

The Mercury News

Caltrain: Agreement with contractors to extend deadline keeps electrification project alive

By JASON GREEN | jason.green@bayareanewsgroup.com |
PUBLISHED: February 28, 2017 at 4:49 pm | UPDATED: March 1, 2017 at 5:19 am

The commuter rail line announced Monday that it has reached agreements with two contractors to extend a March 1 deadline to begin work to June 30. The extra time preserves its \$2 billion electrification project, which was [thrown into disarray](#) this month when the Federal Transit Administration said it was deferring \$647 million in grant funding.

The proverbial train hasn't left the station yet as far as Caltrain's modernization plans are concerned.

The money was withheld at the request of the GOP's California delegation, whose 14 members are gunning to upend the state's plans to run bullet trains between San Francisco and Los Angeles. The California High-Speed Rail Authority has invested more than \$700 million in Caltrain's project and plans to run its trains over the same electrified track.

In a letter to Caltrain, the FTA said it needed "additional time to complete review of this significant commitment of Federal resources," and would make a final decision after President Donald Trump releases his budget for the 2018 fiscal year, which starts on Oct. 1.

As a contender for the grant, the project underwent a two-year review, receiving "medium-high ratings" from the FTA. It now needs the signature of new Secretary

of Transportation Elaine Chao — typically a pro-forma step done after a 30-day comment period.

By switching from diesel to electric, the commuter rail line expects to boost daily ridership from 65,000 to 110,000 — and ostensibly ease congestion on Bay Area roads.

Balfour Beatty Construction and Stadler US Inc. were slated to begin building the infrastructure and trains, respectively, when Caltrain received word the grant funding had been deferred. Backers of the project have pointed out that it will help Trump fulfill one of his major initiatives by creating 9,600 jobs in the Bay Area and across the country.

The four-month extension will likely require the expenditure of up to \$20 million in project contingency funds, according to the commuter rail line. And additional delays may not be possible.

“Our contractors have agreed to delay construction for the maximum amount of time possible,” said Caltrain Executive Director Jim Hartnett in a statement.

“Delaying a decision on federal funding beyond June 30 will be the same as rejecting the grant.”

<http://www.mercurynews.com/2017/02/28/caltrain-agreement-with-contractors-to-extend-deadline-keeps-electrification-project-alive/>