



**Mayor Tilo Cortez Public Comment/Statement to the  
California High-Speed Rail Authority Board of Directors  
Monthly Board Meeting  
August 13, 2020 11:00 AM**

**Mayor Cortez:** *The City of Wasco has been engaged with the high-speed rail project for the better part of the last decade. I speak to you with a heavy heart and frustration over the Authority's actions and treatment of my community. The Authority's staff believes they are being "good partners". Given where things stand now, that statement couldn't be further from the truth.*

*Not taking into account the devastating impacts to businesses and residential properties along the project's alignment, Wasco is further burdened by the socio and economic costs the project is having on our City, which the Authority has refused to address.*

*An immediately critical issue that has risen to the forefront, is the future and current condition of the former Wasco Farm Labor Housing Complex.*

*The former farm labor housing complex is adjacent to the project's alignment in Wasco. The now vacant complex spans 23 acres and has over 220 residential units that pose immediate threats to the City's public safety and quality of life and IS the textbook definition of neighborhood blight. According to the Authority's 2012 Environmental Justice Guidance, "The Authority's duties under its Environmental Justice ("EJ") Policy states the Authority has a continuing duty to review, analyze, and mitigate its effect on communities throughout the scope of its work."*

*The City Council formally requested in our May 5, 2020 letter to the Authority's regional director, that the Authority mitigate the condition of the former farm labor housing complex by demolishing and clearing the site. In meetings and discussion with Authority representatives the City was repeatedly assured that any adverse effect as a consequence of the Authority or the project would be reviewed and mitigated. Construction Package 4, which includes the segment in Wasco, has had 59 change order totaling over \$132 million dollars. We all understand this project has not gone as planned and must adapt to unforeseen issues. The same applies to the Authority's mitigation measures and if they lead to new unforeseen issues. Just as the Authority has done with executing change orders, the Authority needs to address the new condition their mitigation measures have created.*

*The City has several serious concerns with the impacts of this project and how it is being managed, including the apparent lack of oversight in the design process and the loss of direct Amtrak services to our residents. This past January our City staff raised concerns to the Authority over its Contractor's inappropriate use of an engineer's credentials that was no longer involved in the project. There were also questions regarding who was the Contractor's engineer of record or who*

*was the Contractor's engineer stamping the plans. There were instances where the Contractors staff that were working on engineering aspects of the project were operating out of the country and impeding the City staff's ability to engage directly with them on the project.*

*The High-Speed Rail Project was NOT something the City of Wasco or its residents asked for. It was imposed on us by the powers that be. We've had concerns since day one and we were consistently re-assured that our disadvantaged community would be "better off" because of it. Joe Hedges, COO of California Rail Builders once stated in a meeting that "We should be happy, because HSR is making "investments" to infrastructure in our community." Investments?! These are not investments; these are mitigation measures for the path of destruction this tornado of a project is leaving behind in our peaceful City of Wasco. If HSR can't keep its promises to the City of Wasco, how does it expect to keep its promises to the taxpayers who are funding this project? The City has set up a webpage to document the challenges our community faces and instances the Authority has failed to live up its own Environmental Justice Guidance. I would be happy to discuss these issues further with Authority Board members at the earliest possible opportunity."*