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SIGN SEN. WIGGINS' RAIL BILL

Ukiah – September 18, 2007 – The Chairman of the North Coast Railroad Authority (NCRA), Allan Hemphill, today appealed to Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger to sign SB 861 (Wiggins), a measure approved by the legislature and sent to the Governor last week.

In his letter to the Governor, Hemphill said:

“Thankfully, under your leadership, the California Transportation Commission (CTC) has approved the release of \$26 million in Traffic Congestion Relief Program (TCRP) funds to repair the first 62 - mile stretch of the Northwestern Pacific (NWP) railroad line. This will allow freight trains to operate next year from the national rail interchange east of Novato in Marin County, to Windsor in Sonoma County. The long-awaited return of rail service to this line will take trucks off of Highway 101, reduce greenhouse gas emissions, save energy, and benefit the North Coast economy.

“While this work is underway, SB 861 (Wiggins) gives the North Coast Railroad Authority (NCRA) funding to complete a court-ordered clean-up of 9 abandoned rail yards that suffered environmental degradation prior to the enactment of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). Senator Wiggins’ legislation also provides funding for the implementation of “Quiet-Zones” at rail crossings where tracks pass close to Novato’s downtown, and provides funds to address safety hazards wherever they exist along the 316 - mile line, which extends from Marin County to the Port of Humboldt Bay in Eureka.

“The \$5.5 million in funding under Senator Wiggins’ bill is already designated for NCRA and is on deposit in the Local Agency Investment Fund (LAIF). SB 861 merely redirects the use of the money to support environmental clean-up, safety hazard prevention, and implementation of “Quiet Zones.” This can all be accomplished without impacting the State General Fund.

“Thanks to your CTC, the first phase of North Coast train operations (Lombard-Novato-Windsor) will begin next summer. Please reaffirm your support for the long-awaited return of trains to the North Coast wine country by signing SB 861 by State Senator Pat Wiggins.”

Hemphill said that every city, county, and transportation agency on the North Coast supports Senator Wiggins' bill. He encouraged rail proponents to send letters asking the Governor to sign SB 861 (Wiggins).

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The North Coast Railroad Authority (NCRA) was formed in 1989 by the California Legislature under the North Coast Railroad Authority Act, Government Code Section 93000, et seq. The mission of the North Coast Railroad Authority is to provide a unified & revitalized rail infrastructure meeting the freight and passenger needs of the region; a first class service working in partnership with others to build and sustain the economy of the region.