

APPENDIX 3.12-B

Effects on School District Funding and Transportation Bus Routes

TECHNICAL MEMORANDUM

Merced to Fresno Section
**Effects on School District Funding and
Transportation Bus Routes**

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1.0 Introduction

This memorandum describes potential impacts on school district funding as a result of (1) a reduction of students and (2) the loss of property tax collections to the school districts in the California High-Speed Train (HST) Merced to Fresno Section due to property acquisitions. The memorandum also addresses the potential impacts on school district transportation from the construction and operation of the HST Project.

1.1 Methodology and Definitions

The analysis for this technical memorandum consisted of reviewing the proposed HST alternatives and HMF sites in relation to school district boundaries and quantitatively assessing the direct land use impacts, using a geographical information system (GIS). It assesses whether the HST Project would result in impacts on school district funding as a result of loss of students due to residential property acquisition and relocations and/or the loss of property taxes also due to property acquisitions for the HST Project. The analysis in this memorandum only addresses public school districts.

The analysis is based on the number of residential displacements located within the construction footprint of the HST alternatives, compared to the number of (1) residential properties and vacant parcels available for sale and (2) foreclosure residential properties within each school district boundary, to determine if there is available replacement property. The potential loss of property taxes as a result of property acquisition is based upon the direct impacts stemming from acquisition. The acquisition of any properties for the HST Project results in direct land use impacts. These impacts occur when the project permanently converts the existing land uses to a transportation-related use, reducing the area available within the jurisdictions and resulting in those properties no longer providing any property tax revenue. The analysis then determines if the potential loss of property taxes with and without the HST Project results in any negative impacts as it relates to school district funding. The analysis also qualitatively assesses whether there are impacts related to transportation of the students as a result of construction and operation of the HST Project.

The loss of students from any school district is based upon the total residential displacements within each district, even though not every residential property is likely to contain at students.

To determine impacts on school district transportation, the analysis included a review of the potential roadway closures and the construction of new roadway crossings of the HST Project. In some cases, these road changes may require altering bus routes.

1.2 Significance

Significant effects occur when an HST and/or heavy maintenance facility (HMF) alternative results in one or more of the following impacts:

- Reduction in property tax collections as a result of reduction of land or decrease in property values that would reduce the number of students at a school (which would negatively affect the school district funding).
- Relocation of a large number of residences that would negatively affect the school districts funding source.
- Loss of access or alternative routing that increases costs for school district transportation services.

2.0 Existing Conditions

This section provides information on the school districts, school district transportation, and school district funding within the study area.

2.1 School Districts

There are 12 school districts located within the study area (Table 3.12-B-1) and all of the HST alternatives travel through at least a portion of most of the districts. The BNSF Alternative is the only one to travel through the Le Grand Union Elementary District and only the Ave 21 Wye, with all HST alternatives, travels through the Alview-Dairyland Union Elementary District. Table 3.12-B-1 only includes information on public school districts because these are the districts that would be affected by property acquisition. The HMF sites are either located within school districts in Merced or Madera counties.

The public school districts in the study area have school district boundaries for elementary, middle, and high schools. Within the cities of Merced, Madera, and Fresno, the transportation corridors of SR 99 and the UPRR form the boundaries for many of the elementary and middle schools. Appendix 3.12-C, Children’s Health and Safety Risk Assessment, provides information on the school boundaries for the school districts in the study area.

Table 3.12-B-1
 School Districts within HST Alternatives

School District	County
Merced City School District	Merced
Merced Union High School District	Merced
Weaver Union Elementary	Merced
Plainsburg Union Elementary	Merced
Le Grand Union Elementary	Merced
Le Grand Union High	Merced
Chowchilla Elementary	Madera
Chowchilla Union High	Madera
Alview-Dairyland Union Elementary	Madera
Madera Unified	Madera
Central Unified	Fresno
Fresno Unified	Fresno
Source: Unified School District Files (2010).	

2.1.1 School District Transportation

Within the school districts in the urban areas of the cities of Merced, Madera, and Fresno, the existing transportation corridors form many of the school boundaries and many of the students, especially the

younger students, do not need to cross these transportation corridors to get to and from school. Outside of the urban areas, the boundaries for many of the schools are quite large and therefore many of these students either use district-provided transportation, are driven to school, or drive themselves if old enough. Each school district typically has distance requirements for the students that need to be met in order to ride the bus. Districts provide transportation to students under the following general requirements:

- Kindergarten to grades 5 or 6 (depending on the district): a minimum distance of a 1-mile radius from the school site
- Grade 5 or 6 (depending on the district) to 8: a minimum distance of a 1.5-mile radius from the school site
- All other students: a distance of a 2-mile radius from the school site

In some areas, there can be safety concerns with at-grade crossings of the existing railroad crossings. Additionally, some of the school districts in unincorporated Merced County do not have direct access points across SR 99 and buses need to take long routes to pickup and drop-off students.

2.2 School District Funding

Funding for California's public schools (K through 12) comes primarily from the state budget (60%), with local property taxes (23%) and the federal government (10%) as the other significant contributors. Each district has its own particular combination of federal, state, and local sources for funding; the amount varies, but the majority of the school districts' funding is received through revenue limits. Each district receives a dollar amount per student, called the revenue limit, which is measured by the average daily attendance. Revenue limit is funded by local property taxes and state funds. A percentage of the property taxes generated by real property within each district is assigned to the district, with the difference made up in state funds (mainly consisting of monies from income, sales, corporate, and capital gains taxes). If the district collects more property tax revenue than its entitlement (base revenue limit multiplied by the number of students), the district can retain these excess taxes. The revenue limit can only be increased by state legislation and any increase in property taxes results in the state's proportion decreasing; however, if the property taxes fill up or exceed the revenue limit and no state aid is required, then the districts can keep the excess property tax revenues; this is also known as basic aid. The federal government also provides funding to the school districts; typically, this categorical funding is distributed to the districts based upon the needs of the children and special programs. School districts can also raise funds for specific purposes (i.e., building new facilities) by issuing bonds, which need the approval of two-thirds of local voters (or 55% if certain conditions are met).

Public schools across California are facing difficult budget issues, and in the 2011–2012 school year Kindergarten through 12 funding is anticipated to be substantially reduced for the third year in a row. As such, school districts are struggling to hold onto the funds they currently receive (EdSource 2011). The economic recession has affected housing markets in the study area, resulting in a decrease in property values, which has in turn resulted in lower property tax revenues for the counties and has negatively affected school districts. In addition, the recession has resulted in a large number of foreclosures, which have also negatively affected the school districts, as property taxes are not collected on these properties until they are sold. These foreclosures can also result in negative effects on the surrounding properties and negatively affect property values, which can further reduce the property taxes collected. These factors, combined with decreases in state funding, have resulted in budget issues for school districts.

3.0 Environmental Consequences

This section describes the potential impacts of the three HST alternatives and the HMF sites and analyzes whether these impacts would result in any significant impacts on school districts related to funding and transportation.

3.1 No Project Alternative

The No Project Alternative includes planned projects that will likely be implemented by the year 2035. Chapter 2, Alternatives, provides a complete description of the No Project Alternative. Section 3.19, Cumulative Impacts, discusses foreseeable future projects, including shopping centers, large residential developments, quarries, and expansion of SR 99 between Merced and Fresno to provide full-access interchanges and additional auxiliary lanes by 2020.

Under the No Project Alternative, there are conversions of the existing land uses to transportation related uses, so there is potential for funding impacts on school districts. Even though the total property acquisition or number of residential displacements acquired is not known, the No Project Alternative is not anticipated to result in any significant impacts on school district funding. No significant impacts on transportation are expected as a result of the full-access interchanges and auxiliary lane expansion of SR 99, and improvements could benefit school district transportation. Although the No Project Alternative is not expected to result in any significant impacts on school districts, it does not provide the same opportunities with respect to the development around the stations and increased economic vitality that could occur in the region, resulting in increases in property taxes and sales taxes that would be beneficial to the school districts.

3.2 HST Alternatives and HMF Alternatives

3.2.1 Overview

All of the HST alternatives and HMF alternative require residential displacements and relocations that could result in students moving to another school district. This could result in a decrease in the average daily attendance and changes to the revenue limit that negatively affect school district funding. Within most of the school districts, there are more properties available for sale than will be acquired by the HST Project, providing a number of choices for relocations within the school district and likely no significant impacts on revenue limits. For those school districts where there may not be enough properties available for sale, there are residential foreclosures and a mitigation measure identified in Section 3.12.7 (So-MM#6) that includes moving a residential structure to another location within the same property. Combined with the properties available for sale, there are enough residential locations that no significant impacts on revenue limit for these school districts are anticipated.

New transportation projects require new rights-of-way and result in the loss of taxable properties. The HST alternatives for the Merced to Fresno Section would require direct land use conversions of about 0.05% of the total land area, which do not signify a significant impact within the regional context of Merced, Madera, and Fresno counties. Even though the school district areas are much smaller, the conversion of land is not expected to significantly reduce property tax funding to schools because of the potential for increased economic vitality with the HST Project.

Access across the HST right-of-way will be provided approximately every 2 miles, and the Authority will work with the local jurisdictions to provide access as needed. New overpasses would also cross existing railroad corridors and SR 99 in a number of locations. This would be beneficial to a number of the school districts by improving safety and potentially resulting in improvements in access, especially in the larger rural school districts, as these new overpasses would remove current barriers to access.

3.2.2 Property Acquisitions

As described in Section 2.2, School District Funding, the economic recession has negatively affected the housing market in the Central Valley, resulting in budget constraints for all schools. Where the HST Project relocates residential properties and possibly relocates children attending the local school, there is a potential impact on revenue should those children move to another school district. All property acquisitions will receive just compensation. Refer to Appendix 3.12-A, Relocation Assistance Documents, for information on relocation assistance provided. In addition, refer to Section 3.12.7, Socioeconomics, Communities, and Environmental Justice, for information on mitigation measures that will be implemented as part of the HST Project including the development of a relocation mitigation plan.

Table 3.12-B-1 provides information on the potential residential displacements by school districts and representative information on the number of homes and vacant residential parcels available for sale in each district as of January 2012 (Trulia, Zillow, Realty Trak 2012). Within Merced County and a portion of Madera County, the districts are not unified and therefore there is an overlapping of the district boundaries. For example, the boundary for the Merced Union High School District is the same as the combined boundaries for the Merced City School District and Weaver Union Elementary. Within the cities of Merced, Chowchilla, Madera, and Fresno, there are a greater number of residential properties available for sale when compared to the property acquisitions required in each district. For all of the HST alternatives with the Ave 21 Wye connection, the Alview-Dairyland Union Elementary districts currently do not have enough properties for sale to address the number of residential properties that would be acquired. Refer to Attachment A, School District Impacts, for figures that illustrate the district boundaries and the residential displacements and available properties within each district.

The properties identified for sale do not include the existing foreclosures located within the study area. The exact number of foreclosures is difficult to track, but based on existing information there are over 300 available in Merced County, 250 in Madera County, and 300 in Fresno County. For the most part, the foreclosures are primarily within the urban areas of Merced, Chowchilla, Madera, and Fresno, but there are a number in the rural areas as well. By including these properties for the areas where there are currently not enough properties for sale there is no longer a gap.

Table 3.12-B-2
 Residential Property Acquisitions within School Districts within HST and HMF Alternatives

School District	Properties Available For Sale	HST Alternative ^a			
		UPRR/ SR 99	BNSF	Hybrid	HMF
Merced County					
Merced City School District	110	43	43	43	35 - Castle Commerce Center
Weaver Union Elementary	24	2	7 to 9	2	0
Merced Union High School District	110	45	50 to 52	45	35 - Castle Commerce Center
Plainsburg Union Elementary	5	0 to 1	1 to 5	0 to 1	2 – Harris-DeJager
Le Grand Union Elementary	16	0	9 to 22	0	0
Le Grand Union High	21	0 to 1	11 to 27	0 to 1	2 – Harris-DeJager

School District	Properties Available For Sale	HST Alternative ^a			
		UPRR/ SR 99	BNSF	Hybrid	HMF
Madera County					
Chowchilla Elementary	68	20 to 34	12 to 32	23 to 40	5 – Fagundes 2 - Kojima
Alview-Dairyland Union Elementary	6	0 to 12	0 to 10	0 to 12	0
Chowchilla Union High	74	20 to 36	22 to 32	23 to 52	5 – Fagundes 2 - Kojima
Madera Unified	221	81 to 85	82 to 83	66 to 69	4 – Gordon-Shaw
Fresno County					
Central Unified	75	5 to 6	5	5 to 6	0
Fresno Unified	75	45	45	45	0
Total^{b,c}	830	195 to 228	215 to 244	186 to 213	2 to 35
<p>^a A range of displacements is noted when the total number of displacements depends on the wye or design option selected.</p> <p>^b Totals considered that the properties displaced in the Merced Union High District are the same properties as those displaced in the Weaver Union Elementary District and the Merced City School District. Properties displaced in Le Grand Union High District are the same as those displaced in Le Grand Union Elementary District and the Plainsburg Union Elementary District. Properties displaced in the Chowchilla Union High District are the same as those displaced in the Alview-Dairyland Union Elementary District and the Chowchilla Elementary District.</p> <p>^c Totals were calculated for feasible HST alignment connections into only.</p> <p>Source: Authority and FRA (2012), Trulia. (2012), Zillow (2012), RealtyTrak (2012).</p>					

3.2.2.1 UPRR/SR 99 Alternative

The UPRR/SR 99 Alternative would result in 195 to 228 residential displacements within the school districts, depending on design option and wye. The lowest number of displacements is associated with the West Chowchilla design option with the Ave 24 Wye, and the highest, with the East Chowchilla design option with the Ave 21 Wye. There are enough replacement properties available for sale unless the connection is to the Ave 21 Wye. With this connection, there are not enough properties available for sale in the Alview-Dairyland Union Elementary district; however, with the purchase of foreclosures or the implementation of mitigation, the impact is minimized.

3.2.2.2 BNSF Alternative

The BNSF Alternative would result in 215 to 244 residential displacements within the school districts. The lowest number of displacements is associated with the Mission Avenue East Le Grand design option and Ave 21 Wye. The highest number of displacements is associated with the Mariposa Avenue design option and the Ave 24 Wye. The BNSF Alternative is the only alternative that travels through the Le Grand Union Elementary boundary. There are not enough properties for sale to within this district to replace those acquired if the Mission Ave or Mariposa design options are selected because of the displacements in and around the unincorporated community of Le Grand. The same issue occurs within the Le Grand Union High School district. With a connection to the Ave 21 Wye, the issues of enough properties for sale are

the same in the Alview-Dairyland Union Elementary district as those described under the UPRR/SR 99 Alternative.

3.2.2.3 Hybrid Alternative

The Hybrid Alternative would result in 186 to 213 residential displacements within the school districts. The lowest number of displacements is associated with the connection to the Ave 24 Wye and the highest with the connection to the Ave 21 Wye. With a connection to the Ave 21 Wye, the issues are the same in the Alview-Dairyland Union Elementary district as those described under the UPRR/SR 99 Alternative.

3.2.2.4 HMF Alternatives

The Castle Commerce Center HMF site results in the highest number of residential displacements; these are associated with the guideway from downtown Merced to the Castle Commerce Center HMF site. The other HMF sites range between 2 to 5 residential acquisitions. For all HMF site locations, there are more properties available for sale in each school district than would be acquired and no significant impacts are anticipated.

3.2.2.5 Property Acquisitions Summary

Because there are enough properties available for sale in most of the school districts and through the availability of the purchase of foreclosed properties or implementation of mitigation measure So-MM#6 to move the residential building on the same parcel, no significant impacts are expected on the revenue streams for the school districts.

3.2.3 Property Tax Revenues

3.2.3.1 Potential Effects Common to all HST Alternatives and HMF Alternatives

The effects with regards to property tax revenues are the same for all HST alternatives and HMF alternatives. Private property that is acquired by the Authority for the project would be removed from the local property tax rolls. This will result in a net reduction of local property tax revenues available to school districts.

Property tax revenues are likely to decrease whether or not the residential property or business owner relocates within the same jurisdiction. This is because the project will result in a net decrease in the number of properties on the pertinent county's tax roll. Accordingly, any revenue reductions could affect the school districts. The impact of property tax revenue reductions is estimated to range from 1.3% of the FY2009/2010 county general fund in Merced County, 0.1% in Madera County, and 0.6% in Fresno County (refer to Table 3.12-16 in Section 3.12.5, Socioeconomics, Communities, and Environmental Justice, for complete information on the property tax impacts for the alternatives). However, this does not mean that the school districts per-pupil revenue would decrease. As described in the Public Policy Institute of California's *Funding California Schools – The Revenue Limit System* (Public Policy Institute of California 2010):

Under [state] revenue limits each district has a base revenue limit, a dollar amount per pupil. A district's revenue limit entitlement is its base revenue limit multiplied by the number of students attending its schools. The number of students is measured by the district's average daily attendance (ADA). The revenue limit entitlement is funded by local property taxes and state aid. A percentage of the property tax revenue generated by real property located within a district is assigned to the district; state aid makes up the difference between a district's entitlement and its property tax revenue." (Public Policy Institute of California 2010)

For the proposed HMF sites, there would only be impacts in Merced and Madera counties, where the proposed sites are located. Because the HMF sites would be provided at no cost or would include other

incentives, the analysis did not include the impact of lost property tax revenues. The information in Table 3.12-16 only identifies the potential lost property tax revenues associated with additional property requirements. Of the five potential HMF sites, the Castle Commerce Center site would have the greatest property tax impact because the guideway connection to the Downtown Merced Station would require additional property acquisitions.

As described in Section 3.18.5, Regional Growth, the HST alternatives would create employment and business opportunities and would attract higher-wage jobs in all three counties in comparison to the No Project Alternative. The HST alternatives would only slightly raise the projected population and employment growth beyond growth planned under the No Project Alternative. Merced and Fresno would realize a higher rate because of the station locations, but even Madera County is forecasted to grow as well. The HST-induced growth would provide additional population, increasing the number of students in the school districts and providing new sources of property tax revenue, which in turn benefits the school districts in the study area.

In the cities of Merced and Fresno, station area development is expected to increase economic vitality in the downtown areas. There, property tax revenue losses will be somewhat counterbalanced by long-term increases in property value related to new commercial, residential, and mixed-use development in the station areas. These increases would be dependent upon the type and rate of development in the areas around the stations, but would be beneficial for school districts. In addition, the station areas would likely result in increases in other tax revenues that are used to help fund school districts as a result of the increased economic vitality.

There is also the potential for the project to increase the property tax base by generating increases in property values in the region. Although these values cannot be quantified, studies show that the potential exists for the values of residential and commercial properties to increase. Property value increases can result from both the new access to HST and the stations acting as a catalyst for new development and redevelopment in the station area.

The property acquisitions would likely result in a small permanent loss of property tax revenues in all three counties. However, it is possible that these losses could be offset in the future by increased property tax revenues as development on private property around the HST stations might lead to higher values. For example, the construction and operation of an HMF in Merced County or Madera County would result in beneficial impacts on taxes due to increases in sales tax revenue. There is also the possibility of reductions in property values in areas that are not near the HST stations, because of the impacts associated with the HST (e.g., noise and visual impacts). Property values may decrease in areas that are farther from the HST stations but close to the HST guideway, particularly residences close to elevated sections of the guideway. As previously discussed, in the communities of Le Grand, Madera, and Fairmead, there is also the potential for physical deterioration; however, the existing rail corridors have already resulted in areas of degraded buildings and underutilized land in those areas. The loss of property values could result in overall lower property tax revenues, though in most areas, the alternatives are located adjacent to either the UPRR or BNSF railway corridor, and these impacts have already occurred. Outside of the communities, the adjacent land uses are primarily associated with rural agriculture, and few residential or businesses are located nearby. This further minimizes the overall impact of reduced property values because those land uses would not be negatively affected by visual or noise impacts.

Indirect impacts in the form of increased property values and the resulting increase in property tax revenues could occur around the HST stations. The stations would attract commercial and office development and high-density residential development associated transit-oriented development into the surrounding downtown core. Section 3.13, Station Planning, Land Use, and Development, provides additional details on the effects of the HST stations on the downtown areas of Merced and Fresno. The new development would likely result in higher property values in Downtown Merced and Downtown Fresno than would occur under the No Project Alternative.

No significant impacts on school district funding are anticipated, as a result of the potential for increased economic vitality in the station areas and the employment growth in all three counties, which could result in beneficial effects school districts and increases in funding.

3.2.4 School Transportation

3.2.4.1 Construction

In urban areas, elementary and middle school students and buses would not travel over the HST corridor but travel away from it because the existing transportation corridors form boundaries for many of the schools; therefore, no negative impacts are expected. For those students who need to cross and who use school buses, there may be temporary impacts related to school bus detours. For example, in those areas where a new crossing is required, detours would be built first and traffic diverted. After construction is completed, traffic would be diverted back to the new overcrossing. Refer to Section 3.11.5, Safety and Security, for additional information. Prior to construction, a Construction Management Plan will be implemented and include information to address communications, safety controls, and traffic controls to minimize impacts and maintain access. Additionally, a Construction Transportation Plan will be prepared prior to construction to provide information ensuring the safety of school children and advising school districts of construction activities. Refer to Section 3.2, Transportation, for complete information on the Construction Transportation Plan. With the implementation of mitigation, no significant impacts on school transportation are expected during construction.

3.2.4.2 Operation

Roadway modifications may change some access and routing of school buses due to roadway closures, but alternative routes are provided to minimize any impacts. In the urban areas, road closures are not expected to negatively affect those schools within the districts where the HST alternative alignments form the boundary of the schools with the existing transportation corridors, as students would not need to cross the HST corridor. For those that need to cross the HST corridor in the urban areas, the closure of any roadway crossing would not result in any negative impacts because there are other crossings in close proximity and lengthy out of direction travel would not be required. Outside of the urban areas, all of the HST alternatives have roadways that will be closed as a result of the HST Project; however, in many cases, new roadway crossings would be constructed in these locations. If crossings are not constructed in those same locations, then crossings would be provided no more than 2 miles away and, in most cases, no more than 1 mile away. Refer to Section 3.2.5, Transportation, for complete information on the location of roadway closures and new crossings.

The HST alternatives are all grade separated from the existing transportation corridors, so there is no conflict between school buses and the HST trains. Refer to Section 3.11, Safety and Security, for complete information and safety. All of the HST alternatives provide new crossings over existing transportation corridors. The UPRR/SR 99 and Hybrid alternatives include new roadway crossings over SR 99 in unincorporated Merced County where there are currently none. These new crossings could allow for more direct transportation across the SR 99 and UPRR corridors. There are also crossings of the BNSF corridor for the BNSF and Hybrid alternatives in Merced County and Madera County. These overcrossings would remove conflicts with railroads and improve safety and access for buses.

There are no significant impacts expected on school district transportation routing during construction and operation. During operation, there is the potential for beneficial effects because of the roadway crossings improving safety and access.

4.0 References

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5.0 School District Figures

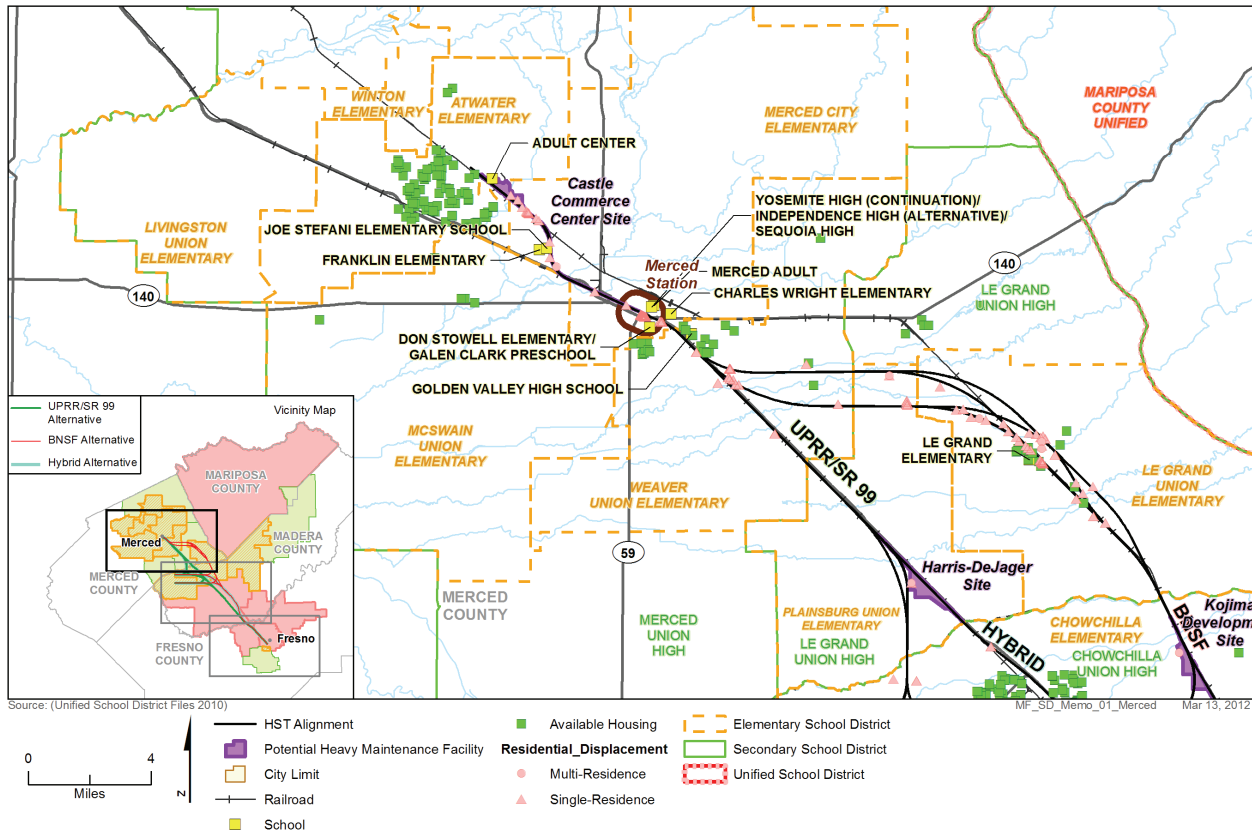


Figure 3.12-B-1
 Merced County School Districts
 (Displacements and Available Properties)

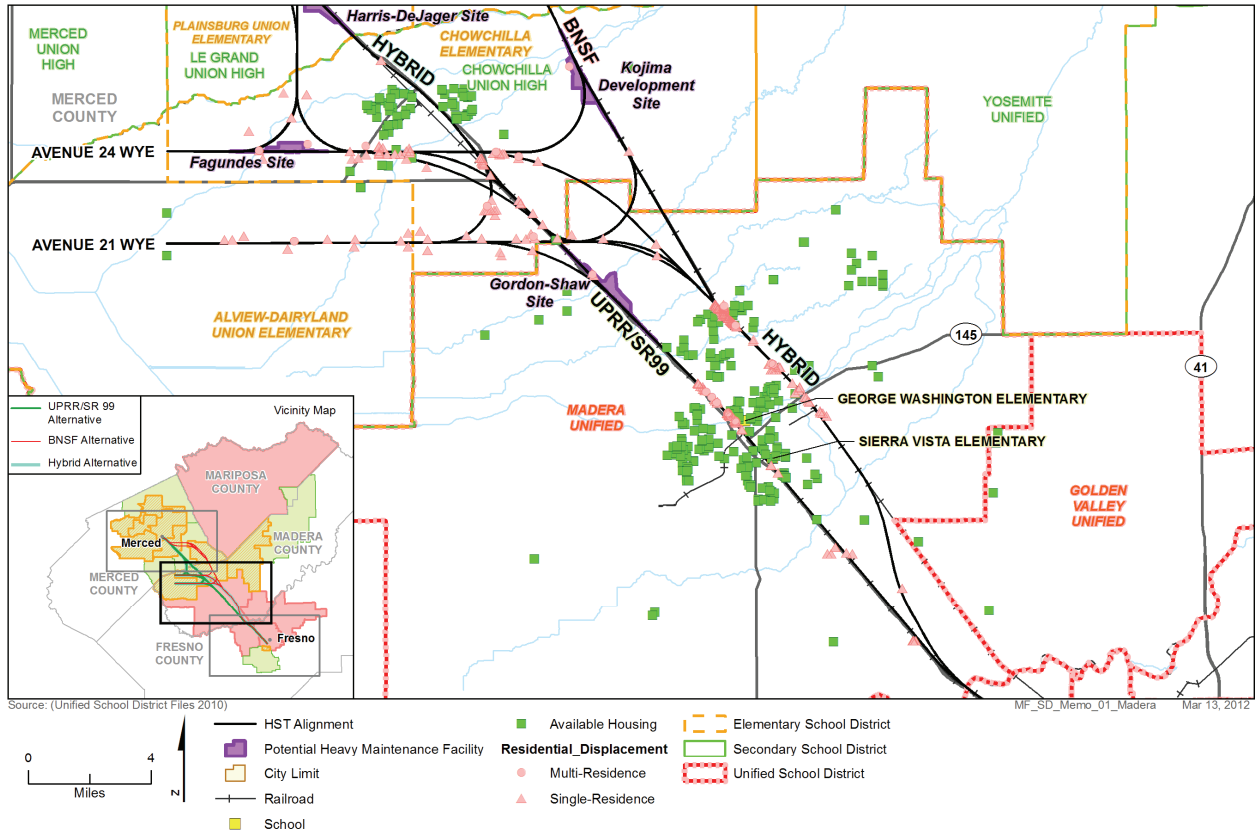


Figure 3.12-B-2
 Madera County
 (Displacements and Available Properties)

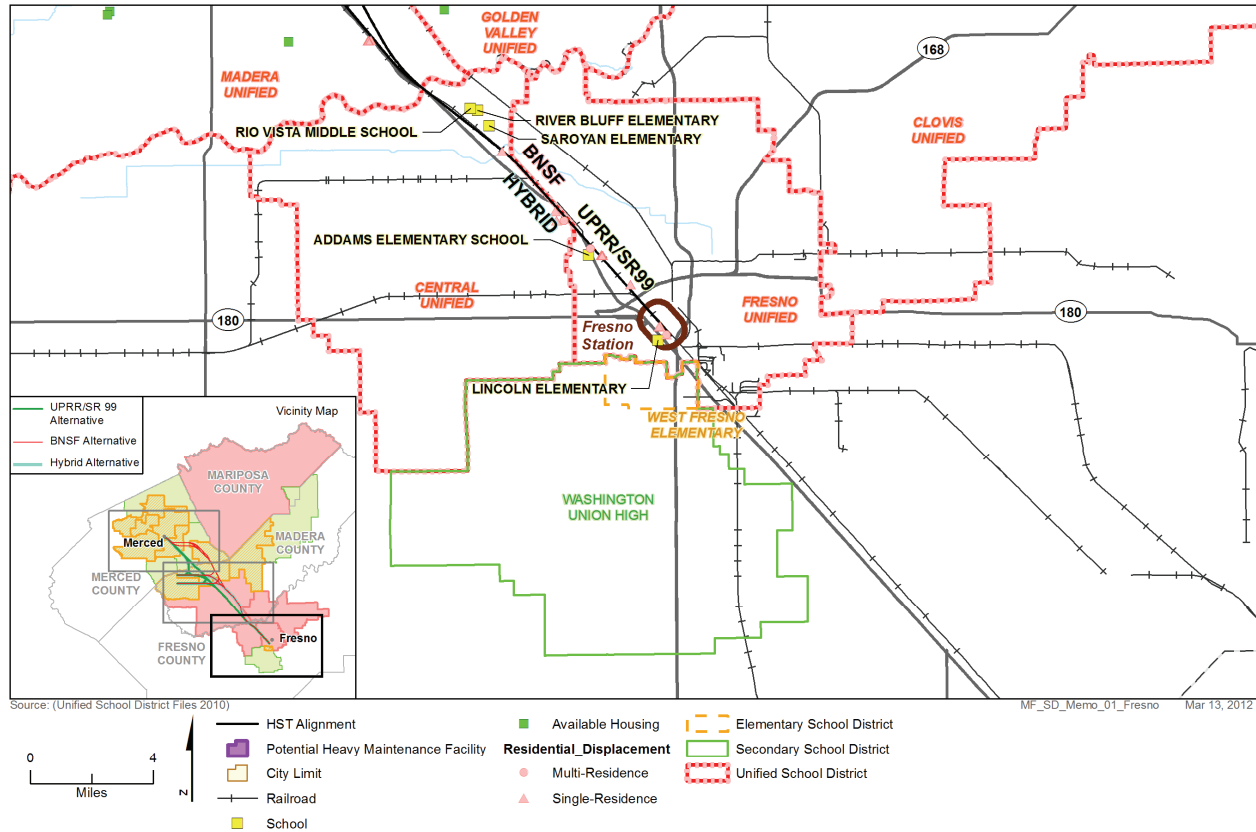


Figure 3.12-B-3
 Fresno County
 (Displacements and Available Properties)