



**DATE:** April 22, 2014

**CATEGORY:** Consent

**DEPT.:** Public Works

**TITLE:** **Peninsula Corridor Electrification Project Draft Environmental Impact Report Comments**

## **RECOMMENDATION**

Authorize the Mayor to send a letter to the Peninsula Corridor Joint Powers Board (Caltrain) commenting on the Draft Environmental Impact Report for the Peninsula Corridor Electrification Project (Attachment 1 to the Council report).

## **BACKGROUND**

### **Peninsula Corridor Electrification Project**

The Peninsula Corridor Electrification Project (PCEP) is part of the Caltrain Modernization (CalMod) Program which will electrify and upgrade the performance, operating efficiency, capacity, and safety of Caltrain's commuter rail service between San Francisco and San Jose by 2019. The CalMod Program will also help prepare the Peninsula Rail Corridor to accommodate California's State-wide high-speed rail service by 2029. Plans are to have Caltrain and high-speed rail share Caltrain's existing tracks along the Peninsula Rail Corridor operating as a blended rail system.

### **Caltrain – Overview**

Caltrain owns and operates approximately 51 miles of primarily two-track main line railroad right-of-way (ROW) between 4th and King Street Station in San Francisco and approximately 2 miles south of the Tamien Station in San Jose. On the 25-mile segment between Tamien Station and Gilroy, Caltrain operates on tracks owned by the Union Pacific Rail Road (UPRR).

Caltrain trains currently consist of diesel locomotive-hauled, bi-level passenger cars. As of 2013, Caltrain operates a total of 92 (46 northbound and 46 southbound) trains per weekday between San Francisco and San Jose. Three of these trains start in Gilroy during the morning commute period and three terminate in Gilroy during the evening

commute period. Eleven (11) trains in each direction are “Baby Bullet” express service trains, traveling between San Francisco and San Jose in less than one hour. Service is frequent during peak commute periods (five trains per peak hour per direction), hourly during midday, and hourly in both directions on Saturdays and Sundays.

In addition to Caltrain commuter rail service, UPRR operates approximately six daily freight trains between San Francisco and Santa Clara under a trackage agreement with Caltrain. From Santa Clara to San Jose, UPRR operates approximately nine daily freight trains. Three passenger-train services also operate on the Santa Clara-to-San Jose segment (Capitol Corridor, Altamont Commuter Express, and Amtrak).

### **Caltrain Modernization Program (CalMod)**

The \$1.5 billion CalMod Program includes the PCEP and purchasing and installing an advanced signal system (Communications Based Overlay Signal System Positive Train Control or CBOSS PTC).

The CBOSS PTC project is a communications-based overlay signal system that increases operating performance of the current signal system, improves the efficiency and safety of grade crossing warning functions, and automatically stops a train when there is a violation of speed or route. This project is currently being installed and scheduled to be operational by the end of 2015 as mandated by the Federal Railroad Administration.

The PCEP is a key component of the CalMod Program and consists of converting Caltrain from diesel-hauled to Electric Multiple Unit (EMU) trains for services between the 4th and King Street Station in San Francisco and the Tamien Station in San Jose, and beginning electrified service by 2019. Operating speeds would be up to 79 miles per hour (same as current speeds) and service would increase from five trains per peak hour per direction to six trains per peak hour per direction. The project also includes installation of an overhead contact system (OCS) to connect the EMUs to the power source. Figure 1 provides a simulation of the OCS at the San Antonio Caltrain Station.



**Figure 1**

Initially, approximately 75 percent of Caltrain's fleet will be EMUs, with 25 percent of the fleet remaining as diesel trains. Full conversion of Caltrain's fleet to EMUs will occur in the future when the remaining diesel trains reach the end of their service life and funding is available to purchase the new trains.

### **PCEP Relation to California High-Speed Rail Project**

Since 2009, Caltrain, the California High-Speed Rail Authority (CHSRA), Metropolitan Transportation Commission (MTC), and other parties have worked together to develop a plan for Caltrain and high-speed rail (HSR) to operate jointly within the existing Caltrain Peninsula Corridor under "blended service" operations. The current electrification project does not include the construction of the infrastructure needed to implement HSR service in the Peninsula Corridor. However, the electrical infrastructure to be constructed as part of the PCEP, such as OCS, will support blended service operations with HSR.

It is important to note that the PCEP EIR will not environmentally clear HSR construction or operations on the Caltrain Corridor. HSR construction and operations

will be the subject of a future, separate environmental analysis to be conducted by the CHSRA and the Federal Railroad Administration.

## ANALYSIS

On February 28, 2014, Caltrain released the Draft Environmental Impact Report (DEIR) for the PCEP for a 60-day review and public comment period (February 28 to April 29, 2014). The entire DEIR document is not included with this staff report because of its length (more than 3,300 pages), but can be viewed on the City's webpage at: [www.mountainview.gov/city\\_hall/public\\_works/high\\_speed\\_rail.asp](http://www.mountainview.gov/city_hall/public_works/high_speed_rail.asp).

As required by the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), the PCEP DEIR evaluates the potential environmental impacts of the proposed electrification project, including temporary construction-related, permanent, and cumulative impacts.

Based on its review of the DEIR, the potential aesthetic and operational impacts of the PCEP are of the greatest concern to staff. The attached draft 11-page City comment letter (Attachment 1) provides a more detailed discussion of these and other significant concerns staff has identified, including:

- The need for Caltrain to provide more specific information regarding the visual impact of the infrastructure and equipment that will be installed. Also, Caltrain needs to evaluate additional project design and other mitigations that could reduce the visual impact of the PCEP.
- The significant loss of tree canopy and vegetation. The DEIR anticipates the need to remove 284 trees, including all existing trees along the north side of Evelyn Avenue between State Route 85 and Bernardo Avenue, and near other sensitive locations, such as Rengstorff Park, where trees serve as a major sound and visual buffer to the railroad. (Figure 2 shows some of the trees on the north side of Evelyn Avenue that may be removed as a result of the PCEP.)
- The need for Caltrain to identify the specific properties and land uses that may be affected by the PCEP and ensure the information is clearly disclosed in the Final EIR.



**Figure 2**

- Given the increase in the number of trains operating on the Caltrain Corridor and increase in gate downtimes, Caltrain should use the grade separation study work previously conducted by the City as the basis for an evaluation of grade-separating the Rengstorff Avenue rail crossing in the Final EIR as an additional mitigation to anticipated traffic impacts of the PCEP, and Caltrain should work with the City to identify potential mitigations to traffic delay and congestion impacts on Rengstorff Avenue between California Street and Central Expressway.
- The City's objection to the DEIR's blanket dismissal of grade separating the Castro Street/Moffett Boulevard at-grade rail crossing as a potential mitigation because of costs, and a request that Caltrain analyze and prioritize impacted at-grade crossings and review the feasibility of a smaller group of crossings based on their local and regional importance, such as the Castro Street/Moffett Boulevard crossing.
- The City's objection to removing on-street parking on Villa Street as a mitigation to traffic delay and congestion impacts.
- The need for the FEIR to evaluate station- and service-related improvements including: level boarding, extending platform lengths to accommodate longer trains, improved bicycle facilities, and platform widening.

City Council review of and input into the draft letter is requested so that the letter can be finalized in time for the letter to be submitted to Caltrain prior to its April 29, 2014 deadline for comments.

This draft comment letter expands on the comments previously submitted by City staff in March 2013 in response to Caltrain's Notice of Preparation for the DEIR for the PCEP and Caltrain's request for initial project scoping comments regarding the proposed electrification project (Attachment 2).

### **FISCAL IMPACT**

There is no fiscal impact directly associated with forwarding the City's comments regarding the DEIR to Caltrain.

### **CONCLUSION**

Staff requests City Council review of, and input on, the draft letter so that the letter can be finalized and submitted to Caltrain prior to its April 29, 2014 deadline for comments.

Anticipated next steps in the environmental review process for the PCEP include:

- Fall 2014 – Release of Final Environmental Impact Report.
- Winter 2014 – Adoption of the Environmental Impact Report.

City staff will continue to participate in the environmental review process to ensure the City's interests are addressed.

### **ALTERNATIVES**

1. Authorize the Mayor to forward a revised version of the comment letter to Caltrain.
2. Take no action to provide comment on the PCEP DEIR.
3. Provide other direction to staff regarding the City's participation in the environmental review process.

**PUBLIC NOTICING**

Agenda posting and notices were sent to the City's interested parties list and City neighborhood associations.

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- Attachments: 1. Draft Letter to Caltrain – City Comments on Draft Environmental Impact Report  
2. City Staff Scoping Comments on Notice of Preparation for Draft Environmental Impact Report