Caltrain’s Executive Director Jim Hartnett recently testified during three State Legislative hearings to review the Draft 2016 High-Speed Rail Business Plan. Hartnett appeared before a March 28 Assembly Transportation Committee hearing, an April 4 Joint Senate Committee on Transportation and Housing and Senate Budget Subcommittee hearing and an April 6 Assembly Budget Subcommittee hearing.

Mr. Hartnett provided the following statement on the revised plan and its implications for the Caltrain Electrification Project:

“Good afternoon. Thank you for your attention to this issue and for inviting us to share a local perspective on the draft business plan. I'm Jim Hartnett. I'm the Executive Director of the Caltrain commuter rail system and the CEO of the San Mateo County Transit District. I'm also a past member of the California High Speed Rail Authority Board of Directors and a former Mayor of Redwood City.

When voters approved Prop 1A in 2008 it wasn't just about connecting the state with high-speed rail, it was also about improving transportation connectivity on existing systems. The measure included significant resources dedicated to upgrading local transportation services to feed the statewide network and to improving mobility options for surrounding communities.

Large-scale, visionary projects like HSR can and should be planned and delivered in a way that prioritizes investments in local improvements, while also making incremental, but significant progress toward the long-term vision.

During my time on the HSR Board, I worked with my colleagues to ensure that this approach would be embraced. The product of those efforts was SB 1029, which appropriated funding for HSR construction in the Central Valley, but also directed over $1 billion for local and regional improvements on the "bookends" in southern California and the Bay Area.
In our case, this State funding is being used to leverage over $1 billion in local, regional and federal funds to upgrade the Caltrain corridor and allow us to deliver more service at a time when our communities need it most.

We're happy to see that the Draft 2016 HSR Business Plan reaffirms the State's commitment to advance these local improvements.

Caltrain is struggling to accommodate unprecedented regional growth. 2015 marked our fifth consecutive year of record-setting ridership. As Hwy 101 and 280 have become more and more congested, employers have turned to Caltrain as the preferred commute option between San Francisco and Silicon Valley. As a result, our peak hour service is well over 100 percent capacity with ridership on some trains exceeding 125 percent of available seats.

The Caltrain corridor is arguably the most economically productive area in the State. The communities served by our 51-mile railroad are responsible for 14 percent of the State's GDP, 20 percent of CA tax revenue and are the birthplace of over half of California patents.

However, the region cannot continue to thrive without equipping the 150-year-old rail corridor with a modernized transit system capable of accommodating current and future ridership demand.

Fortunately, with the State's help, Caltrain has been able to advance the Caltrain Modernization Program. The centerpiece of this program is the transformation of the corridor from its current diesel operations to a system that features high-performance electric trains capable of delivering cleaner, faster, more frequent service to Peninsula communities.

When complete, electrification of Caltrain will increase the capacity of the current system, and as a result will reduce vehicle miles traveled by 619,000 miles every day. The system's greenhouse gas emissions will be dramatically reduced eliminating over 176,000 tons of CO2, and the project will create over $2.5 billion in economic value including almost 10,000 new jobs during construction.

Caltrain and HSR have worked with several local, regional and federal partners to secure funding for The Caltrain Modernization Program as an early investment in the high-speed rail system. A 2012 MOU between 9-parties included a funding plan to complete these improvements and in February, the Obama Administration announced the allocation of $73 million in FTA discretionary funds and a request that Congress approve an addition $125 million in its 2017 budget.

Caltrain is working with the State and our local and federal partners to put the final agreements into place and all indications are that we will be able to award contracts
this summer for the construction of the project and the procurement of electric trains.

Meanwhile, we are also collaborating with the High-Speed Rail Authority as it prepares to begin the environmental process for additional improvements that will needed to equip the corridor to accommodate HSR service. When HSR is extended north of San Jose, Caltrain and HSR will share the corridor and operate on a blended system to San Francisco. The planning and design of these improvements will need to be carefully considered to ensure that impacts on surrounding neighborhoods are minimized and benefits are realized. If done right, this 150-year old corridor will be transformed, connecting the nation's most innovative communities to each other and to the rest of the State.”

The Caltrain Electrification Project will electrify the system between San Francisco and the Tamien Station in San Jose and convert Caltrain’s diesel-based system to an electric system with high-performance electric trains called Electric Multiple Units (EMUs). The Project will reduce air pollution in this corridor by 97 percent by 2040, will allow Caltrain to provide more service to more stations, increasing ridership and providing faster service between San Francisco and San Jose.

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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 four years of consecutive monthly ridership increases, surpassing more than 60,000 average weekday rider. While the Joint Powers Board assumed operating responsibilities for the service in 1992, the railroad celebrated 150 years of continuous passenger service in 2014. Planning for the next 150 years of Peninsula rail service, Caltrain is on pace to electrify the corridor by 2020, reducing diesel emissions by 96 percent by 2040 and adding more service to more stations.

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