

# San Francisco Chronicle

## Brown 'cautiously optimistic' about federal Caltrain funding

By [Carolyn Lochhead](#) | Updated 7:54 pm, Tuesday, March 21, 2017



Photo: Jeff Chiu, Associated Press

In this July 1, 2013, file photo, commuters board a Caltrain train at the Caltrain and Bay Area Rapid Transit station in Millbrae, Calif. The Federal Transit Administration is delaying a decision on whether to approve a \$650 million federal grant for electrification of a San Francisco Bay Area train system that would also help California's high-speed rail project. Congressional Republicans had pushed the administration to reject the application from Caltrain, but on Tuesday, March 21, 2017, Gov. Jerry Brown said he saw a possible way to have the funds restored after meetings with high-level Republicans in Washington. (AP Photo/Jeff Chiu, File)

WASHINGTON — Gov. **Jerry Brown** said he saw a possibility Tuesday to get federal money for the recently stalled electrification of **Caltrain** during private meetings with House Majority Leader **Kevin McCarthy** and Transportation Secretary **Elaine Chao**.

“It’s difficult, we’re not there yet, but I’m cautiously optimistic we’re going to find a way to fund Caltrain,” Brown told reporters outside the **Transportation Department** after his meeting with Chao.

Brown, on the second day of a four-day trip to the nation’s capital, met with McCarthy and Chao just over a month after the transportation secretary moved to withhold a \$647 million federal grant to electrify the Peninsula commuter line.

Chao put a stop to the funds at the request of San Joaquin Valley Republicans who see the electrification project as tied to Brown’s multibillion-dollar high-speed rail project, which they consider a boondoggle and is under construction now in the valley.

McCarthy, R-Bakersfield, is seen as close to President Trump and particularly influential on California issues. During Tuesday’s meeting, Brown said McCarthy “outlined possibilities” for Caltrain funding, “so I’d say the door isn’t closed.”



The bill to repair California’s crumbling roads, dams and other critical infrastructure hammered by an onslaught of storms this winter could top \$1 billion, including nearly \$600 million alone for damaged roadways that more than doubles what the state budgeted for road repair emergencies, officials said Friday. Adding to the problems, many communities have drained their emergency budgets and are looking to the state and federal government for help.

Media: MediaOS Video

Brown is in Washington to lobby the state's congressional delegation and administration officials on California issues. He was scheduled to have dinner Tuesday night with California Sen. **Dianne Feinstein**, who spent the day leading **Democrats** on the **Senate Judiciary Committee** in the questioning of **Supreme Court** nominee **Neil Gorsuch** at his confirmation hearings.

In pressing for restoration of the Caltrain electrification funds, Brown cited strong support for the project from the Silicon Valley Leadership Group, the tech business organization that sent its own delegation to Washington last week to lobby the administration and its congressional allies for the money.

Caltrain serves 65,000 daily commuters in the crowded Silicon Valley corridor with an aging system of diesel locomotives. Electrifying the trains would reduce smog, upgrade the trains and reduce traffic congestion, supporters say.

**Carl Guardino**, the president of the leadership group, said in an interview leaving Washington last week that it was "unprecedented" for an administration to withdraw funding for a project that got such a high priority rating from the **Federal Transit Administration**, adding that the project would create 9,600 jobs in states across the country.

"We need to make sure we don't start setting precedents denying projects that have been thoroughly vetted for years by career professionals for reasons not based on the merits of the project," he said.

Brown said he was searching for ways to bridge the partisan divide in Washington so that the state's interests can be served.

"Look, we have a very polarized nation, it's polarized in California, it's more polarized in Washington," Brown said. "Republicans have certain doctrines and frameworks. Democrats have different doctrines and different frameworks. We have a president called **Donald Trump**. We are looking for ways to protect California and advance the cause of our country.

Brown cited his collaboration with Republicans in California on a big water bond, a rainy-day fund for the budget, and a workers compensation overhaul. “I’m not going to say, ‘Oh no, we don’t talk to the president, we don’t talk to Republicans,’” Brown said. “I think we’ll find a way here in Washington. I can’t say we’re there yet, but you don’t build Rome in a day. You take steps.”

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