



## California agency urges Trump to allow funds for commuter rail project

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A California transit agency is ratcheting up pressure on President Trump to unblock federal funding for an electrification project, which suffered a major setback last week after its grant money was put on hold.

In a petition to the White House, Caltrain is urging the administration to reverse course on its decision to halt \$647 million worth of grant money for the transit agency until at least the fiscal 2018 budget. California officials say the delay could have a major impact on the economy and jobs in the region.

“You have said infrastructure and jobs will be a keystone of your administration. When you spoke with Silicon Valley leaders you praised their innovation and said ‘anything we can do to help this go along, we’re going to be there for you,’” the petition says.

“Shovel-ready transportation projects would put Americans to work in good manufacturing and infrastructure jobs. Caltrain Electrification would support over 9,600 Americans, not only in California, but in states including Utah, Virginia, and Pennsylvania.”

The transit agency planned to use the money to pay for a large chunk of its \$2 billion plan to electrify a portion of commuter rail that runs between San Francisco and San Jose. The efforts would also eventually benefit a high-speed rail project in the state, which has been a lightning rod among Republicans.

Last week, the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) decided to pump the brakes on Caltrain's electrification funding pending "additional time to complete review of this significant commitment of federal resources."

The move follows directly on the heels of a letter from 14 California Republicans, who pleaded with Transportation Secretary Elaine Chao to block the federal grants and argued that the money would be wasted.

GOP lawmakers have blasted California's high-speed railway project linking the state's two metropolitan hubs after federal officials concluded that the rail line is likely to cost taxpayers far more than was initially projected.

"We think providing additional funding at this time ... would be an irresponsible use of taxpayer dollars," the Republicans wrote in their letter to Chao.

The letter was spearheaded by Rep. Jeff Denham (R-Calif.), who chairs the House Transportation and Infrastructure subcommittee that oversees railroads.

The fight over the proposed 800 miles of high-speed rail has long pitted California Republicans, who say the project is a government boondoggle, against Gov. Jerry Brown (D), who sees it as a cornerstone to his legacy and who has emerged as one of Trump's most vocal and biting critics.

The Obama administration provided billions in grant funding for the effort through the 2009 stimulus package and an omnibus appropriations measure in 2010. California voters also approved a nearly \$10 billion bond to fund the project in 2008.

But since the high-speed rail system was first proposed, costs have ballooned, from about \$33 billion to more than \$60 billion.

*-Reid Wilson contributed to this report*

<http://thehill.com/policy/transportation/320544-california-transit-agency-urges-trump-to-unblock-funding-for>