

June 15, 2010

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Madera County Board of Supervisors,
400 4th St.
Madera, Ca. 93637

I would like to urge the Board to support only the Freeway 99/Union Pacific alignment alternative for the high speed rail. I am a farmer in the area of Avenue 10 and Road 32 who could be drastically affected by the Santa Fe Proposal. Even if my property is not affected, my farming neighbors could have their properties heavily impacted. Following are some of the reasons that the Santa Fe alignment is so bad.

1. The 'crossovers' from the Santa Fe to the Southern Pacific tracks cuts diagonally across farm properties. This route is not following an existing transportation corridor. Such diagonal geometry affects farms dramatically—far beyond the 100' swath that the rail proposes. Farmers will be forced to maintain roadways on each side of the rail tracks to provide turning room for farm equipment. Labor time will be increased on the ranches as turning at row ends involves more time than most people realize. Some additional land will be left fallow, because when row lengths drop below a minimum length it simply isn't practical to farm them (triangular shaped properties are really inefficient to farm). Irrigation systems and irrigation sets will be drastically affected.
2. Smaller county roadways will most likely not have crossings installed. How is a farmer whose property has been cut by the rail going to move equipment safely and efficiently between the newly separated portions of his farm? I use a 15' wide disc, and really think using the highly traveled avenues and roads which will have crossings installed for moving my equipment is dangerous (in my case Ave 9 which also is the access to Valley Children's Hospital from Freeway 99).
3. Farmers need to spray their crops. Bringing the public into the middle of my pistachio orchards when I am spraying with an air blast sprayer concerns me. Again, the effect on my farming would reach far beyond the 100' swath that the rail authority envisions.
4. I have a farm on the northern edge of Madera County located on Avenue 28 about 1 ½ miles east of the Santa Fe tracks on the Chowchilla River and Ash Slough. Wild life abounds in this area. We have deer following the river down from the foothills. Eagles abound. A mountain lion is a nearby resident. Enough natural areas remain on both sides of the Santa Fe tracks that I'm sure this wildlife continues to follow the rivers westward. I'm sure the HSR would require the construction of fences that would impair the travel of wildlife.

The freeway 99 corridor is an existing transportation route that has already experienced the 'winnowing out' of minor roads and avenues being cut off from crossing the freeway and the Southern Pacific tracks. I purchased my farm properties for the purpose of farming, and made sure that I did not develop my ranches in the path of development. My neighbors likewise are farmers as an occupation; none of us purchased our land for the purpose of profiting from the expansion of urban areas. Farming areas should remain farms!

I also own property adjacent to the Southern Pacific tracks on the east side of Freeway 99. I have already been contacted by the rail authority asking permission to pass onto my property to do an environmental impact assessment. If the Freeway 99 alignment is chosen, I will lose two or three acres of my ranch. While I prefer not to give up acreage, the land that would be taken would entail entire rows, and is upwind from my farm. The effect on my farming, and that of my neighbors, would be limited to the lost acreage only. The existing freeway and railroad are already heavily used transportation corridors, and adding the high speed rail to what already exists would cause very little disruption, and is clearly a far better alternative for the rail.

The Board of Supervisors is the only governmental voice of the rural areas of Madera County, and I strongly urge the members of the board to protect Madera County's 'farm belt' from damage. I would also point out that Freeway 99 currently divides Madera County into 'east of the freeway' and 'west of the freeway' because of the number of roads closed off by the freeway. Utilizing the A-1 alignment would divide our county yet again. Please protect our county by endorsing the A-2 (Union Pacific alignment), the only the HRS route that adheres to existing transportation corridors.

Sincerely,

Gerald W. Cederquist