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The California High-Speed Train Project Environmental Impact Report/ Environmental Impact Statement

and

DRAFT

Section 4(f) Statement

Merced to Fresno Section

VOLUME I:

REPORT

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California High-Speed Train: Merced to Fresno Section

Draft Environmental Impact Report/Environmental Impact Statement

and

Draft Section 4(f) Statement

Pursuant to:
California Environmental Quality Act, P.R.C. 21000 et seq.; State of California CEQA Guidelines, California Administrative Code, 15000 et seq.; and National Environmental Policy Act (42 U.S.C. 4332 et seq.) 40 C.F.R. Part 1500 and 64 Fed. Reg. 28545

Prepared by the
California High-Speed Rail Authority
and the
Federal Railroad Administration

With Cooperating Agency:
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers

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Abstract: This document considers, describes and summarizes the environmental impacts of the Merced to Fresno Section High-Speed Train (HST) Project, an approximately 80-mile portion of a larger HST system which is intended to connect to sections traveling west to San Francisco, south to Los Angeles and later, north to Sacramento. The project is designed as a steel-wheel-on-steel-railway completely grade separated from other modes. The need for this project is directly related to the population growth and increased intercity travel demand over the next 20 years and beyond and the increased travel delays and congestion that would result on California's highways and airports. Additionally, the Merced, Madera, and Fresno Counties have limited connectivity with the state's larger urban metropolitan areas. Four alternatives are considered in this Draft EIR/EIS, the No Project Alternative and the three HST alternatives: the UPRR/SR 99, BNSF, and the Hybrid alternatives. Each contains one station in Merced and one in Fresno. The HST in this section has the ability to travel up to 220 mph along the alignment. Potential environmental impacts of the alternatives include displacement of commercial, residential and agricultural properties; community and neighborhood disruption; increase in noise; increase in traffic at each of the stations; impacts on historic and archaeological sites; impacts on parks and recreational resources; visual impacts; impacts on sensitive biological resources and wetlands; and use of energy. Mitigation measures are described to address impacts identified in the Draft EIR/EIS.

This California High-Speed Train (HST) Project Environmental Impact Report/Environmental Impact Statement (EIR/EIS) is being made available to the public in accordance with the California Environmental Quality Act and the National Environmental Policy Act.

Visit the California High-Speed Rail Authority Web Site (www.cahighspeedrail.ca.gov), where you can:

- View and download the Draft EIR/EIS.
- Request a CD-ROM of the Draft EIR/EIS.
- Locate a library near you to review a hardcopy of the Draft EIR/EIS.

Printed copies have been placed in the main public libraries in the following cities and communities: Merced, Chowchilla, Madera, Fresno, Atwater, Fairmead, Le Grand, and Los Banos.

Fact Sheet

Project Name

California High-Speed Train Project, Merced to Fresno Section

Project Description

The California High-Speed Train Project, Merced to Fresno Section, proposes to build and operate an 80-mile portion of a larger high-speed train (HST) system which is intended to connect to sections traveling west to San Francisco, south to Los Angeles, and later north to Sacramento. The project is designed as a steel-wheel-on-steel-railway completely grade-separated from other modes. The need for this project is directly related to the population growth and increased intercity travel demand projected over the next 20 years and beyond and the increased travel delays and congestion that would result on California's highways and at airports. Additionally, Merced, Madera, and Fresno counties currently have limited connectivity with the state's larger urban metropolitan areas.

This Draft Project Environmental Impact Report/Environmental Impact Statement (EIR/EIS) considers four alternatives, including the No Project Alternative and the three HST alternatives: the UPRR/SR 99, BNSF, and the Hybrid alternatives. Each contains one HST station in Merced and one in Fresno. The HST in this section would have the ability to travel up to 220 miles per hour along the alignment. Potential environmental impacts of the alternatives include displacement of commercial, residential, and agricultural properties; community and neighborhood disruption; increase in noise; increase in traffic at each of the stations; impacts on historic and archaeological sites; impacts on parks and recreational resources; visual impacts; impacts on sensitive biological resources and wetlands; and use of energy. Mitigation measures are described to address impacts identified in the Draft Project EIR/EIS.

Joint Lead Agencies

Federal Railroad Administration
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Washington, D.C. 20590

California High-Speed Rail Authority
770 L Street, Suite 800
Sacramento, CA 95814

National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) Lead Agency

The Federal Railroad Administration is the lead agency for NEPA.

Responsible NEPA Official

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California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Lead Agency

The California High-Speed Rail Authority is the lead agency for CEQA.

Responsible CEQA Official

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Document Availability

The Draft EIR/EIS is available online at: http://www.cahighspeedrail.ca.gov/

Printed copies of the Draft EIR/EIS, as well as related appendices and technical reports, are available at the California High-Speed Rail Authority, public libraries, and community centers (see List of Recipients beginning on page 8-1).

Contact Information

To obtain a copy of the environmental documents, contact:

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Permits, Approvals, and Consultations

Federal

- **U.S. Army Corps of Engineers** – Section 404 Permit for Discharge of Dredge or Fill Materials into Waters of the U.S., including wetlands. Also, Section 10 Permit for construction of any structure in or over any Navigable Water of the U.S.
- **U.S. Environmental Protection Agency** – review of Environmental Justice conclusions; General Conformity Determination.
- **National Marine Fisheries Service and US. Fish and Wildlife Service** – Section 7 Endangered Species Act (ESA) Consultation and Marine Mammal Protection Act Consultation.
- **Federal Railroad Administration, in consultation with the California Office of Historic Preservation** and the **Advisory Council on Historic Preservation** – National Historic Preservation Act, Section 106 Consultation.
- **U.S. Department of Transportation –** Section 4(f) Evaluation.

State

- **California Department of Fish and Game** – **California Endangered Species Act (CESA)** permits; Section 1602 Lake and Streambed Alteration Agreement; use of Title 14 lands along the San Joaquin River (Camp Pashayan).
- **California Department of Transportation** – Encroachment permits.
- **California Public Utilities Commission** – approval for construction and operation of railroad crossing of public roads and for construction of new transmission lines and substations.
- **California State Lands Commission –** lease for crossing state sovereign lands.

Regional

- **San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District** – Permits under Rule 201, General Permit Requirements; Rule 403, Fugitive Dust; Rule 442 Architectural Coatings; Rule 902 Asbestos.
- **Regional Water Quality Control Board – Permits u**nder Clean Water Act Section 401 Water Quality Certification; Section 402 National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) Water Discharge Permit; Dewatering Permit (Order No. 98-67); Spill Prevention, Control, and Countermeasures (SPCC) Plan (part of Section 402 process); Stormwater Construction and Operation Permit.
- **Central Valley Flood Protection Board –** Section 408 (flood protection facilities).

Authors and Principal Contributors

Please see List of Preparers in Chapter 9 of the Draft EIR/EIS.

Date Issued

August 2011

Subsequent Environmental Review

After circulation of the Draft EIR/EIS and consideration of comments received, the California High-Speed Rail Authority Board will identify a preferred alternative. Following this action, the Authority and FRA will prepare the Final EIR/EIS. The Final EIR/EIS will document and address comments received on the Draft

EIR/EIS. Following completion of the Final EIR/EIS, the Board will consider certifying the Final EIR/EIS for compliance with CEQA and making a final decision on the project. FRA's decision under NEPA is not final until it certifies the ROD on the Final EIR/EIS. Certification of the ROD is expected in spring 2012.

Preface

What Is This Document?

The California High-Speed Rail Authority (Authority) proposes to construct, operate, and maintain an electric-powered high-speed train (HST) system in California. When completed, the nearly 800-mile HST system will provide new passenger rail service to California's major metropolitan areas and through the counties that are home to more than 90% of the state's population. The Merced to Fresno Section of the California HST System is a critical link connecting the Bay Area HST sections north and south to the rest of the system.

This Project Environmental Impact Report/Environmental Impact Statement (EIR/EIS) is the next step in the environmental process after the development and certification of the *2005 Final Program Environmental Impact Report/Environmental Impact Statement for the Proposed California High-Speed Train System* (referred to hereafter as the Statewide Program EIR/EIS) and the *2008 Bay Area to Central Valley High-Speed Train Final Program Environmental Impact Report/Environmental Impact Statement* (referred to hereafter as the Bay Area to Central Valley Program EIR/EIS) and the *2010 Bay Area to Central Valley Revised Final Program Environmental Impact Report*. The Authority and the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) have prepared this Project EIR/EIS for the Merced to Fresno Section of the California HST System in compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). Because of the highly technical and complex nature of the proposed Merced to Fresno Section of the HST project, this EIR/EIS contains more information than is mandated by either the federal or state statutory and regulatory requirements.

This Project EIR/EIS does the following:

- Describes the HST alternatives and their potential impacts.
- Provides environmental information to assist decision-makers in selecting the project to be built.
- Identifies measures to avoid and minimize impacts, and, when necessary, compensate for adverse impacts.
- Considers cumulative impacts as part of the environmental review process.

How Do I Use This Document?

The purpose of environmental documents prepared under NEPA and CEQA is to disclose information to decision makers and the public. While the science and analysis that supports this Project EIR/EIS is complex, this document is intended for the general public. Every attempt has been made to limit technical terms and the use of acronyms. Where this cannot be avoided, the terms and acronyms are defined the first time they are used.

Volume I of this Project EIR/EIS is organized into 13 chapters and a Summary. Volume II contains technical appendices, and Volume III provides plans and other relevant engineering drawings. For a reader with a limited time to devote to this document, the **Summary** is the place to start. It provides an overview of all of the substantive chapters in this document and includes a table listing the potential environmental impacts at the project level for each environmental resource topic. If the reader begins here but wants more information, the Summary directs the reader where to get details elsewhere in the document.

Chapter 1.0, Project Purpose, Need, and Objectives, explains why the project is proposed and provides a history of the planning process. **Chapter 2.0, Alternatives,** describes the proposed Merced to Fresno Section HST alignment alternatives and design options, HST station alternatives, connections to the Bay Area sections, and heavy maintenance facility alternatives, as well as the No Project Alternative used for purposes of comparison. It contains illustrations and maps and provides a review of construction

activities. These first two chapters help the reader understand what is being analyzed in the remainder of the document.

Chapter 3.0, Affected Environment, Environmental Consequences, and Mitigation Measures is where the reader can find information about the existing transportation, environmental, and social conditions in the area of the proposed project. This chapter provides the findings of the analysis of potential environmental impacts, along with methods to reduce these impacts (called mitigation strategies). Chapter 3 is divided into subsections discussing various environmental resource topics:

- Transportation
- Air Quality and Global Climate Change
- Noise and Vibration
- Electromagnetic Fields and Electromagnetic Interference
- Public Utilities and Energy
- Biological Resources and Wetlands
- Hydrology and Water Resources
- Geology, Soils, and Seismicity
- Hazardous Materials and Waste
- Safety and Security
- Socioeconomics, Communities, and Environmental Justice
- Station Planning, Land Use, and Development
- Agricultural Lands
- Parks, Recreation, and Open Space
- Aesthetics and Visual Quality
- Cultural Resources and Paleontological Resources
- Regional Growth
- Cumulative Impacts

Chapter 4.0, Section 4(f)/Section 6(f) Evaluation summarizes parks, wildlife refuges, and historic properties in accordance with Section 4(f) of the Department of Transportation Act of 1966 and Section 6(f) of the Land and Water Conservation Funds Act. It describes avoidance alternatives and measures to minimize harm to these resources.

Chapter 5.0, Project Costs and Operations, summarizes the estimated capital and operations and maintenance costs for each Merced to Fresno Section alternative evaluated in this Project EIR/EIS, including funding and financial risk.

Chapter 6.0, CEQA/NEPA Decision Process and Other Considerations, summarizes the project's significant adverse environmental effects, the significant adverse environmental effects that cannot be avoided if the project is implemented, and the significant irreversible environmental changes that would occur as a result of the project or irretrievable commitments of resources or foreclosure of future options. Chapter 6 also provides information about identification of the preferred alternative and the least environmentally damaging practicable alternative.

Chapter 7.0, Public and Agency Involvement, contains summaries of coordination and outreach activities with agencies and the general public. **Chapter 8.0, EIR/EIS Distribution,** identifies individuals and organizations informed of the availability of the Project EIR/EIS. **Chapter 9.0, List of Preparers,** provides the names and responsibilities of the authors of the Project EIR/EIS. **Chapter 10.0, References/Sources Used in Document Preparation,** cites the references and contacts used in writing this document. **Chapter 11.0, Glossary of Terms,** provides a definition of certain terms used in the Project EIR/EIS. **Chapter 12.0, Index,** provides a tool to cross-reference major topics used in the Project EIR/EIS. Finally, **Chapter 13.0, Acronyms and Abbreviations,** defines the acronyms and abbreviations used in this document.

Appendices and Technical Reports provide additional details on the project and Draft EIR/EIS process. Technical appendices, included in Volume II, are related to the affected environment and

environmental consequences analyses. These appendices are numbered to match their corresponding environmental elements in Chapter 3, as well as Chapter 2, of the Project EIR/EIS. Detailed technical reports prepared for transportation; air quality and global climate change; noise and vibration; biological resources and wetlands; hydrology and water resources; geology, soils, and seismicity; hazardous wastes/materials; acquisitions and relocations; socioeconomics; aesthetics and visual quality; cultural resources; and paleontological resources; as well as other sections as identified in the Draft EIR/EIS, are available on DVD. Volume III, Alignments and Other Plans, also available on DVD, presents the design drawings, including trackway and roadway crossing design. These documents are also available at www.cahighspeedrail.ca.gov and at locations identified on Chapter 8, EIR/EIS Distribution.

What Happens Next?

Public Review of the Draft EIR/EIS

The Authority and FRA are widely circulating the Draft EIR/EIS to affected local jurisdictions, state and federal agencies, tribes, community organizations, other interest groups, and interested individuals. The document is also available at Authority offices, public libraries, and community centers. Those who wish to review and/or comment are provided a formal public comment period following the date of issuance of the document. In addition, public hearings will be held during the comment period to receive oral testimony.

Identification of Preferred Alternative

It is anticipated that the California High-Speed Rail Authority Board will identify a preferred alternative after the Board considers the information in the Project EIR/EIS, public and agency comments on the Draft EIR/EIS, and other relevant information. The board will not make a final decision on the project alternative to be implemented until after the Final Project EIR/EIS is issued. The preferred alternative is called a “preferred alternative” by FRA to make clear that the federal government has not made a decision until it issues a Record of Decision (ROD) after completion of the Final EIR/EIS.

Final EIR/EIS and Project Decision

After circulation of the Draft EIR/EIS and consideration of comments received, the Authority and FRA will prepare the Final EIR/EIS. The Final EIR/EIS will document and address comments received on the Draft EIR/EIS. It will also describe the preferred alternative and proposed mitigation commitments associated with the Merced to Fresno Section. Following completion of the Final EIR/EIS, the Board will consider certifying the Final EIR/EIS for compliance with CEQA and making a final decision on the project. If the Board certifies the Final EIR/EIS and makes a project decision, it will file a notice of determination with the State Clearinghouse. FRA’s decision under NEPA is not final until it certifies the ROD on the Final EIR/EIS.

Federal Approval

FRA will issue a decision document referred to as the federal ROD. The ROD states FRA’s decision on the project, identifies the alternatives considered by the FRA in reaching its decision, and itemizes the Authority’s commitments to mitigate project impacts. Issuance of the ROD is a prerequisite for any federal funding or approvals.

Merced to Fresno HST Milestone Schedule

August 2011	Public release of Draft EIR/EIS
February 2012	Final EIR/EIS published
March 2012	Notice of Determination and Record of Decision
2011 through 2013	Final design/permitting

December 2012	Property acquisition begins
Spring 2013	Construction begins
2019	Operation begins

The schedule for final design, construction, and operation will be refined as the project moves closer to the end of the environmental review and preliminary design phase. The Authority envisions that service would be provided between Merced and Fresno by 2020.

Table of Contents

VOLUME II: TECHNICAL APPENDICES (BOUND SEPARATELY)

VOLUME III: ALIGNMENTS AND OTHER PLANS (AVAILABLE ON DVD)

LIST OF TABLES

LIST OF FIGURES