacted.

Existing estimates of financial impacts on farmland have not been disclosed with a level of accuracy. It is imperative that realistic cost models are developed, and soon. These models must take into account the true value of land that will be impacted, as well as the actual cost of this land. The value of farmland is significantly decreased as it is broken into smaller pieces. Land that is bisected at a strange angle loses even more value. Giving an estimate per mile of track based on whether the train goes through farmland, cities, or mountains fails to take into account many factors.

Transportation systems are not compatible with agricultural operations, due to existing stringent laws and regulations. California has the most rigorous set of laws and regulations for the handling and application of fertilizers, herbicides, and pesticides in the country. For example, chemical sprays must be applied at a specific wind speed, according to law (between 2-10mph). Should the speed increase, farmers must shut down their spraying operations and wait for more favorable conditions. It is prohibited by law for a chemical to drift, especially onto a passenger or human transit vehicle. This is a constant challenge with the presence of school buses on rural roads. Should there be a "suspected drift," the bus in question must be swabbed by the County Agricultural Commissioner's office, and the grower faces tens of thousands of dollars in penalties. However, buses only run at certain times of the day, whereas, HSR trains will be present throughout the day and night. Not yet considered is the effect of a 220 mph train near farms – certainly chemical applications will be subject to drift with this level of air transfer. Lastly, aerial spray applications, vital to many agricultural crops, will be impossible with the regular presence of a human transportation system, as it will create a public safety issue.

Irrigation canals and irrigation systems will be interrupted and costly to reconfigure. Irrigation water travels through canals by gravity pull. Should this flow be interrupted, expensive pumps will need to be employed to deliver water to homes and ranches. There are irrigation canals running east to west about every mile and it would be a massive project to bury each one at each crossing.

High Speed Rail wind impacts on flowering trees and bee pollination will cause a decrease in yields. Permanent crops such as almonds, pistachios and grapes are the top commodities grown in the Central Valley. Nut crops, such as almonds, require that bees be present to complete pollination. Without bee activity, which is provided by employing a bee keeper to bring hives to the orchard, most trees will not produce a crop. Bees are

very particular about the types of conditions that they will work in, including: temperature and *wind speed*. A high speed train traveling at 220 miles per hour is very disruptive to bee activity, not to mention lethal. Additionally, strong wind will blow blooms off of flowering trees, like almonds and grapes, when flower counts are directly related to crop yields.

Farmland is not replaceable, there is no true mitigation for farmland, as it is not a renewable resource. California loses 100,000 acres of farmland per year to transportation and development projects. Farmland is the only property that is privately held, from which families make their livings. There are 82,000 farms in California, and 64,000 of them are family farms. We implore you to recognize that farmland is not simply flat land for the taking. It is a home to real people, and real families. There is an emotional tie to the land and a historical value that may not be replaced by “preserving” farmland in another area with mechanisms such as farmland easements. Please do not squander this nonrenewable resource.

As California’s one dependable economic engine we ask the Authority Board and staff to continue to work with individual growers and their representatives. We will continue to be active in the public process and we thank you for your consideration on this matter.

Sincerely,

California Agriculture