August 26, 2026

Stephen Kawa, Chair
Ian Choudri, Chief Executive Officer
California High-Speed Rail Authority
770 L Street, Suite 620
Sacramento, CA 95814

Re: Merced High-Speed Rail Station and Regional Mitigation Plan

Dear Chair Kawa and Chief Executive Officer Choudri:

Thank you for recently meeting at the Authority's Sacramento offices with local, state and federal leaders, including Congressman Adam Gray, to discuss the proposed relocation of the Merced high-speed rail station. We appreciate your willingness to engage directly with our region about this consequential decision.

We also want to recognize State Senator Anna Caballero and Assemblymember Esmeralda Soria for their advocacy on behalf of the region. As the City of Merced and Merced County's current state legislative representatives, their continued involvement will be essential to reaching an agreement with the state.

The City of Merced and Merced County have supported California high-speed rail for nearly four decades. That commitment has been sustained by generations of regional leaders, including Jim Costa, Gary Condit, Dennis Cardoza, Barbara Matthews, Cathleen Galgiani, and Adam Gray. Our region has repeatedly defended the project, secured funding for its development, and accepted the responsibility of serving as the system's northern terminus.

The state's longstanding commitment has been to construct a combined station in downtown Merced connecting high-speed rail, Amtrak San Joaquins, now branded as Gold Runner, and Altamont Corridor Express (ACE) service. The Legislature reinforced that effort in Senate Bill 198, which defined the state-funded Merced-to-Bakersfield segment as including a new combined station in downtown Merced with connections to Amtrak and ACE. The City, County, and surrounding communities subsequently made transportation, land-use, infrastructure, and redevelopment decisions under the presumption that these obligations would be upheld.

That is why in 2017, the region helped secure passage of Senate Bill 1 after the state committed $400 million to extend ACE service toward Merced and $100 million for the Campus Parkway project. The Campus Parkway funding was delivered, and three segments have been constructed, but the connection to UC Merced and the larger Merced Loop system remains incomplete.

Despite this progress, the promised ACE service has not been delivered. The San Joaquin Regional Rail Commission has now placed the southern ACE expansion in a second-priority program without sufficient funding or a committed schedule for reaching Merced.

At the same time, the Authority's 2026 Business Plan identifies Mission Avenue in southeast Merced as the proposed station location. Moving the station would eliminate the planned combined downtown connection among high-speed rail, Amtrak and ACE, while creating substantial new infrastructure and connectivity needs.

The City and County remain aligned in their position that Merced must be included in Segment 1, Phase 1 of the high-speed rail project. Our participation in discussions about the Mission Avenue location should not be interpreted as support for the relocation or as a waiver of the state's existing commitments to Merced. We are prepared to evaluate a different station location, but relocation and mitigation must be negotiated, funded, and approved together.

We therefore request that the Authority convene a meeting with all of the state, regional and local entities necessary to develop a binding Merced Regional Transportation and Station Mitigation Plan. Participants should include:

- Governor Gavin Newsom's office
- California Department of Finance
- California State Transportation Agency
- California Department of Transportation
- California High-Speed Rail Authority
- San Joaquin Regional Rail Commission
- San Joaquin Joint Powers Authority
- City of Merced
- County of Merced
- Merced County Association of Governments
- University of California, Merced
- Congressman Adam Gray
- State Senator Anna Caballero
- Assemblymember Esmeralda Soria

The mitigation plan should address, at a minimum:

- Completion of the Campus Parkway and Merced Loop transportation system necessary to connect the proposed station with downtown Merced, UC Merced, the future medical school, Atwater and Castle Commerce Center.
- Widening State Route 99 through Merced and Atwater from four to six lanes.
- Protection and full use of the state's Inland Port investment at Castle Commerce Center.
- Mitigation for the loss of the planned downtown intermodal station and the resulting effects on downtown investment, redevelopment and economic activity.
- A formal accounting of the original $400 million ACE commitment, including how those funds were used and what resources remain available for service to Merced.
- A determination of whether and how ACE and Amtrak services will connect to the proposed Mission Avenue station.
- Public safety, water, sewer, transportation, planning, economic development and other infrastructure needs identified by the City and County.
- Specific funding sources, responsible agencies, and enforceable implementation schedules for each agreed-upon project.

Any effort to relocate the station must proceed concurrently with the development and approval of this mitigation plan. The Authority should not seek legislative changes, make a final station decision, or take irreversible actions affecting the downtown location before the mitigation agreement is complete. The final agreement should identify the projects and funding commitments, designate the agencies responsible for delivery, establish enforceable schedules, and specify any necessary legislative or budget actions.

The City of Merced and Merced County have been committed partners in the high-speed rail project for decades. If the state now determines that a different station location is necessary, it must also accept responsibility for the transportation, economic, and infrastructure consequences of that decision. Relocation and mitigation must be treated as one coordinated state action, not as separate processes occurring on different timelines.

Thank you again for your engagement with our regional leaders. We look forward to working with you, Governor Newsom's administration, Congressman Gray, Senator Caballero, and Assemblymember Soria to convene this process and complete an enforceable mitigation agreement before the end of the year.

Sincerely,

Matt Serratto
Mayor
City of Merced

Josh Pedrozo
Supervisor, District Two
County of Merced

Sarah Boyle
Mayor Pro Tempore
City of Merced

Shane Smith
City Council, District 4
City of Merced

cc:
Governor Gavin Newsom
Congressman Adam Gray
State Senator Anna Caballero
Assemblymember Esmeralda Soria
California Department of Finance
California State Transportation Agency
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California High-Speed Rail Authority Board of Directors
San Joaquin Regional Rail Commission
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