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Caltrain Receives FRA Approval to Proceed with New Positive Train Control System

October 16, 2014

The Federal Railroad Administration has given Caltrain the green light to proceed with the installation and testing of its Positive Train Control technology, a “smart” system designed to prevent train-to-train collisions.

Known in the industry as an Interoperable Incremental Train Control System, the new system will provide substantial safety and operational benefits for trains in the Caltrain corridor and will allow the agency to meet the federal mandate for the installation of Positive Train Control by the end of 2015.

Caltrain will be the first passenger rail system in the country to adopt this specific technology, which meets the unique needs of a commuter rail corridor that shares tracks with freight and inter-city service providers.

The system is far more complex than a system offering similar benefits currently in use by freight providers throughout the country, including those operating on the Caltrain right of way. Caltrain deals with many challenges that are unique to providing reliable passenger service, raising issues that freight providers don't typically need to consider.

Through the use of the new technology Caltrain will be able to enhance safety at grade crossings, improve schedule reliability, operate trains closer together so more trains can serve the corridor, improve flexibility and enhance safety during construction work alongside the tracks.

“We set a goal of creating a train control solution that would not only provide substantially greater safety improvements but would improve the efficiency and performance of the Caltrain corridor,” said Chuck Harvey, deputy CEO, Engineering, Construction and Operations for Caltrain. “But as a corridor that is also used by freight and other rail service providers, we needed a system that would work with others that are likely to be in use on this corridor one day. We're thrilled to be leading the way with this new technology, which we hope will prove useful for other rail corridors throughout the country facing similar operating environments.”

This approval is considered an important step toward meeting the federal implementation deadline. Caltrain began installation work along the rail corridor last year and will begin installing and testing the software and wayside technology that will interact with onboard software as its next step once installation of the fiber optics is complete. System testing is expected to be completed by October 2015.

The advanced signal system, which includes Positive Train Control technology, is part of Caltrain's Modernization Program. The program includes electrifying the Caltrain system and purchasing new electric multiple units to provide more frequent service and or reduce travel times for more riders at more stations. The program will also decrease noise and pollution in the corridor by more than 80 percent.

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About Caltrain: Owned and operated by the Peninsula Corridor Joint Powers Board, Caltrain provides commuter rail service from San Francisco to San Jose, with limited commute service to Gilroy. Caltrain has enjoyed three years of consecutive monthly ridership increases, surpassing more than 50,000 average weekday riders last year. While the Joint Powers Board assumed operating responsibilities for the service in 1992, the railroad will celebrate 150 years of continuous passenger service this year. Planning for the next 150 years of Peninsula rail service, Caltrain is on pace to electrify the corridor by 2019, reducing diesel emissions by 84 percent and adding more service to more stations.