



November 11, 2021

The Honorable Gavin Newsom
 Governor, State of California
 1303 10th Street, Suite 1173
 Sacramento, CA 9581

(Submitted via email to recipients)

Re: Directing Caltrans to Add Necessary Wildlife Overpasses to Brightline West High-Speed Rail Project

Governor Newsom:

We write to request that your administration ensures that the proposed Brightline West High-Speed Rail Project (“Project”) includes three wildlife overpasses, which are necessary to avoid the permanent blockage of critical California wildlife corridors resulting from the Project’s concrete barrier walls. Caltrans holds jurisdiction over the Project right-of-way, and has existing authorities to ensure the Project

proponent includes these wildlife overpasses in the Project design, making the Project consistent with your commitment to protect biodiversity including desert bighorn sheep and mountain lions.

Time is of the essence to resolve this matter, as the Project proponent hopes to complete financing on the project within the next six months. We support the findings from your Caltrans and Department of Fish and Wildlife scientists that have identified the three wildlife overpasses as necessary to protect our world-class wildlife in the fragile California desert. Wildlife species of special status whose movements will be inhibited by this Project include the desert bighorn sheep, desert tortoise, Mojave ground squirrel, mountain lion, desert kit fox and Merriam bobcat, just to name a few. Wildlife overpasses preserve the movement of wildlife and provide for genetic diversity, connecting populations and allowing individual species to move between habitats, which will be increasingly essential in the face of climate change. Desert wildlife such as the bighorn sheep are of tremendous cultural significance to the San Manuel Band of Mission Indians and many other desert Native peoples.

Brightline, the Miami-based owner of the Project, is proposing the more than \$8 billion project, requesting hundreds of millions in tax-exempt bonds from California, expected to have an annual operating profit of nearly \$1 billion,¹ and proposing a project that – as currently designed – will have devastating impacts to California’s wildlife. Therefore, requiring Brightline to construct the wildlife overpasses is not only the right thing to do, but is financially reasonable and feasible.

Through the inclusion of the overpasses into the Project design, California can continue to demonstrate its commitment to protecting its rich biodiversity. We ask for your leadership to secure this outcome.

Sincerely,

Eric Hanson, Co-Chair & Policy Lead,
California Chapter
Backcountry Hunters & Anglers

Kevin Emmerich, Co-Founder
Basin and Range Watch

Aimee J. Byard, Associate Director/Biologist
Bighorn Institute

Fred Harpster, President
Black Brant Group

Chriss Bowles, President
California Bowmen Hunters/State Archery Association

Don Martin, President
California Chapter of the Wild Sheep Foundation

Dan Whisenhunt, CEO
California Deer Association

Lori Jacobs, President
California Houndmen for Conservation

Roy Griffith, Legislative Director
California Rifle & Pistol Association

Mark Hennelly, Vice President of Government Relations
California Waterfowl Association

Linda Castro, Assistant Policy Director
California Wilderness Coalition

Ileene Anderson, Public Lands Deserts Director
Center for Biological Diversity

Sierra Pencille, Tribal Council Chairperson
Chemehuevi Indian Tribe

Philip A. Francis, Jr., Chair
Coalition to Protect America’s National Parks

Pamela Flick, California Director
Defenders of Wildlife

Edward L. LaRue, Jr., M.S., Chairperson
Desert Tortoise Council, Ecosystems Advisory Committee

Jocelyn Silverlight, Executive Director
Friends of Big Morongo Canyon Preserve

Wendy Schneider, Executive Director
Friends of the Inyo

Kelly Herbinson, Executive Director
Mojave Desert Land Trust

Chris Clarke, Board President
Mojave National Preserve Conservancy

Steve Bardwell, President
Morongo Basin Conservation Association

Debra Chase, CEO
Mountain Lion Foundation

Neal Desai, Senior Program Director
National Parks Conservation Association

Michael Madrigal, President
Native American Land Conservancy

Fraser Shilling, Director
Road Ecology Center

Gary F. Brennan, President
San Diego County Wildlife Federation

Cathie Nelson, President
**San Francisco Bay Area Chapter
Safari Club International**

Kim Floyd, Conservation Chair
San Geronio Chapter, Sierra Club

Kenneth R. Ramirez, Chairman
San Manuel Band of Mission Indians

Lisa C. McNamee, Legislative Coordinator
SCI CA Coalition

John D. Wehausen, Ph.D., President
Sierra Nevada Bighorn Sheep Foundation

Frazier Haney, Executive Director
The Wildlands Conservancy

Steve Miller, President
Tulare Basin Wetlands Association

Laura Cunningham, California Director
Western Watersheds Project

Gray N. Thornton, President & CEO
Wild Sheep Foundation

cc:

The Honorable Dianne Feinstein, U.S. Senator
The Honorable Alex Padilla, U.S. Senator
Toks Omishakin, Director, Caltrans
Chuck Bonham, Director, California Department of Fish and Wildlife
The Honorable Fiona Ma, State of California Treasurer
The Honorable Betty Yee, State of California Controller
Mark Tollefson, Deputy Cabinet Secretary, Governor's Office
Mike Gauthier, Superintendent, Mojave National Preserve, U.S. National Park Service
Joe Stout, Associate State Director, U.S. Bureau of Land Management

ⁱ 6/11/2020 Forbes article on Fortress Investment Group, which owns Brightline:

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/alanohnsman/2020/06/11/inside-a-wall-street-tycoons-plan-to-get-americans-off-the-highway---and-on-his-trains/?sh=182631b87a04> and https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Cc6_3uNXcqc