

Assembly Transportation Committee
1020 N Street, Room 112
Sacramento, CA 95814

March 1, 2021

Re: Revised 2020 Business Plan Hearing | Joint Meeting of the Assembly Transportation Committee and Assembly Budget Subcommittee 3 - March 10, 2021

Dear Chair Friedman and Chair Bloom,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments on the Authority's 2020 Revised Business Plan. **SPUR strongly supports high-speed rail and the vision of a future California it helps to achieve.** SPUR, the San Francisco Bay Area Planning and Urban Research Association, is a non-profit organization that promotes good planning and good government through research, education and advocacy in the San Francisco Bay Area. We have been supporting, commenting on, and producing policy reports and papers on high-speed rail for decades and engage in numerous local projects that are part of high-speed rail's investments in Northern California.

SPUR offers the following additional comments to the California High-Speed Rail Authority:

- 1. SPUR strongly encourages the state to release the remainder of Prop 1A funds and secure additional funding to complete the entire Phase I of the project.** The high-speed rail project can proceed more quickly and have a better chance of securing additional support from the Biden Administration with additional revenue from the state.
- 2. SPUR encourages the Authority to develop a stations strategy for high-speed rail stations.** Stations are people's first point of contact with high-speed rail and the location for a significant part of passengers' door-to-door journey. If planned well, stations can become an anchor for public life and economic development--boosting a city's profile and becoming a part of a statewide network of places. Now is the time to begin thinking about who will own and operate these stations and how they will be designed and programmed to meet the needs of the communities they serve.

Further, the stations strategy should include a vision and tools to proactively concentrate growth around stations, which will reduce emissions and strengthen local and regional economies. With an increasing focus on reducing housing and transportation costs at the USDOT, there may also be opportunities to leverage federal financing such as RRIF to support infrastructure and housing. Over the past several years, SPUR has authored several policy reports and offered peer-to-peer and international learning opportunities on how high-speed rail can support sustainable urban development and economic growth in the cities it serves. The state's ambitious

environmental agenda will be more successful if the state also takes a stronger role in shaping growth around high-speed rail stations. Station cities need additional tools to make it happen. Some of these tools include making state funding incentives, the ability to do urban development around stations, banking land for the public purposes of affordable housing and economic development near stations, and providing a framework that defines the purpose and land use expectations around high-speed rail stations. Creating great cities anchored and connected by rail will require forward-thinking partnership between station cities, the Authority, and the Legislature.

3. **SPUR appreciates the efforts that the Authority has taken to control project risks and costs.** As with all megaprojects, high-speed rail is a large, complex and long-term venture that can be transformational and have significant social and economic impacts. We appreciate the Authority's efforts to bring costs and schedule under control, including adding more organizational capacity, securing NEPA Assignment authority, improving contract management, among other steps. Ongoing improvement and independent oversight will help ensure that public dollars are responsibly spent and build public support for future investment.

With renewed federal partnership, bipartisan support for infrastructure investment, and California's remarkable climate leadership, this is a promising time for high-speed rail in California. SPUR supports the direction of the 2020 Revised Business Plan and looks forward to working with the Authority and the State Legislature to ensure its successful implementation.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Laura Tolhoff', with a stylized, flowing script.

Laura Tolhoff
Transportation Policy Director