



PRESS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Friends of Riverside's Hills Lawsuit Deals Setback to Public Transit

The Riverside County Transportation Commission (RCTC) is profoundly disappointed regarding the decision of Judge Sharon Waters to decertify the Environmental Impact Report for the Perris Valley Line project. Her decision indefinitely delays a regionally-significant public transit project which was ready to go to construction later this year. Although a previous ruling had identified limited areas of concern, the Judge granted the Friends of Riverside's Hills request to decertify the environmental document and set aside all project approvals.

The Perris Valley Line project would have extended the existing Metrolink 91 Line for an additional 22 miles from Downtown Riverside to South Perris along a rail right-of-way that has been in place for more than a century. The proposed project also includes a number of improvements along the right-of-way that would have benefitted schools, local residents and safety at designated rail crossings.

"Freight trains have run along these tracks since the 1800's" said RCTC Chairwoman Karen Spiegel. "It's a rail line that has served this area effectively for a long time and will continue do so even after this ruling which has no effect on current rail operations."

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“Our intent was to serve more people and potential employers by offering attractive and reliable passenger rail service on the existing right-of-way,” Spiegel said.

In addition to traffic and congestion impacts, RCTC officials are also concerned about economic impacts if the project remains stalled.

“This project will create thousands of high-paying construction jobs and make the overall area attractive for businesses to relocate to the area,” said Perris Mayor Daryl Busch who also serves as RCTC’s Second Vice Chairman. “We can improve our economy and the environment with this project, which makes this decision especially disappointing.”

New stations are slated for high employment areas such as the Hunter Park Business Complex in Riverside and the March Air Reserve Base. Yet another station would have complemented existing bus transit service in Downtown Perris. The project had also received approval for \$75 million in federal funding and was spelled out in a transportation expenditure plan approved by voters in 2002.

The judge’s ruling can be appealed and RCTC is required to respond within 90 days on compliance with the Court’s mandate. “These kinds of legal decisions have unintended and far-reaching consequences and hurt the general public in favor of a narrow special interest,” said RCTC Vice Chairman Marion Ashley, a Riverside County Supervisor. “This is a prime example of how CEQA is actually being used to harm an environmentally-friendly project and the overall community.”

The full RCTC board will likely consider the legal decision and future action during their next meeting on June 12.

For more information on the Perris Valley Line project, please see <http://perrisvalleyline.info>.