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California High Speed Rail Authority
925 L Street, Suite 1425
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Dear Commissioners:

The University of California, Merced, appreciated the opportunity to participate in the scoping session conducted by the California High Speed Rail Authority on October 8, 2009, in Merced. This letter will formally transmit our comments related to the information conveyed during the scoping session.

We strongly support the development of high speed rail, particularly the service segments that entail a north-south and east-west connecting hub in Merced. In fact, the high speed rail system is essential to the successful implementation of the campus long range multi-modal transportation plan.

The campus is concerned about the newly proposed northern and southern alternative routes displayed at the scoping session, both of which are inconsistent with the route embraced by the voters of the state in passing Proposition 1A. The voter endorsed route runs from the San Jose area to the Central Valley, in close alignment with State Highway 152. The route described in Proposition 1A also represents the shortest distance between the San Jose and Merced hubs and it is the shortest, straightest and most direct path of the alternative routes. Both of these factors are critical to the operational efficiency of the system.

The voter-endorsed route also is preferable from an economic standpoint. It presents the opportunity to minimize capital costs in construction and to provide a lower cost approach for maintenance by providing access off of an existing highway and minimizing right-of-way acquisition costs. It also would provide a ready-made major roadway that could be used to efficiently transport the workforce, equipment, and materials needed for construction of the high speed rail segment. The newly raised northern and southern routes represent vastly more costly alternatives.

October 19, 2009

Page 2

With respect to environmental resources, the campus recently obtained a U.S. Clean Water Act (CWA) Section 404 permit from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. The multi-year permit process included development of an EIS/EIR and Biological Opinion. The granting of the U.S. CWA Section 404 permit was necessary to allow for the full development of UC Merced's campus. An underlying principle embraced by the University during this process was the importance of balancing and minimizing the impacts to both environmental resources and agricultural land, where such impacts could not be avoided. Should the Commission wish to consider this approach, we believe that the route embraced by the voters best encompasses this principle in comparison to the other alternatives.

By contrast, the new northern and southern alternatives represent lengthier routes, would disproportionately impact valuable farmland, and result in greater construction costs, given the longer distances to traverse and the lack of an adjacent highway that could ensure efficiency in moving workers, materials and equipment. Moreover, through the development of the UC Merced "Conservation Strategy", we are aware that the southern-most alternative route would disturb significant San Joaquin kit fox habitat.

The UC Merced campus ultimately will grow to a 25,000 student enrollment level and the need for an efficient transit system linkage between other major regions of California will be paramount. To date, the UC Merced student body is drawn in essentially equal proportions from the northern, southern and central valley regions of the state. The campus believes that this enrollment pattern will continue and we envision significant ridership of the high speed rail system by students, staff and faculty. For example, high speed rail would be expected to open a more economical route to securing a UC education by enabling students to commute to the campus for classes from their homes in other parts of the state. This would extend access for students seeking a UC education and would also expand job opportunities, especially for knowledge based industry seeking to collaborate with the campus.

The UC Merced campus continues to endorse the east-west route in near proximity to state highway 152, as approved by the state's voters. I will be glad to respond to any questions that you might have.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment.

Cordially,



Steve Kang
Chancellor