

CITY OF MERCED

"Gateway to Yosemite"



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March 27, 2012

Assembly Member Cathleen Galgiani
State Capitol, 10th & L Sts, Room 5155
Sacramento CA 95814
Attention: Victoria Grajek, Chief of Staff

RE: Intercity Passenger Rail Act of 2012 for San Joaquin Corridor – Letter of Support

Dear Assembly Member Galgiani:

The City of Merced strongly supports Assembly Bill (AB) 1779 transferring the transfer of administrative responsibility of the San Joaquin intercity passenger rail service from the Department of Transportation to a new joint powers authority.

AB 1779 will result in local control of Valley rail service and that will result in a more robust and responsive train service for our residents. With passenger rail service under local control, we can adjust train schedules to meet the needs of Valley residents and expand the rail service to meet their needs. We believe ridership will increase once residents find a schedule that is more responsive to their needs, once it can get them to the state Capitol in time for Legislative hearings and to the Bay Area in time for baseball games.

We know it can work. In 1996, the Capitol Corridor Joint Powers Authority (CCJPA) was created to oversee the administration of the Capitol Corridor service under the provisions of Senate Bill 457 (SB 457). Over the last 15 years, without direct financial contribution by member agencies, the CCJPA has successfully managed the Capitol Corridor between Auburn and San Jose. Capital investments, cooperation with the Union Pacific freight railroad, and state support have allowed for dramatic increases in the frequency of service (increases of 400 percent between Sacramento and Oakland), and the Capitol Corridor intercity passenger rail service has the best on-time performance in the nation for intercity service.

In addition to more cost effective administration and operations, the CCJPA has shown that there are several other potential benefits to local authority administration of intercity passenger service including: the ability to have a stronger voice in advocating for service improvements and expansions, local decision-making that is more responsive and adaptive to passenger issues, the ability to take better advantage of joint marketing and partnerships with local agencies, and more engagement by local communities to support the service.

We appreciate that AB 1779 follows the model of the CCJPA, and is permissive legislation which would enable regional governance/management of the existing San Joaquin intercity passenger rail service between Bakersfield-Fresno-Stockton-Sacramento-SF Bay Area.

We support defining the composition of the San Joaquin Joint Powers Authority (Authority), and extending the time for creating the Authority and executing an interagency transfer agreement with the Department of Transportation to December 31, 2013. In order to transfer responsibility of the San Joaquin intercity passenger rail service to the Authority, AB 1779 will require that the transfer must result in administrative or operating cost reductions. In addition, AB 1779 will prevent any existing sources of local or regional transit funding to be used to expand or maintain the San Joaquin intercity passenger rail service.

With more efficient administration and stronger local/regional support, a regionally managed San Joaquin intercity passenger rail service can result in much higher frequencies of service, and increases in ridership and revenue – like experienced by the Capitol Corridor under the regional administration of the CCJPA. Increases in San Joaquin intercity passenger rail service and ridership will result in more jobs, improve air quality, and will help promote sustainable development.

Intercity passenger rail is environmentally friendly, and the state has a continuing interest in the provision of cost-effective and efficiently administered intercity passenger rail services. The City of Merced is pleased to provide this letter of support for AB 1779 to help move California forward.

Sincerely,



Stanley P. Thurston, Mayor

Cc: State Senator Anthony Cannella
Merced County Association of Governments
League of California Cities