

Central Valley Agricultural Working Group July 2011

Overview

The California High Speed Rail Authority (Authority) is proposing a statewide high-speed train system. Two segments of this system travel through 173 miles of the San Joaquin Valley, with stations proposed in the cities of Merced, Fresno, Bakersfield and Hanford. Potential route alignments and station locations are being evaluated through an environmental review process under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) and the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). This process will result in the development of a draft Environmental Impact Report (EIR) and Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) available for public review and comment in August/September 2011.

To date, multiple concerns have been raised by the agricultural community. These concerns fall within the following general categories:

- Agricultural Economics
- Environmental Considerations
- Agricultural Operations

The specific agricultural issues related to these categories are more fully described below.

Agricultural Working Group Charge

The Agricultural Working Group is being formed to assist the Authority in addressing the key issues raised by the agricultural community. The goals of the Agriculture Working Group are to:

1. Refine the list of issues and concerns within the agricultural industry;
2. Use the agricultural expertise of the resource specialists to ensure the EIR/EIS process adequately addresses potential agricultural impacts, including social impacts, due to physical changes caused by the project;
3. Use resource specialists to develop mitigation measures and guidance guidelines to minimize agricultural impacts during construction, implementation and operation of the high-speed rail project

Agricultural Working Group Representatives

This working group will be comprised of university, agency, and business agricultural representatives. The overarching criteria for participation on the Agricultural Working Group includes a commitment to active participation, a willingness to engage in a constructive manner, an identifiable interest in the subject matter and outcome, and local or subject matter knowledge or expertise.

Specific resource areas of the working group members include:

- Bees
- Irrigation Systems, Wells, Canals
- Field and row crops, permanent crops
- Air Quality
- Spray Materials
- Livestock
- Agricultural Equipment

Representatives on the Agricultural Working Group are specialists in their area of expertise and will contribute to improved information sharing and decision-making by the California High-Speed Rail Authority on issues related to the agricultural industry and the High-Speed Train.

Summary of Agricultural Community Issues

A summary of the key issue(s) to be evaluated and addressed by the Agricultural Working Group is outlined below. Progress made on addressing these key issues will be reported by staff or an appointed Agricultural Working Group member to the Authority staff and Board of Directors. Although the Authority will ultimately make determinations and decide on the resolution of issues addressed by the Agricultural Working Group, it will be done in close consultation with the representatives participating in the working group.

Agricultural Economics

- Agricultural revenue loss due to direct loss of agricultural land and production revenue
- Agricultural revenue loss and impacts during temporary construction activities
- Parcel split impacts; production efficiency and value
- Calculation methods for all agricultural-related costs (i.e. UC Extension calculator)

Environmental Considerations

- Wind/Dust impacts to trees, crops and bees
- Noise impacts on bees and bee pollination
- Noise impacts on dairy cows and milk production
- Proximity of pesticide spraying (including aerial) to tracks and related train structures
- Pesticide application timing, proximity to train ROW, and duration
- Minerals – gas and oil wells – on farm property (Kern County)

Agricultural Operations

- Equipment movement (crop dusters and equipment movement) and related loss in efficiency and increased operational costs
- Weed management from adjacent (split) parcels
- Pest management (from train travelers)
- Protection and/or relocation, as well as ongoing maintenance of, existing water/irrigation systems, pumps, and wells
- Permitting difficult to acquire (e.g. County and State water permits, County and State air quality permits, Permitting for dairy facilities)
- Air quality regulations and PM10 – farming operations filing for Conservation Management Plans and the additional costs changed farming operations due to train

The issues listed above will be expanded upon and perhaps added to by the Agricultural Working Group.

Agricultural Working Group Structure

Expectations and Ground Rules

The Agricultural Working Group is intended to address key issues raised by the agricultural community relative to the High-Speed Train project. Working groups are not a forum for discussions about the merits of a High-Speed Train system in California, or the project in general. Working group members must be respectful of one another, address the problem at hand, and work cooperatively.

Public Engagement in the Agricultural Working Group Process

Meetings of the Agricultural Working Group will be held in closed working sessions. However, all progress and determinations made by the working group will be presented to the Authority Board of Directors, and public comment on the working group progress will be taken during the monthly Board of Directors meeting.