

Request: Support for Opportunity Zones.

Description: Merced County continues to build upon recent economic development successes at the Castle Commerce Center and throughout Merced County. Formerly Castle Air Force Base, the Castle Commerce Center is already home to more than 60 tenants, generating millions in revenue with several promising prospects on the horizon. Merced County continues to develop the site with the overall goal of spurring job creation and site utilization.

The California Autotech Testing and Development Center is a 225-acre autonomous vehicle testing facility that has driven significant domestic and international interest throughout the vehicle and technology sectors. In 2012, Merced County leased property to Waymo, Google’s self-driving car program, which now leases from Merced County well in excess of 100 acres for a proprietary testing site, which is believed to be the largest of its type in North America. Since Waymo has grown, Castle has seen multiple autonomous companies regularly test on its site, which has proven advantageous due to its close proximity to the Silicon Valley.

In February 2021, the Board of Supervisors approved a third-party operator contract with Transportation Research Center (TRC) to construct and operate the testing facility. TRC, with more than 40 years of experience, currently operates the largest non-proprietary automotive testing and proving ground in North America. TRC is affiliated with The Ohio State University and has more than 1,000 clients, many of which now plan to utilize the Merced County location which is slated for operation on July 1, 2021.



One of the Waymo vehicles tested at the MCITD

Additionally, the Merced County Board of Supervisors continues to advance other economic development goals at Castle, most notably with logistics and goods movement. In October 2017, the Board of Supervisors established an agreement with the Port of Los Angeles to leverage Castle as an inland port opportunity, to address both broad climate change and goods movement goals. The memorandum of agreement formalizes the relationship between the two entities and initiates several actions, including the development of a joint Business Development Plan, and exporter outreach initiative in the

Central Valley, and collaborating to share business intelligence and work on prospective deals. In 2019, Burlington North-Santa Fe became invested in the project, deeming the 205-acre facility as “an area of growth for BNSF.” Merced County is working with BNSF, and local and state transportation leaders, to build out a transportation hub, focused on improving congestion in the region and improving air quality.

Necessity: Castle Commerce Center is designated as an Opportunity Zone. As the County looks to continue developing the site into a hub for manufacturing, goods movement, and autonomous vehicle testing and development, Merced County supports the continued use of Opportunity Zones through the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act.

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