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The Hon. Michael Rubio, Senator
16th District
State Capitol, Room 2066
Sacramento, CA 95814

Senator Rubio:

Fresno Council of Governments strongly supports SB 325. SB 325 provides for the development of a structure to protect short-haul rail lines in Fresno, Tulare, Kings and Kern counties from abandonment and short-sighted interests. Short-haul rail lines are an essential part of the greater freight rail system.

Short-haul railroads often hold monopolies over rail shippers and receivers and, because of increasing rates and other factors, are forcing them to ship by truck. As rail traffic decreases on the short-haul lines, they are then abandoned and the track and ties sold for their scrap value. Just recently, a 30-mile segment of short-haul rail from Jovista in northern Kern County to Exeter in Tulare County has been completely abandoned and the track removed.

The systematic removal of short-haul rail segments has significant environmental and economic impacts to Central California. Removing the rail option increases the volume of goods shipped by truck, impacting local air quality and increasing maintenance costs for both local roads and state highways. The rail option can contribute to local economic development, particularly in an environment of rising fuel prices. Ideally, the Central California Rail Authority may eventually play a key role in establishing a short-haul network through the entire San Joaquin Valley, stretching from Kern County to the Port of Oakland, largely for agricultural and petroleum-based products and could eventually even provide commuter connection service to high-speed train stations in Central California.

SB 325 is intended to provide a structure and mechanism of last resort to prevent additional short-haul rail abandonments in Kern, Tulare, Kings and Fresno counties. Otherwise, the reversion of land ownership rights and subsequent environmental review processes create an insurmountable obstacle to reintroducing rail.

The Authority intends to use local funding sources to purchase short lines before further abandonments can occur and then lease the line to operators who have an interest in maintaining the track for profit. The Authority will be administered through a joint powers agreement among the Fresno, Tulare, Kings and Kern Councils of Government.

Fresno Council of Governments thanks you for sponsoring this bill and urges your continued support for SB 325.

Sincerely,

Amarpreet Dhaliwal, Chair
Fresno Council of Governments

Cc: The Hon. Senator Mark DeSaulnier
The Hon. Senator Ted Gaines (Vice Chair)
The Hon. Senator Tom Harman
The Hon. Senator Robert Huff

The Hon. Senator Christine Kehoe
The Hon. Senator Alan Lowenthal
The Hon. Senator Fran Pavley
The Hon. Senator Joe Simitian

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