

Fresno Council of Governments
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One Voice Regional Priorities Washington, DC

Cross Valley Rail in Huron

Submitted by:

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TITLE

Cross Valley Corridor in Huron

SHORT INTRODUCTION OF REGIONAL PRIORITY AND ISSUE:

The Cross Valley Corridor (CVC) is a vital east-west rail corridor among communities in Fresno, Tulare, and Kings Counties in the Central San Joaquin Valley. While existing rail is active in certain segments and abandoned in others, the corridor presents a unique opportunity to unlock mobility improvements for the region, advance local economic development, and to improve local air quality. With a proposed California High-Speed Rail station located in the middle of the corridor, there is an opportunity to improve regional and statewide connectivity and mobility throughout the communities along the corridor, which include Huron, Naval Air Station Lemoore, Hanford, Visalia, Farmersville, Exeter, Lindsay, and Porterville.

REQUEST SUMMARY:

1. Congressional delegation support for future grant applications for the Cross Valley Corridor in general and for rail station construction in Huron, specifically.

REQUEST BACKGROUND AND EXPLAIN THE REGIONAL SIGNIFICANCE:

In 2016, Tulare County Association of Governments (TCAG) began the Cross Valley Corridor Plan to study connectivity and mobility improvements in the Central San Joaquin Valley. The project aims to increase transit service efficiency, enable communities and cities in the Cross Valley Corridor (CVC) to promote developments that support transit usage, encourage revitalization and economic development, and facilitate growth in support of the California High-Speed Rail (HSR) investment. This project evaluated a range of new public transit service alternatives that would be able to accommodate future population and economic growth, while being compatible with existing land uses and future development opportunities. By planning for a CVC transit system well in advance, right-of-way and land needs can be identified and protected now, avoiding costly acquisitions or eminent domain processes later.

The Cross Valley Corridor (CVC) is approximately 75 miles long between the cities of Huron and Porterville, with 7-13 potential stops in cities in between, and could serve as the backbone for a future transit corridor. The majority of the corridor is currently occupied by single track freight railway owned and operated by the San Joaquin Valley Railroad (SJVR). However, existing track conditions are not yet suitable for passenger rail operations as many structures, including railway, bridges, culverts, and crossings are aging and obsolete. The existing right-of-way (ranging from 50-200 feet wide) would be suitable for passenger rail via a mixed use (freight and passenger rail). The alignment connects the corridor cities' downtown areas, making it an ideal route to serve the region's major activity centers and populations. Commute patterns analyzed in the development of the Cross Valley Corridor Plan suggest that there are strong internal connections between the Cross Valley Corridor communities.

A connection between the proposed Kings-Tulare Regional HSR Station and the CVC could benefit the region by potentially linking the communities to each other. The HSR station that

will ultimately link the Central Valley with the HSR system is located near the City of Hanford and will open as part of the first phase of the HSR project from Merced to Bakersfield. The process of designing and implementing a large-scale rail project can span decades and come with a hefty price tag that may be alarming to stakeholders who are unsure that the project benefits outweigh the costs. In consideration of this, the CVC Plan proposes a phased approach to demonstrate value in the near-term by implementing a bus or BRT service along the approximate proposed route to spark awareness among the communities along the corridor while allowing for data collection in ridership and usage trends that could be helpful in future rail planning efforts.

Huron residents would benefit from both the positive economic and environmental improvements that the CVC would provide. According to the California EPA CalEnviroScreen 3.0 tool, the City of Huron ranks in the top 70-85th percentile of pollution burden in California. Specifically, the concentration of particulate matter, or PM2.5, in Huron is in the 95th percentile, meaning it is higher than 95% of the census tracts in California. PM2.5 comes from cars, trucks, and other activities, and can have serious health effects, including heart and lung disease. Increasing local transit opportunities will help to reduce local PM2.5 concentrations. Additionally, Huron is defined by the California Department of Housing and Community Development as a low-income community. Connecting Huron to cities along the CVC, as well as the California High-Speed Rail, will improve Huron residents' access to jobs and services.

In 2023, Caltrans awarded the project a \$650,000 Sustainable Communities Planning Grant through the City of Hanford to identify recommendations for connecting transit services between Downtown Hanford and the Kings-Tulare HSR Station along Lacey Boulevard, and promote transit-oriented development (TOD) around the Kings-Tulare HSR Station. The final plan will guide land use planning along Lacey Boulevard and the Kings-Tulare HSR Station, support TOD, promote economic development and revitalization, enhance connections to transit and mobility choice, stimulate connectivity between Downtown Hanford and the Kings-Tulare Station, connect Hanford with other communities along the CVC, and support an efficient and effective multi-modal transportation system in some of California's most disadvantaged and low-income communities.

Also in 2023, CalSTA awarded the project a \$20.2 million Transit and Intercity Rail Capital Program (TIRCP) grant for the Cross Valley Corridor Zero-Emission Bus Expansion Project which would develop new multi-modal transit centers in both Kings and Tulare Counties along the Cross Valley Corridor, providing greater connectivity and mobility options for rural communities. This includes new zero-emission feeder buses which will operate along the corridor and a regional zero-emission micro transit operation that will connect underserved communities to the CVC and the future Kings-Tulare High-Speed Rail Station.

In 2024, the Tulare County Association of Governments (TCAG) and Kings County Association of Governments (KCAG) completed the Kings-Tulare County Cross Valley Corridor Phase 1 Operations Plan, which establishes and recommends a phased service implementation and capital improvements plan for the Cross Valley Corridor. This initial express bus service would

include service between NAS Lemoore, Lemoore, Hanford, Goshen, Visalia, Farmersville, and Lindsay. In a future expansion of this express bus service, service would be extended to Huron and Porterville. This service is planned to have a 30-minute frequency and will serve the Kings-Tulare HSR Station once the HSR service becomes operational between 2030 and 2033.

ARE THERE ANY ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT BENEFITS?

The CVC would have long-term economic development benefits for the City of Huron and improve the quality of life for residents through increased access to jobs and services, as well as environmental benefits related to air quality, energy use, noise reduction, and land use. When fully operational, California HSR service throughout the Central Valley and to the major employment hubs throughout the State can have a transformational impact on local and regional economies. The CVC presents an opportunity to better harness High-Speed Rail's statewide benefits, enhance intra-regional connectivity, and promote greater economic integration.

ARE THERE ANY ATTACHMENTS?

Cross Valley Corridor Plan
Cross Valley Corridor Map
Cross Valley Corridor Phase 1 Operations Plan

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