



August 1, 2019

Senator Anthony Portantino
Glendale District Office
116 E. Broadway
Suite 204
Glendale, California 91205

Assemblymember Luz Rivas
District Office
9300 Laurel Canyon Blvd.
First Floor
Arleta, California 91331

Re: Removal of Documents from California High-Speed Rail Authority Website

Dear Senator Portantino and Assemblymember Rivas,

It has come to our attention that the California High-Speed Rail Authority recently removed thousands of pages of documents from its website, including business plans, board meeting materials, and even the analysis reports for proposed route alignments. CHSRA has stated that interested parties wishing to review these documents will be able to do so, but only by undertaking the time-consuming effort to submit an official request through the Public Records Act.

CHSRA maintains a webpage dedicated to "Transparency & Accountability." On this page, the Authority explains that, "*Recently, Governor Gavin Newsom directed us to take steps to provide an even greater degree of transparency for the citizens of California.*" Ironic that one of the Authority's first actions in furtherance of the Governor's directive was to scrub its website of critical information documenting the project and its history.

These documents – and their unimpeded availability and accessibility – is essential. By expunging its records from the public domain, the Authority has effectively hamstrung anyone and everyone who might wish to research the project. This includes the citizens whose properties may fall into the path of the train, the journalists whose articles may cast the Authority in an unfavorable light, and even the state legislators whose role it is to provide oversight to this project. The State and its agencies should be leading by example, and providing unfettered access to its public records is an obvious step towards building trust through transparency.

CHSRA is already facing scrutiny for mismanagement of taxpayer funds. The headline of State Auditor Elaine Howe's 93-page audit of the Authority concluded that, "*Its Flawed Decision Making and Poor Contract Management Have Contributed to Billions in Cost Overruns...*" This latest action by the Authority is yet another example of the myriad ways it contrives to waste taxpayer dollars.

S.A.F.E.
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Instead of simply continuing to host the documents in a forum and format easily accessible to all interested parties, the hurdles that CHSRA has created to accessing the documents means that it now needs to provide additional staff just to handle the requests received through the Public Records Act. More taxpayer dollars will be wasted on salaries for staff to fulfill requests, on materials to physically copy the documents, and on postage to mail the documents to the requestor.

Regardless of the Authority's intentions, reasons, or excuses for scrubbing its website, the perception created in the public eye is that the Authority is purposefully hiding documents that may expose it to further scrutiny. Despite wasting ten years and billions of dollars, CHSRA has not managed to build a single foot of usable track. What it has built is a legacy of mistrust with the people of the State of California, and with this pernicious act of intentionally hiding documents from the public, CHSRA has just written yet another disgraceful chapter in its history. The fact that CHSRA is shielding its offense behind the pretext of compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act only compounds its transgression.

We urge you to compel CHSRA to restore the documents to its website immediately. These documents were prepared with taxpayer dollars, and the taxpayers have the right to review them, unfettered by the constraints imposed by CHSRA.

Sincerely, on behalf of the S.A.F.E. Coalition,



Kelly Erin Decker

cc via email to:

Ralph Vartabedian, National Correspondent, *LA Times*
Kathryn Barger, Supervisor, Fifth District Los Angeles County
Jim Patterson, Assemblyman, 23rd Assembly District of California
Bob Hertzberg, State Senator, 18th Senate District of California
Kevin McCarthy, Congressman, 23rd Congressional District of California

SAFE (Save Angeles Forest for Everyone) is a coalition of leaders of communities in California's Northeast San Fernando Valley, many of which border the Angeles National Forest. We united to protect sensitive environmental areas and densely populated areas threatened by California's high-speed rail project. Together, we represent hundreds of thousands of people impacted by the three routes currently proposed by the California High-Speed Rail Authority (CHSRA) to connect proposed train stations in Palmdale and Burbank.