



Merced County Association of Governments

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December 15, 2005

Dr. Alan C. Lloyd
Secretary, CA Environmental
Protection Agency
1001 I Street 12th Floor
Sacramento, CA 95814 2828

Dear Secretary Lloyd:

The Merced County Association of Governments supports the State's Goods Movement Action Plan, but strongly urges an expedited effort to facilitate improvements beyond those contained in the report. In fact, while we share the State's desire to improve transportation infrastructure adjacent to our ports, we consider a high priority to be overall improvement of the Highway 99 corridor. Providing necessary fixes to the port regions only exacerbates the conditions in the San Joaquin Valley if improvements for that area are delayed. While planned improvements to the corridor also help facilitate goods movement, the funding for many of the projects has not been identified or committed and is likely to only be available by pooling a variety of resources. This is why it is critical that the San Joaquin Valley issues be equally represented at the table and any resources designated for goods movement include funding for Highway 99 improvements.

Transportation infrastructure improvements in the San Joaquin Valley have been neglected for too long. Highway 99 is just one example of this infrastructure shortfall, but its improvement is the key element in a long-term solution to the challenges facing the San Joaquin Valley.

Here are some of these challenges:

- **High truck traffic.** Route 99 is the workhorse of the state's highway system. The traffic is 20-30% trucks, 2-3 times the state average.
- **Growth.** The San Joaquin Valley is the fastest-growing part of the state and will be doubling in population within 30 years.
- **Business opportunities.** Huge distribution centers and other goods movement facilities are locating in the Valley. There's a reason for that – it's economically advantageous. And it will continue to be so.
- **Bad air.** The Valley has some of the worst air in the country, much of it due to emissions, and we desperately need to lessen congestion to improve the air.
- **Highway 99 is old.** Parts of it are still not freeway. The last stoplight was replaced seven years ago but we still have dozens of at-grade crossings, where cars and trucks cross in front of, and merge with, freeway-speed traffic barreling down a county-road design.
- **Highway 99 is falling apart.** Some sections have seen no improvements in 40 years. The pavement is bad, the design is antiquated, and the capacity just can't handle all the trucks.

Highway 99 is the transportation spine of California's San Joaquin Valley. Any lasting improvement in the economic and environmental quality of the Valley requires major investment in the Highway 99 corridor. This will provide a positive impact on the goods movement challenges for the entire state, and

begin to address the Valley infrastructure shortfall issue at the same time. Conversely, funding improvements in other portions of the state without addressing the Valley does not provide a solution.

We in the San Joaquin Valley do not expect the state to solve these problems for us. Let's look at some of the efforts underway:

- **We're working together.** With the state, and in the San Joaquin Valley, we've identified what needs to be done. The California Partnership for the Valley, the Route 99 Business Plan, the movement to explore Interstate status, and other efforts now have traction and we're gaining momentum.
- **We are grateful.** We hope that the recent allocation of funds to projects on Highway 99 marks a turning point in the state's investment strategy and is a first step toward correcting decades of neglect.
- **We are partners.** Regional agencies in the Valley recognize that we must share in this undertaking, and are investing in Route 99 from a variety of local sources including Regional Improvement Programs, impact fees, and sales tax measures.

It is critical for this Goods Movement Action Plan to **accelerate** the improvement of Highway 99, not delay it. The California Partnership for the San Joaquin Valley met last week and asked that California commit to investing \$6 billion to finance improvements in the 99 corridor over the next ten years. It is important to realize this amount reflects the infrastructure improvements identified in the recently completed Highway 99 Business Plan. Each of the eight councils of governments in the San Joaquin Valley has endorsed the Business Plan and has also called for an expedited schedule of improvements (\$4 billion over ten years).

The Merced County Association of Governments, along with the seven other Councils of Government in the San Joaquin Valley, the California Partnership for the San Joaquin Valley, and the Great Valley Center urge that your commitment to improve goods movement for California include comprehensive attention to the San Joaquin Valley corridor.

Sincerely,



Jesse Brown
Executive Director