

HOUSE JOINT MEMORIAL

**56TH LEGISLATURE - STATE OF NEW MEXICO - SECOND SESSION, 2024**

INTRODUCED BY

DISCUSSION DRAFT

A JOINT MEMORIAL

RAISING AWARENESS OF THE ECONOMIC CHALLENGES EXPERIENCED BY THE FOUR CORNERS REGION AND URGING NEW MEXICO'S CONGRESSIONAL DELEGATION TO SUPPORT LEGISLATION THAT WILL FUND THE CONSTRUCTION OF A FREIGHT RAIL LINE AND TRANSLOADING FACILITY ON THE NAVAJO NATION IN THE FOUR CORNERS REGION.

WHEREAS, San Juan county experiences high systemic poverty and unemployment, with a poverty level that is twice the national mean and with approximately one in four people living below the poverty line; and

WHEREAS, the Navajo Nation in San Juan county experiences even more severe poverty, with a poverty level that is nearly four times the national mean and with an estimated three out of every four young children living in households with incomes under one hundred eighty-five percent of the poverty level; and

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1           WHEREAS, power plants, mines and associated businesses  
2 account for eighty percent of property tax revenues for San  
3 Juan county; and

4           WHEREAS, the San Juan generating station and San Juan coal  
5 mine closed in 2022, resulting in the loss of a substantial  
6 number of high-paying jobs; and

7           WHEREAS, the Four Corners power plant, which contributes  
8 nearly forty percent of the total revenue to the Navajo Nation  
9 general fund, is scheduled to close in 2031 and will result in  
10 the loss of thousands of additional jobs and millions of  
11 dollars in tax revenue; and

12           WHEREAS, the Four Corners region in San Juan county is one  
13 of the largest metropolitan statistical areas in the nation  
14 that does not have a freight rail line and the only  
15 metropolitan statistical area in New Mexico that does not have  
16 a freight rail line, interstate highway or commercial airport;  
17 and

18           WHEREAS, research by the economic development department  
19 and the city of Farmington identified nearly twenty billion  
20 dollars' (\$20,000,000,000) worth of products in projected  
21 demand for transport by rail through the Four Corners region;  
22 and

23           WHEREAS, constructing a Four Corners rail line that would  
24 connect to the present BNSF railway company rail line on the  
25 interstate 40 corridor between Gallup and Grants would capture

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1 a high percentage of this projected demand, attract investment  
2 and businesses to the region, help diversify and support the  
3 tax base and workforce of San Juan county and contribute  
4 significant tax revenues to the state; and

5 WHEREAS, moving freight by rail can lower greenhouse gas  
6 emissions by up to seventy-five percent, with railroads being  
7 up to four times more fuel efficient than trucks and moving an  
8 average of one ton of freight more than four hundred eighty  
9 miles per single gallon of diesel fuel; and

10 WHEREAS, moving freight to the Four Corners region by rail  
11 would reduce shipping costs, traffic, road accidents and the  
12 cost of road construction and maintenance; and

13 WHEREAS, a memorandum of agreement already exists between  
14 the Navajo Nation and San Juan county to pursue the development  
15 and study the feasibility and environmental impact of a freight  
16 rail line to connect the Napi Headquarters and Bisti areas of  
17 San Juan county to the existing BNSF railway company rail line  
18 on the interstate 40 corridor; and

19 WHEREAS, with the Navajo Nation's dependence on power  
20 plants, coal mines and electric utility transmission lines, the  
21 recent and future closures of power plants and coal mines and  
22 the economic hardships and decreasing revenues of San Juan  
23 county, the Four Corners region needs financial assistance to  
24 build a rail line and capture the concomitant economic growth;

25 NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE

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1 STATE OF NEW MEXICO that New Mexico's congressional delegation  
2 be urged to support legislation that will fund the construction  
3 of a freight rail line into the Four Corners region and a  
4 transloading facility on the Navajo Nation to help alleviate  
5 the region's high unemployment and extreme poverty through the  
6 creation of a rail economy; and

7 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that copies of this memorial be  
8 transmitted to New Mexico's congressional delegation.

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