CALIFORNIA High-Speed Rail Authority

California High-Speed Rail
BRIEFING: January 21, 2026 Agenda Item #2

TO: Board Members

FROM: Chair Richards and Board Member Anthony Williams

DATE: January 21, 2026

RE: CEO Performance Criteria – Year Two

Summary

The Board has the authority to pay the Authority's executive director a recruitment differential in addition to his salary. The Board approved a one-time payment equal to $25,000 at the end of his first year of service and has the authority to pay a second $25,000 recruitment differential at the end of his second year of service if additional performance metrics are met. The California Exempt Salary Schedule, which provides the above authority, makes this payment a flat rate payment, and does not give permission to pay a pro-rata share of the recruitment differential to the executive director.

This action item is to allow the Board to adopt criteria for year two of the recruitment differential, which will then be applied to the executive director's performance after his second year in position to evaluate whether the second payment should be made.

Background and Proposed Criteria

Ian Choudri assumed his position as executive director of the Authority on September 16, 2024, and will be eligible for the second $25,000 recruitment differential payment on September 16, 2026.

To assist with determining the appropriate metrics to measure the executive director's success in the position, the Board Chair formed a subcommittee made up of himself and Board Member Williams to determine a set of criteria. That subcommittee recommends the following performance criteria to determine whether the executive director's work for the twelve months ending September, 2026, is to the satisfaction of the Authority and therefore whether the executive director will be eligible to receive a one-time payment equal to $25,000 at the end of his second year of service:

Legislative and Administrative Actions
Actively support the progress of the following legislative and administrative actions: • Utility Relocation Streamlining/Third-Party Management • Prioritized System for Right-Of-Way Court Cases • Boosting Land Use Authority & Value Capture Mechanisms • CEQA Exemption for Clean Power Facilities • Additional Funding/SB 198 Modifications • State Sales Tax Exemption for Cost Optimization • Encroachment Permitting Authority

Procurements and Requests for Expression of Interest
Ensure all possible steps are taken to conclude/advance the following procurements and RFEI: • Trainsets bid evaluation conclusion • Track and Systems award • Private Sector Partner/Co-Development Agreement award • Civil Works Design-Build contracts for 171 miles • Release Clean Energy RFEI • Launch Clean Energy P3 Request for Proposal • Finalize acquisition of all remaining necessary parcels
Construction Milestones
• Prioritize actions to (1) conclude CP1 and CP2-3 by the end of 2026, and (2) complete all remaining civil works structures. • Railhead prepared to receive first materials. • Complete remaining guideway mileage. • Initiate track laying between Madera and Wasco
Leadership and Management
• Maintain responsiveness, coordination, and communication with the Board, state administration leadership, and external public official stakeholders • Drive continuous organizational improvement and high employee performance and retention • Ensure appropriate utilization of Governor's appointees to Authority positions, including involving them in all key decisions and processes related to their roles • Coordinate with the Office of the Governor and CalSTA leadership to develop and implement an updated long-term plan.

Budget and Fiscal Impact

This request to adopt a recruitment differential metric does not in and of itself include an expenditure of Authority funds. If the criteria are adopted, then it is possible that in September 2026, there will be a payment of $25,000 out of the Authority's budget to pay the differential. The funds that would be associated with that payment would be state funds. That request will be consistent with the budget for the executive director salary.

Recommendations

The recommendation is for the Board to approve the above criteria.