



Morgan Hill Historical Society

To preserve and share the history of Morgan Hill, and its environs, to inspire a sense of community.

May 28, 2020

California High-Speed Rail Authority
Attn: San Jose to Merced: Draft EIR/EIS
100 Paseo de San Antonio, Suite 300
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san.jose_merced@hsr.ca.gov

Ricci Graham
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Subject: San Jose Merced Draft EIR/EIS Comments

I am writing to you as Board President of the Morgan Hill Historical Society (MHHS), an all-volunteer organization. MHHS has restored, preserved, maintained and operated Villa Mira Monte (VMM) and offered education and enrichment programs at this site for the benefit of our community for 27 years. To accomplish all this and fundraise requires a full-time effort from a number of our board and committee volunteers. We are currently working on plans to develop the back of the site with a parking lot, a great lawn and an agricultural demonstration garden to better support our community events and programs. These plans also include a provision for a much-needed Visitor Center that will draw tourists to learn about local history and all that our community has to offer during their visit.

Our board members have reviewed the San Jose to Merced Draft EIR/EIS and wish to submit the following comments. Our organization holds title to VMM, which is designated as a Morgan Hill City park and listed on the National Register of Historic Landmarks, United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service, ID # 78000777. The deed to the site requires that the holder preserve and maintain it in perpetuity as a community resource/park keeping it open for community educational and recreational purposes.

The CHSRA position in the EIR/EIS sites Federal, State and possibly County regulations that permit alternatives (2 and 4) to run through the center of our community with up to 16 HSR trains per hour at peak commuting times. In addition, Caltrain will be running 4 commuter trains (likely to increase since HSR will not have a station in Morgan Hill) with additional freight trains using the same right of way on a daily basis. This means that at full buildout during peak commute times at least 20 trains per hour will run on the tracks. This means that trains will be traveling through our community approximately every 3 minutes.

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What the EIR/EIS does not consider are the numerous negative human and financial impacts created by these alternatives – for our city and for VMM. Our comments address Alternatives 2 and 4 which impact VMM and will place the tracks adjacent to the eastern boundary of the VMM property and through the center of downtown Morgan Hill.

Sound: The noise and vibration from these trains—projected to be a minimum of 20 per hour at peak, running as often as every 3 minutes during peak commute times—will mean that structures within several hundred feet from the tracks will be significantly impacted by high noise levels and vibrations. In the case of VMM, this adverse impact will make it virtually impossible to hold our year-round, mission-driven community education, recreation and fundraising events, and threaten site rentals by community partners. The result will be a severe and irreversible diminishing of our ability to serve our community according to our mission and to raise funds needed to keep the site open and operational. This in turn would result in a loss of membership and donation revenue. Currently, MHHS raises an annual average of \$79,000 to support site preservation, maintenance and operation. This does not include grants and donations from outside sources.

The Alternative 2 makes this statement: “While the HSR embankment would be visible from VMM, it would not hinder the resource’s ability to convey its era of construction, associations with Diana and Hiram Morgan Hill, and distinctive and refined architectural style. The project would not cause a substantial adverse change in the significance of the resource because construction of the HSR embankment would not materially impair characteristics that qualify it for listing in the CRHR.”

This does not address the environmental issue of sound that would render the site virtually unusable for most all functions.

Alternative 4 states that, “The project would not cause a substantial adverse change in the significance of the resource because project activities would not materially impair characteristics that qualify it for listing in the CRHR.”

Again, reality is that the site will be rendered virtually useless for purposes of community educational and recreational use and prohibit fundraising and rental income.

Vibrations: Vibrations will be an ongoing concern for the long-term effects on historical buildings that require constant preservation and maintenance work. From comments shared by many who have experienced vibrations, they can be considerably more of a concern than what is presented by the CHSRA.

Environmental Impacts:

- The impact of the near constant noise of trains during peak commute hours is significantly underrated and will render the site useless for education and recreation activities as required in the deed to the site. Even during non-peak commute times, the disruption to programs and events will be significant.
- The impact of long-term vibrations is underrated and leads to concerns about increased preservation and maintenance costs.
- The view of the HSR corridor, even well designed from the CHSRA perspective, will be unsightly from the historical perspective and will greatly diminish the authenticity of visitors’ experience of our historic site.

- The above factors render the site unable to conduct fundraising activities to support preservation, maintenance and operation.
- The above factors also render the site unpleasant to volunteers and community partners who are critical to the growth and success of our operations.

Impact on the historical significance of the site: While HSR construction and operation may not directly alter the physical structures located at VMM, the view from the site to the rear with a 20+ foot embankment and 27-foot-tall OCS poles with transmission wires running through them will create a very “unappealing sight” that runs counter to the authentic visual experience of VMM and its historic significance as the original home of our city’s namesake—making it one of the most important assets that makes the City of Morgan Hill unique. The EIR/EIS statement that the current view of the residential development behind the site already compromises the historical context of the site fails to mention that a greenbelt area is already planned to mitigate that impact. The presence of residences in no way compares to the glaring monstrosity that will be created by the HSR.

Use of the site as a temporary staging area:

MHHS has the following comments and questions regarding the temporary use of the back of the site as a temporarily staging area for construction materials and equipment.

This area is slated for the development of a paved parking area, which is possible prior to the timeframe CHSRA plans to use this area. If this should happen, there are concerns about loss of use as well as damages to the surfaces, curbing and landscaping.

Questions for which we would like answers:

- Can the Historical Society deny CHSRA use of the designated area for staging activities?
- If there is an alternative staging area, how will MHHS be compensated for this use or for damage to our site?
- What is the anticipated time commitment (months/years, start and end dates) for this use?
- What equipment, materials and supplies will be located/used on the VMM site? Will HSR be required to also put up temporary safety fencing, further encroaching on our site? Will fuels be stored in equipment or containers on the site? How will HSR ensure that MHHS is free of liability should HSR equipment, materials or supplies be damaged or stolen while located on the VMM site?
- What will be the access for locating equipment, materials and equipment on the site?
- Will this involve large trucks and heavy equipment using the main drive to the site?
- If the driveway on the site will be used, is it wide enough to provide access, what wear and tear will it suffer and will MHHS be compensated for repairs and maintenance? How would HSR compensate MHHS for large mature native oaks on the driveway side and in back of the site?
- What other environmental impacts will impede MHHS from doing business and maintaining the site; dust, noise, etc.?
- What compensation will MHHS receive for damage to or disruption of the site: driveway and parking area, replacement of fencing, damage or disruption of infrastructure elements including but not limited to power, water, sewer, broadband, etc?

The presence of HSR will grossly compromise the site's historical integrity and we anticipate devastating impacts along with economic, safety, cultural, and environmental repercussions.

Based on all the above, the Morgan Hill Historical Society requests that the HSR Authority select an approved alignment that will avoid ANY impact to this unique, valuable and irreplaceable community resource.

The Morgan Hill Historical Society appreciated CSHA's careful consideration of these comments. A response to the questions raised in this letter would be greatly appreciated. If there are any questions, please contact me at ksullivan@morganhillhistoricalsociety.com.

Sincerely,



Kathy Sullivan
President, Morgan Hill Historical Society
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CC: Morgan Hill Historical Society Board of Directors
Morgan Hill City Council
Morgan Hill City Manager, Christina Turner
Morgan Hill Director of Community Services, Chris Ghione
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U.S. Senator Bill Monning
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California Assembly Member Robert Rivas
Santa Clara County Supervisor Mike Wasserman