Caltrain cleared to advance design-build plans for electrification

Caltrain's electrification project may now proceed as a design-build project under new legislation recently signed by California Gov. Jerry Brown.

California transit agencies' authority to issue design-build contracts expires at the end of this year, but Senate Bill 785 extended the authorization until 2024, according to a Caltrain press release. Extension of the design-build authority was necessary for Caltrain's electrification project to proceed as planned.

The design-build procurement method allows agencies to combine design and construction activities into one contract, which helps manage risk, speed up project delivery, foster innovation and potentially reduce cost, officials said.

Part of Caltrain's modernization program, the electrification project is designed to transform the system from a diesel-based service to an electrified system, featuring high-performance electric trains that operate on an overhead power system. The electric trains will enhance capacity and enable the system to deliver cleaner, quieter and potentially more service, as well as shorter trip times, Caltrain officials believe.

Electrification will support service levels to help accommodate regional job and population growth and will prepare the corridor to eventually accommodate California's planned high-speed rail system, they said.

In September 2013, Caltrain approved use of the design-build contracting approach for designing and installing the electrification infrastructure. A request for qualifications has been issued to potential contractors, and a request for proposal is expected to be issued in January 2015. Caltrain anticipates awarding the contract in fall 2015.

Electrification will allow Caltrain to almost double the system's forecasted daily ridership by 2040, according to a press release.