

December 15, 2021

*****REPLACEMENT LETTER*****

Chair Teresa Alvarado
California Water Commission Members
California Water Commission
P.O. Box 942836
Sacramento, California 94236-0001

RE: WSIP Feasibility Determination for Pacheco Dam Project: December 15, 2021
Commission Meeting

Dear Chair Alvarado and Members of the Commission:

Thank you for considering my views about the feasibility determination for the North Fork Pacheco Reservoir expansion project for purposes of the Proposition 1 Water Storage Investment Program (“WSIP”). As Mayor of America’s 10th largest city, I have serious concerns about the proposed project, and about the Valley Water’s benefit-cost analysis in the agency’s Supplemental Feasibility Documentation. Rather than scrutinizing each element of that analysis, however, I’ll start with my threshold concern for this \$2.5 billion (year-of-expenditure) project: It won’t provide more water.

1. No More Water

That’s right: Pacheco is a \$2.5 billion dam project that actually won’t expand our water supply. Valley Water’s own professional staff publicly told its Board as much.

According to the April 14, 2021 PowerPoint presentation of Valley Water’s staff engineers to their Board of Directors in a public meeting, the Pacheco project will provide “*no new water supply*,” and “*no long term drought supply*.” Further, Valley Water informed their Board that the project offers “[n]o significant reduction in water shortage severity during prolonged droughts,” because one or two dry years would likely exhaust the water supply in an expanded Pacheco Reservoir.

Why won’t Pacheco help with water supply? Apparently, for the same reasons why “Pacheco Creek” isn’t “Pacheco River.” The catchment area around the creek doesn’t collect much water. In fact, the stream is completely dry in the summer. Studies of the topography of the site reveal that the reservoir yields little rainwater from the local watershed—perhaps 6,000 to 9,000 acre-feet, “and that’s in a wet year,” according to one Valley Water expert. Virtually all of that additional water would be required to enable a constant stream flow of Pacheco Creek, to support the environmental benefits promised by the project’s proponents to assist with rearing and migration of juvenile steelhead trout. So, the collected rainfall would be entirely, or nearly entirely, offset by stream outflow required to support fish.

The real water supply benefits of the project, Valley Water experts acknowledge, comes from providing much greater in-county capacity to store water it already owns. Admittedly, the Pacheco project might offer fewer constraints to our rapid access of our existing imported water supply, but regardless, *it provides no new water* to our community.

2. Cost

Even if the Pacheco Reservoir project actually provided water—not a terribly ambitious objective for a dam expansion—it appears very costly. The cost estimate for the Pacheco project has already ballooned from \$969 million in 2017 – when many cities like San José and community organizations supported Valley Water’s application for Proposition 1 funding – to more than \$2.5 billion in year-of-expenditure dollars. As Board Member Nai Hsieh, a civil engineer, warned in one hearing, “the updated cost estimate will probably increase again.”

3. The Environment

Proponents point to the project’s provision of constant flows in the Pacheco Creek to better support salmonids, and its potential support for wildlife refuges south of the Delta, but, the project’s environmental harms and risks outweigh its benefits. I’ll defer to the Sierra Club and other leading environmental organizations to describe the project’s impacts—inundation of natural river habitats, the destructive effects of construction, and loss of cultural resources of heritage sites from ancestors of our local Amah Mutsun tribe, among others.

4. Better Alternatives

Finally, there are better and more cost-effective public investments to address our local water needs. The expansion of the Los Vaqueros Reservoir in Contra Costa County, for example, comprises a project that has fully cleared environmental review, has no significant environmental opposition, and—based on the April 14, 2021 public statements of Valley Water staff—costs less than half as much as Pacheco on a cost per acre-foot basis. Los Vaqueros—already the Bay Area’s largest reservoir—also appears far closer to getting under construction and completed than Pacheco.

The public implicitly understands that better options exist. When Valley Water reported a survey recently about the project on March 23, 2021, finding support plummeted when local residents learned of the price tag for the Pacheco Dam. Less than 7% of respondents indicated they still supported the project if they had to pay the \$16-24 monthly rate increase to fund it, and they strongly preferred funding other options, such as recycled water.

Thank you for considering my concerns. Please contact me (sam.liccardo@sanjoseca.gov) with any questions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Sam Liccardo". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "S" and "L".

Sam Liccardo
Mayor
City of San José

