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Feds Approve High-Speed Rail Route from Merced to Fresno

Sacramento, CA -- In a major step forward for California High-Speed Rail, the U.S. Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) has issued a Record of Decision that approved the alignment from Merced to Fresno, allowing construction to begin next year. The Merced to Fresno section is the first of several key project sections that make up the back bone of a high-speed rail system that will ultimately connect millions of Central Valley residents to San Francisco and Los Angeles in less than 2 hours.

“Today is a significant move forward for California’s high-speed rail system,” said Dan Richard, Chair of the Authority’s Board of Directors. “Governor Brown’s leadership brought major improvements to the plans, management and delivery of high-speed rail and has in large part made this day possible. The Authority is committed to a close partnership with the public in the building of high-speed rail. Currently we are gathering public comment on our environmental documents for the Fresno to Bakersfield section and we look forward to again delivering an alignment that is the best for the communities along the route as well as for all Californians.”

Approved by California voters, high-speed rail has the strong bi-partisan support of the Mayors of Los Angeles, San Francisco, San Jose, Sacramento and Fresno as well as major business, labor and environmental leaders. California High-Speed Rail is a statewide rail modernization plan which not only delivers high-speed rail but also invests billions of dollars in improvements to local and regional rail lines. These investments in local rail projects will improve connectivity across the state for rail systems that provide over 950 million trips per year.

“No economy can grow faster than its transportation network can carry it,” Federal Railroad Administrator Joseph C. Szabo said. “The Record of Decision clears the way for California to begin construction on the first segment of its high-speed rail project. Over the next several years, this project will put thousands of Californians to work and provide the state with the transportation capacity and connectivity needed for long-term economic expansion.”

“The Federal Railroad Administration’s action is both an historic step forward for the high-speed rail project and great news for local businesses and workers,” Fresno Mayor Ashley Swearingin said. “The start of the Fresno to Merced segment will provide a much-needed economic boost for our area through the high-paying construction jobs that will be created. Over the long term, building high-speed rail is essential to creating jobs in the San Joaquin Valley and connecting us economically to the state’s other population centers.”

“I applaud the Federal Railroad Administration on this bold, courageous, historic decision that will propel America forward,” said Fresno County Supervisor Henry Perea. “Not only will it provide an incredible new form of transportation but it will also put our residents back to work, this is the game changer we have all been waiting for.”

“With the Federal Record of Decision, we are now poised to move forward and break ground next year,” said Jeff Morales, CEO of the California High-Speed Rail Authority. “This is now a statewide rail modernization plan which will not only deliver high-speed rail but also will invest billions of dollars of improvements to local and regional rail systems around the state immediately. These improvements will provide countless benefits to commuters and travelers in the near-term, while paving the way for high-speed rail in the future.”

The FRA approved the “Hybrid Alternative” which was selected by the Authority’s Board of Directors in December. The Board’s decision came following extensive outreach and robust public comment. The Board carefully considered the public’s input choosing an alternative that maximized the public benefits while minimizing impacts.

The "Hybrid Alternative:"

- Minimizes the need to acquire property.
- Requires the shortest length of elevated track.
- Is the least expensive to build.
- Entails the fewest potential noise impacts.
- Minimizes the impacts on parks and other public space.

To access the FRA’s Record of Decision:

http://www.fra.dot.gov/rpd/freight/fp_California_HST_%20Merced_to_Fresno.shtml