

1 HOUSE JOINT MEMORIAL 1

2 **56TH LEGISLATURE - STATE OF NEW MEXICO - SECOND SESSION, 2024**

3 INTRODUCED BY

4 Rod Montoya

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8 FOR THE ECONOMIC AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT AND POLICY COMMITTEE

9
10 A JOINT MEMORIAL

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

16
17 WHEREAS, San Juan county experiences high systemic poverty
18 and unemployment, with a poverty level that is twice the
19 national mean and with approximately one in four people living
20 below the poverty line; and

21 WHEREAS, the Navajo Nation in San Juan county experiences
22 even more severe poverty, with a poverty level that is nearly
23 four times the national mean and with an estimated three out of
24 every four young children living in households with incomes
25 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 Navajo agricultural products industry
17 headquarters and Bisti areas on the Navajo Nation in San Juan
18 county to the existing BNSF railway company rail line on the
19 interstate 40 corridor; and

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

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