



November 17, 2020

Fiona Ma, Treasurer  
 State of California  
 915 Capitol Mall  
 Sacramento, CA 95814

Toks Omishakin, Director  
 Caltrans  
 C-151120 N Street  
 Sacramento, CA 95814

Chuck Bonham, Director  
 California Department of Fish & Wildlife  
 1416 9th Street, 12th Floor  
 Sacramento, CA 95814

*(Submitted via email to recipients)*

**Re: Adding Necessary Wildlife Overcrossings to XpressWest High-Speed Rail Project Design**

Treasurer Ma, Director Omishakin and Director Bonham:

We write to request that your agencies coordinate to ensure that the proposed XpressWest High-Speed Rail Project (“Project”) includes wildlife overcrossings, which are necessary to avoid the permanent blockage of critical California wildlife corridors resulting from the Project’s concrete barrier walls. The Project requires discretionary approvals from the State, specifically financing (e.g. tax-exempt bonds) and land-use authorizations (e.g. right-of-way).<sup>1</sup> State approvals and financial support warrant guarantees that the project respect the state’s interest in affected wildlife. We have presented this request directly to the project sponsors and ask that you make it a requirement.

<sup>1</sup> **Bloomberg** news reported the \$600 million in State bonds issued to XpressWest earlier this year will be returned to the State for reallocation to housing and other projects and that over the next several weeks, the State Treasurer’s Office will be discussing with Brightline the potential for a new request for State bonds. **Las Vegas Review Journal** reported Brightline will work with California officials to finalize project design.

Your agencies can ensure the Project is appropriately designed to benefit Californians and our world-class wildlife instead of creating a permanently impermeable barrier to wildlife movement. 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 overcrossings preserve the movement of wildlife, connecting populations and allowing individual species to move between habitats. This is critical to allow species to access food and other habitat needs, avoid the isolation of populations and provide for genetic diversity. The need for these crossings has already been identified by the California Department of Fish and Wildlife. Therefore, we request that inclusion of these wildlife overcrossings in the Project design be made conditions for any State of California approvals for the Project.

As you may be aware, overtures have been made directly to Brightline, the Miami-based owner of the Project, requesting the company voluntarily propose these overcrossings as part of project design and demonstrate how to construct such projects the right way to protect California's wildlife.<sup>2</sup>

Brightline is proposing a more than \$8 billion project, requesting \$600 million in tax-exempt bonds from California, expected to have an annual operating profit of nearly \$1 billion,<sup>3</sup> and proposing a project that will have devastating impacts to California's wildlife. Therefore, the addition of wildlife overcrossings is not only the right thing to do, but is financially reasonable and feasible.

Through adding overcrossings, California can continue to demonstrate its commitment to protecting its rich biodiversity. We ask for your leadership to secure this outcome, and request to discuss this matter with you at your earliest convenience.

Sincerely,

Gray N. Thornton, President & CEO  
**Wild Sheep Foundation**

Don Martin, President  
**California Chapter of the Wild Sheep Foundation**

Neal Desai, Senior Program Director  
**National Parks Conservation Association**

Gary F. Brennan, President  
**San Diego County Wildlife Federation**

Pamela Flick, California Program Director  
**Defenders of Wildlife**

Aimee J. Byard, Associate Director/Biologist  
**Bighorn Institute**

Geary Hund, Executive Director  
**Mojave Desert Land Trust**

Meg Foley, Executive Director  
**Friends of Big Morongo Canyon Preserve**

Ileene Anderson, Public Lands Deserts Director  
**Center for Biological Diversity**

Michael Madrigal, President  
**Native American Land Conservancy**

Kim Floyd, Conservation Chair  
**San Geronio Chapter, Sierra Club**

Steve Bardwell, President  
**Morongo Basin Conservation Association**

Linda Castro, Assistant Policy Director  
**California Wilderness Coalition**

Frazier Haney, Deputy Director  
**The Wildlands Conservancy**

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

Steve Miller, President  
**Tulare Basin Wetlands Association**

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<sup>2</sup> See [9/18/2020 letter](#) from National Parks Conservation Association to Brightline

<sup>3</sup> See [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](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Cc6_3uNXcqc)

Mark Hennelly, Vice President of Government Relations  
**California Waterfowl Association**

Fred Harpster, President  
**Black Brant Group**

Chriss Bowles, President  
**California Bowmen Hunters/State Archery Association**

Corey Thompson, President  
**Cal-Ore Wetland and Waterfowl Council**

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

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

Steve Marschke, President  
**Society for the Conservation of Bighorn Sheep**

Rick Travis, Director of Development  
**California Rifle & Pistol Association**

Loir Jacobs, President  
**California Houndmen for Conservation**

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

Lisa C. McNamee, Co-Legislative Coordinator  
**SCI CA Coalition**

Don Giottonini, Co-Legislative Coordinator  
**SCI CA Coalition**

Donn Walgamuth, President  
**California Deer Association**

Kate Hoit, California Director  
**Vet Voice Foundation**

Wendy Schneider, Executive Director  
**Friends of the Inyo**

Kevin Emmerich, Co-Founder  
**Basin and Range Watch**

Chris Clarke, Board President  
**Mojave National Preserve Conservancy**

cc: Stafford Lehr, Deputy Director for Wildlife and Fisheries, CDFW  
Chad Dibble, Deputy Director for Ecosystem Conservation, CDFW  
Andrew Walters, Senior Environmental Planner, Caltrans  
Michael Beauchamp, Deputy District Director of Construction, Caltrans  
Mike Gauthier, Superintendent, Mojave National Preserve  
Debra Hughson, Chief, Science and Resource Stewardship, Mojave National Preserve  
Members of California Debt Limit Allocation Committee