

REMCO General Meeting

Tuesday, June 10, 2025

10:35 AM

President Lori Norman called members to order as the Speaker was ready.

Director Gloria Keene asked if the members were ready, to raise their hands and thanked the members for being at the meeting today. Director Keene reported it was her privilege to introduce Speaker Garth Fernandez, Central Valley Regional Director, who has been with CAL-Trans for 22 years and he was a civil engineer by trade, all together he has been with the Rail for 35 years so he is very experienced and we should wait to ask questions after he finishes his talk. Director Keene reported that she had lots of questions! Mr. Fernandez introduced his assistant Augie Blancas who set up the equipment to connect with the Elk's projection screen on the stage and provided the information that the Central Valley extended to Bakersfield and up to Merced and this is the area that physical work was actually being done on the Rail. We want to give you a flavor of what our program is Statewide, what is happening in the Valley and what is happening in our neck of the woods, in Merced. He knew that there is a lot of terror in this area and that political issues arise, and we try to stay away from those to keep the Rail a reality. It is a challenging project with funding. Basically, our project is broken into two phases: Phase 1: High Speed Rail from San Francisco to Los Angeles/Anaheim consisting of 494 miles of rail, which is what we are constructing right now. We are constructing in the Central Valley; it is a key component. It is split into three basic regions. As you can see on the left side of the map that we have a rail that goes to Bakersfield, one going to the Bay area and one going to Anaheim. Like me, there are two other regional Directors for their regions, one for the North and one for the South. After Phase 1, Phase two will extend 300 miles of rail from Merced to Sacramento, and to Los Angeles to San Diego. The trains are designed to travel at 220 miles per hour, that is almost the fastest rail in the world, China has the fastest. We will add 24 stations to the Corridor. Our goal remains to provide high-speed services to the greater Los Angeles area: in the North, we will connect to the newly electrified Cal Train System, creating immediate benefits; in the South we will link to the High Desert at Palmdale, connecting to Brightline West's high-speed rail to Los Vegas, forming a Southwest High-Speed Rail Network. This project is not just for California, it is a system, a mode of transportation that we deserve in this Country. He asked if anyone had ridden a high-speed rail train anywhere in the World and asked if we need it in the U.S? A member said they had ridden in Europe but did not feel like it was needed in the USA. Mr. Fernandez said we are building it right now and it was his experience when people use a high-speed rail train they are changed, significantly changed on how they travel. Where are we today? We are constructing 119 miles in the Central Valley: 52 miles under Advanced Design (north into Merced and South into Bakersfield): that is when Merced will get High-Speed Rail, ACE and Amtrak. If we had enough funding we could be working on each segment at the same time. Environmentally clearing a full 494 miles between San Francisco and Los Angeles Basin. Approximately 463 miles environmentally cleared to-date; Anticipating 494 miles environmentally cleared in 2025: Station design for four Central Valley Stations: Merced, Fresno, Kings/Tulare and Bakersfield.

Improving Safety in the Valley: Fully grade separated HSR Corridor: Eliminating 55 existing freight railroad at-grade crossings: Mr. Fernandez met someone who had lost someone at one of these crossings. She appreciated that the crossing would no longer be a problem. Unfortunately, people think they can beat the train, they try to go under the arms or around because they don't want to wait. We have several such crossings in Merced and down South. Immediate benefit includes enhanced safety; Improved traffic operations (East -West connective); Reduction in greenhouse gas emissions from idling vehicles; Reduced noise (no train horn).

Job Creation: The Federal Government requested the Central Valley to create jobs because most of the Valley has been a historically oppressed area of the State of California. 15,000+ Construction jobs have been created since construction started: 1,500+ construction workers dispatched to sites daily: 30+ active construction sites are all along the Corridor: Good news for the Valley is that 75% of the workforce are from disadvantaged communities. The chart on the other side shows the Counties where physical work is actively happening (Merced County {236}, Madera County {749}, Fresno County {5,165}, Kings County/ Tulare County {1,647} Kern County). Now, that doesn't include me, doesn't count the designers, Surveyors, all of the people who support the project. Something else that we did was establish the Central Valley Training Center in 2020: A program created for the City of Selma to provide pre-apprentices and Construction Industry training, in partnership with the City of Selma, Fresno Economic Development Corporation and the Building Trades with a 10-week apprentice program for students. Every 10-weeks, I get to graduate students and hear how the program has changed their lives. Students learn soft skills, communication skills, Construction math, and are introduced to eleven different trades. 250 students to-date have graduated (16 cohorts) with several Industry specific Certifications:

908 Small Business accounts on HSR: 243 in the Central Valley.

What does it take to build a Train? There is a lot that you will never see, some is underground. We have 106 major Structures. Type 1 (46) are structures designed for high-speed trains to ride on, severely large structures, built to be stiff when going 220 miles per hour, including 9 viaducts which are 2000 feet or over a mile long and 2 trenches. The one we have in Hanford is 6000 plus feet as it is an elevated structure as there will be a Hanford Station there. Merced will have a viaduct all the way to Mission; that will be big viaduct. Type 2 structures (60) are designed for vehicle traffic, like overpasses, over streets, underpasses and grade separators. 257 Reinforced Concrete Box Structures over canals, irrigation and wildlife crossings. Earth Work: there are 24 million cubic-yards earthwork needed for the high-speed guidelines. Mr. Fernandez noted that if the 24 million cubic-yard earthwork was dumped on a football stadium, it would be taller than the highest peaks in California.

We've struggled a lot on the relocation of utilities, needed to relocate 1,836 utilities facilities; 87% completed. AT&T has a trunk line in Fresno, was moved 10 miles, to 180 to the river. That is equivalent to 24 -4" conduits, each has cables that has thousands of wires, it took almost 9 years. We are almost completed.

The 119 miles is in construction under 3 different Contractors, these are large companies, not small singular contractors. This is divided into 3 packages: Package 1 is Avenue 19 in Madera County to just

South to East American Ave in Fresno County, the most complex of all; includes 19 grade Separations, three viaducts, includes a major river crossing over the San Joaquin River and 2 trenches (52 miles) Tutor Perini, Zachary: Construction 2-3 is South of Fresno, to one mile North of the Tulare/Kern County line: includes viaducts, underpasses and overhead structures (65miles) Drabados - Flat Iron: Construction Package 4 (Substantially Complete) From one mile North of the Tulare/Kern County line to Poplar Ave (22 miles) California Rail Builders (CRB): Substantially Completion expected in 2026. If you travel down 99 to cross to Fresno you will see this large overhead structure for an entry into Fresno or out of Fresno, it depends on which side you are on. There are a lot of green fields, this is where the 6000 plus structure that will become the elevated Hanford Station when finished. Substantially will be completed in 2026.

Civic Work completed in CP 4

The Rail-Head project is the beginning of the track-laying phase, there was a ground breaking ceremony with the Governor and includes: A build out of 150 acres for a rail-yard in Kern County, where materials will be stored like the ballast, the ties; Temporary freight tracks that will help transport materials needed to build the future electrified high-speed rail tracks; Construction started in January 2025; Rail-head track installation by BNSF; Completion scheduled for Fall of 2025.

Project Extensions: (Wasco to Bakersfield -LGA Segment) located between Shaffer and Bakersfield; 18.5 miles long; 30 structures; 5 ½ miles of viaduct, several elevated stations; 7 at-grade railroad crossings eliminated; 278 parcels. Status: Advancing Design to 30%; Developing Right of Way footprint; utilities to Design to 100%; Public Outreach Information meetings. If you are interested in learning what is happening, provide your data to us and we will keep you up-to-date.

Merced to Madera: We've been transparent about the challenges, we didn't have all the properties when the construction began, there were funding issues, we have a better plan for the future to carry the plan all together. This is the alignment of how to get into Merced: located between Merced Station and Ave 19 in Madera (35 miles long); Designed in 5 segments; 42 Structures; 3 miles of viaduct; 4 at-grade railroad crossings eliminated; approximately 195 properties impacted; 73 within Merced County; approximately 400 geological field explorations within Merced County; 14 interactions within Merced County infrastructures adopted. Parroting Highway 99, this cuts across 152, stays on the North side of 152 to get to Merced. Project Interactions: Merced County – South to North; AVE 26; Roosevelt (AVE 27); Cross Road; Sandy Mush RD; Athlone RD; Le Grand RD; Ranch RD; West Frontage RD; Lindgard RD; Healy RD; Mission RD; Mission Ave; across road; Gerard Ave; and Childs RD; Ongoing meetings with local agencies, geological field explorations have begun, updates to be provided at Open House in October or November 2025. Estimated design completion in Spring of 2027.

Boys and Girls Club and Merced Senior Center: The Authority continues to work closely with Merced Boys and Girls Club and Merced Senior Center during the Right of Way process. We work within the law, of what we can do for them, what is allowed under the Federal Uniform Act. The Authority is committed to continuing to lease both buildings once acquired, and will maintain the lease as long as possible or if Construction is eminent. First Offers were provided to the City of Merced. Both entries are eligible for

relocation. Merced Boys and Girls Club has been offered assistance with Certification and submission of Grant applications.

Station Planning: Central Valley Stations; City of Merced, City of Fresno; Kings/Tulare Regional; City of Bakersfield.

Status: Schematic Designed (30%) and early site location activation during initial construction documents completed in late 2024. Meeting with agencies and community-based organizations to gather feedback for final results. – Winter of 2025.

Final Designs - First Q – 2025; 100% completed Mid 2026; Begin construction 2027.

Future Merced Station: Located between O and R Streets in downtown Merced along 16<sup>th</sup>Street. It is our vision for high-speed Stations to be more than a train stop. They will transform cities, create community hubs and be iconic of the State. Continuing to work with Stakeholders in 2025. Working with agencies on opportunities for Early Site Activation. Mr. Fernandez asked if any members had been at the last meeting, several hands were raised. He said we need your feedback, your input to be sure that the Station would be something that will improve that area, Mr. Fernandez said he would take questions now. A member asked what was in that area now. Director Keene said it was mostly warehouses, and dilapidated buildings. He said the project stops just before Costco Warehouse. Someone asked a question about the rails; there would have been 3 stations originally; it was decided to move the station a little more north. A question about funding; the State is supporting 80%, Federal only 20%. Question on the buildings of the Boys and Girls Club and Merced Senior Center; Not at this time, too early in the project. One member asked about a reservoir project for water; need water projects more than the train. Question about CA grid; Using electric trains, it becomes a zero on the grid. Director Keene thanked speaker Garth Fernandez. 11:20 AM.

At 11:31 President Lori Norman called the General Meeting to order, followed by the Pledge of Allegiance and observed a moment of silence for Military and Public Safety personnel and REMCO Members that have passed.

President Norman introduced herself, then had the Head Table Officers, Directors and Guests introduced themselves. President Norman introduced Directors Bernadette Castaneda and Michle Burroughs, and asked Guests Amy Gonzales and Mai Yang from Merced County Human Resources with insurance information to come to the dais.

Amy provided information for those under 65, that Anthem had a new app for receiving virtual care and support 24/7 with their Sydney Health app. Doctors are virtually available to visit for common health concerns: COVID-19, Flu, Cold and fever, minor rashes, sore throat, and headaches. During a video visit the doctor will assess your condition, provide a treatment plan and send prescriptions to the pharmacy of your choice if needed. Mai Yang provided the Merced County New Retiree Medicare Enrollment Form for those who need to enroll 30-60 days to avoid a lapse in coverage prior to eligibility date (1<sup>st</sup> day of the month in which you turn 65 in order to receive the monthly premium reimbursement offered by

Merced County for its eligible retirees). Enroll for Social Security, enroll for Medicare Part A (hospitalization) and Part B (Medical/doctor visits) enroll for Medicare Part D (prescriptions) Enroll in a Medicare Supplement Plan with United HealthCare. Amy and Mai reminded members that if they have questions, come see them at the Head table.

President Norman introduced Sheri Villagrana from MercedCERA

Sheri came to the dais with a Good Morning and Thank you for being here today. I'm Sheri Villagrana from MercedCERA. Most of you already know me already. Just a few updates today.

Fraud – there is more and more fraud that is happening in the world and so we ask that you be patient with us when you call as we locate your account. We will be contacting you each and every time you make changes like address, bank account or tax changes. Lots of other CERAs are experiencing an uptick in fraud so we are trying to remain diligent to protect you, our members! We will be asking more and more questions that only you should know, like your full Social number, your beneficiary's name, beneficiary's DOB, last position title, DOR, and it might be helpful to have a current earnings statement handy when calling, in case we ask you something to do with your net or gross amounts or your deductions. I'm sure you would rather us ask more questions and be thorough than for your information to be in the wrong hands. We also have a "Secure File Upload" location on our website for you to upload all of your secure documents like banking or tax changes or anything that you wish to send to us instead of attaching to an email since that is not secure.

75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary – MercedCERA was established in July of 1950. We are reaching 75 years that we have had a pension system. Can you believe that? That is so amazing to me that we have been retiring members such as yourselves for the last 75 years already. We will be having a 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary celebration later this Fall to commence our 75<sup>th</sup>, more to come on that.

Members Counts – Currently we have just under 6,500 total members in our association. As of March 1, 2025 we had 2,320 active members, 2,627 retired members, and 1,472 deferred members. Of the 2,320 active members, we only have 22 Tier 1 members that are still currently working, and of those 22 – 5 are Safety and the remaining 17 are General members.

Funding Level – As of March 31, 2025 – Merced CERA is 78% funded, and our total assets are \$1.279 Billion. Our investments are in U.S. Equity, International Equity, Emerging Markets Equity, Private Equity, U.S. Fixed Income, Hedge Funds, Real Estate, Real Assets, Direct Lending, Opportunistic Credit, and lastly, Cash. Sheri reported she had some address forms and tax change forms in case anyone needs one or if there were any questions, come see her at the Head Table.

President Norman reported that the winner of the \$50 gift card quarterly random draw from the REMCO Membership Report is Dennis Floyd of Encinitas, CA. If not present, a congratulatory letter with the \$50 gift card inside will be mailed to him.

President Norman reported that REMCO Elections for Officers are held on odd years (2025). Directors are held on even years (2026). The REMCO By-Laws allow the President to fill any vacancies without a paper

ballot election. President Norman was able to fill the Vice President vacancy and to replace Secretary LaVon Justice who had given her resignation as of August 10, 2025. At the September 9th Annual Business Meeting the members will signal by saying Aye for Vice President Dartine Solis and Secretary Karen Rodriguez to serve a 2- year term as Officers.

President Norman introduced Director Mary Brooks, Cindy Ramirez who handled tickets, and Treasurer Richard St. Marie who handled the Scholarship applications.

Treasurer St. Marie thanked the Scholarship Committee for their time and diligence to return the applications in a timely manner. The applications that REMCO received were two categories: Graduating Seniors and Continuing Education. Two were awarded in each category, then the next highest score in either category was selected. (5-total Scholarships). The applications were very impressive.

2025 Continuing Ed (1) Celina Henn, parents, Chris Henn/Myra Ferrer-Henn, Member Kenneth Henn, Grandfather. (2) Angelo Contreras Tumonong unable to attend, had Finals, parents Arvin & Christine Tumonong, Member Alma Contreras, Grandmother. (3) Justine Navarra, parents Kevin and Mary Ann Navarra, Member Mary Ann Navarra, Mother.

2025 Graduating Seniors: (1) Fiona Kutcher, parents Nathan & Caroline Kutcher, Member Kenneth Henn, Grandfather. (2) Jessa Dunn, Parents Nathan Dunn & Susan Wyatt, Member JoAnn Wyatt, Grandmother.

Each attending Scholarship winner spoke briefly on their goals or family members spoke. Treasurer St. Marie spoke for Angelo Contreras Tumonong.

Next Meeting is September 9, 2025. Make reservations early.

President Norman reported that those who need assistance will go first, then Head Table, Scholarship winners/families then down the right side when Elks let us know food is ready. Linda Sanchez won Attendance \$100 gift card, will draw tickets.

No other business – Meeting closed 12:10 PM. – Action Item, (Motion made/Seconded/Passed)