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RAIL CONSOLIDATION UPDATE

AB 1094 Seeks State Funding

Rail consolidation in Fresno will be one of my top priorities during the current Legislative Session in Sacramento, as I attempt to obtain state funding to pay for an ambitious consolidation project. The Burlington Northern-Santa Fe tracks are a major source of congestion and gridlock in Fresno, and the plan is to consolidate the BNSF line with the Union Pacific railroad that runs parallel to Highway 99. My bill, **AB 1094**, seeks funding from a variety of state sources to pay for the consolidation project.

Identifying the Need

Rail consolidation is not a new idea. The Fresno Bee first identified the need for consolidation in a 1949 editorial. Everyone agrees that consolidation is a top priority, including the BNSF and UP rail lines. That isn't the problem. The real problem is **money**.

Consolidation Costs

It's estimated that removing 16-miles of railroad track through Fresno and placing all freight and passenger traffic onto just one rail line could result in a price tag between \$300-\$400 million.

Who Will Pay?

That's where I intend to focus my energy. **AB 1094** seeks the resources necessary to help finance a project like this one. There are two potential funding sources within the California Transportation Commission. In addition, the Governor could also provide funding through his **Traffic Congestion Relief Program**.

Why Consolidate?

A number of studies completed by the State Department of Transportation (CAL-TRANS) show that congestion and traffic delay is the number one problem identified by motorists in California. A 1993 study estimated that the number of Fresno vehicles delayed by trains was 5.6 million in 1991.

Safety Concerns

The inner city Burlington Northern-Santa Fe track is more than 100-years old and is used by as many as ten Amtrak trains a day. That is in addition to the freight traffic, which can average up to 30-freight trains a day. Each freight car can be loaded with up to 143-tons, which can and does cause considerable damage.

Long Term Process

Rail consolidation in Fresno is a long-term goal and will take time to accomplish. It will take a unified effort between Fresno City and County leaders and the Council of Fresno County Governments.

Commitment to Rail

I am a strong supporter of railways in the Central Valley and helped obtain \$4 million in funding to upgrade the existing San Joaquin Valley Rail Line between Huron and Visalia. This will serve as a vital "heavy rail" link for business, and will help reduce truck congestion on local roads.

Visit Assemblyman Briggs on the Web at: <http://www.assembly.ca.gov/briggs>