

**Request:** Support expanded passenger rail service to Merced County through funding support for the San Joaquin service, Altamont Corridor Express rolling stock procurement, and High Speed Rail construction.

**Description:** Historically, Merced County was a major rail transportation hub, served by multiple railroads including the Yosemite Valley Railroad, the Southern Pacific, and the Atchison Topeka and the Santa Fe. Today, we hope to revitalize railroad infrastructure to provide quality mass transportation. Merced County is poised to become an important transportation hub for California, as it will be the only Phase 1 station in the Central Valley to connect Intercity, Commuter, and High-Speed passenger rail.



Currently, the Amtrak “San Joaquins” serve Merced County at Merced Amtrak Station. The San Joaquins are operated locally through the San Joaquin Joint Powers Authority (SJJPA), of which Merced County is a member. Five roundtrip trains per day operate to Oakland and two to Sacramento. The San Joaquins are one of Amtrak’s most successful services, holding the sixth highest ridership in the nation. On May 7<sup>th</sup>, the San Joaquins will begin a Morning Express service from Fresno to Sacramento. By 2020, there will be an additional two round trip trains to Sacramento. The San Joaquin also provides leisure travel, especially at Merced where it connects with the MCAG operated Yosemite Area Regional Transit System (YARTS) for Yosemite-bound passengers. The long-term goal is to eventually develop the San Joaquin Rail Corridor into a service either competitive with or surpassing the efficiency of Amtrak’s Northeast Corridor (NEC) with frequent trains to Oakland and hourly trains to Sacramento. Merced Amtrak Station will be upgraded with a second platform to meet the increased needs.



Altamont Corridor Express (ACE) is a commuter rail service that operates over the Altamont Pass, providing rail service that had ended with the fall of the Western Pacific. ACE is offering commuter service synchronized with its other trains to provide service from Merced to Stockton where a passenger could switch to a San Jose bound train or stay to ride to Sacramento. ACE will also open a station in Natomas for a shuttle to Sacramento International Airport (IATA: SMF). ACE is planning to open revenue service to Merced in 2027. This will be the first time Merced has had multiple passenger rail services since 1968. ACE is currently asking for assistance with their plans to increase their rolling

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stock to include five Tier IV emissions locomotives, twenty-eight coaches, and one cab car.

California High Speed Rail (HSR) has planned for Merced to be part of the initial operating segment (IOS), connecting the Central Valley to Silicon Valley. Merced County may also host the Heavy Maintenance Facility for all rolling stock at Castle Commerce Center. Merced HSR Station is planned to be a multi-modal transportation center providing connections to ACE, The Bus, and YARTS. As Merced will be the station representing the North San Joaquin Valley, we expect a significant rise in travelers switching to intercity and commuter rail to Sacramento and the Bay Area.



**Necessity:** The transportation infrastructure in the Central Valley is aging. Investing in the improvement of the entire system, especially in a future transportation hub like Merced, will solve several problems at once. The immediate benefits are clear; travelers will have access to an integrated travel system. This accessibility is invaluable to those who do not have ready access to a personal vehicle, such as youth, the elderly, and disabled. For those who do have access, it offers the ability to travel while working, eating, or relaxing in comfort and safety.

Transportation options have the extended benefits of reducing emissions and relieving congestion. Merced County suffers from poor air quality, as does the entirety of the San Joaquin Valley. While much of the pollution is blown into the Valley from the coast, a large portion is generated by the drivers on Highway 99. As the main north-south freeway for the Central Valley, Highway 99 has been steadily growing in congestion from locals, commuters, and freight traffic. While expansion of Highway 99 is underway, expanding rail service is more cost effective and will remove cars from the road, easing both emissions and congestion.



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