For the past 150 years, Caltrain has provided passenger rail service along the Peninsula corridor, linking communities from San Francisco to San Jose. It's the oldest continuously operating rail line in the West, and remains one of the most important passenger rails lines in the San Francisco Bay Area.

As we commemorate this milestone, the California High-Speed Rail Authority is working in partnership with Caltrain, the Peninsula Corridor Joint Powers Board and regional stakeholders to ensure that this venerable rail line is well positioned to keep pace with increasing ridership demands while also preparing it for high-speed service.

Less known is the significant impact the partnership will have in helping the state meet its goals for reducing greenhouse gas emissions by 2020 and beyond. In his proposed budget, Gov. Jerry Brown plans to allocate a portion of state cap-and-trade revenue for the high-speed rail program as part of the state’s long-term air pollution-reduction plan. Some have criticized putting cap-and-trade money into high-speed rail because they believe — wrongly — that the project won’t reduce air pollution soon enough. In fact, high-speed rail’s plan to electrify the Caltrain line will reduce emissions in advance of the deadline imposed by Assembly Bill 32. Further, high-speed rail will play an important role in helping to meet the bill’s requirements to continue to lower greenhouse gases well beyond 2020.

High-speed rail is collaborating with Caltrain staff on the Caltrain Modernization Plan, which, among other benefits, will lay the foundation for high-speed rail service along the San Francisco-San Jose corridor. The plan calls for investing $600 million in high-speed rail funding to fully electrify the Peninsula Rail Corridor, enabling Caltrain by 2019 to replace diesel trains with a clean, electrified fleet that will eventually operate in a blended service with high-speed rail.

The program electrifies the Caltrain line between the station at Fourth and King streets in San Francisco and the Tamien Station in San Jose. Electrification also will reduce power consumption and lower noise for those living and working nearby.

At the same time, Proposition 1A, the High-Speed Rail Act of 2008, is providing Caltrain with $105 million for a “Positive Train Control” (PTC) electronic safety system that will monitor and, if necessary, control train movement in the event of human error. PTC will equip Caltrain with federally mandated safety technology essential for high-speed rail. The
system integrates command, control, communications and information systems to significantly reduce the likelihood of collisions. It also allows trains to travel safely at higher speeds. This phase of the project involves installing a fiber optic backbone along the Caltrain right-of-way so that signals, trains, dispatchers and other components of the railroad operations can communicate seamlessly. The installation work has started in San Jose and will progress north to San Francisco.

Finally, the high-speed rail project plays a critical role in another key Bay Area transportation project: San Francisco’s Transbay Transit Center. The center is a multi-modal transportation hub that will centralize the region’s transportation network and extend the Caltrain line into the San Francisco Financial District. The center will be used by both Caltrain and high-speed rail, connecting San Francisco to the rest of California with effective and efficient rail service.

California’s high-speed rail program not only represents the largest and most ambitious infrastructure project of its kind in the country. It is a project that is building strategic partnerships, such as the one with 150-year-old Caltrain, which will modernize passenger rail service throughout the state for decades to come.

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