

Caltrain gets \$100 million in tentative federal budget deal

By [Kurtis Alexander](#) | Tuesday, May 2, 2017



Photo: Paul Chinn, The Chronicle

Caltrain rolls through Redwood City on Wednesday, April 19, 2017.

Plans to outfit the Caltrain system with fast, environmentally friendly electric trains came to a grinding halt three months ago when Trump administration officials withdrew funding for the rail upgrade, saying they wanted time to rethink priorities.

This week, hope of obtaining cash for the busy commuter system was renewed. A \$100 million allocation for electrification of the line between San Francisco and San Jose was included in Congress' tentative budget deal.

While the money infusion is still far from certain — the budget agreement has yet to be approved, and Trump's newly minted **Federal Transit Administration** has final say over transportation dollars — Caltrain officials believe the appropriation is a good sign.

“We're hoping that this is a signal that the administration will be prepared to move forward with the grant and we can start construction,” said **Seamus Murphy**, a Caltrain spokesman.

Problems for the rail agency began when congressional Republicans petitioned the new president to drop a \$647 million federal grant for electrification. The lawmakers were not so much concerned about Caltrain's 15-year-old modernization effort as they were determined to block California's high-speed-rail project.

The Caltrain rail corridor, once electrified, will be able to host the state's planned 220-mph trains between San Francisco and Los Angeles. Many oppose the venture because of its high cost.

While Caltrain officials have sought to distance themselves from high-speed rail, the Federal Transit Administration told the commuter line in February that it was putting the agency's grant on hold in order to review projects that had received commitments from the Obama administration.

Federal transit officials have not yet said whether they intend to reinstate the electrification funds, and agency officials could not be reached for comment Tuesday. The \$1-trillion-plus federal budget agreement announced Monday, which includes several projects the Trump administration had threatened to cut, is expected to be voted on within the week.

Even if the \$100 million allocation for Caltrain is approved, the money cannot be used until the Federal Transit Administration commits to the entire \$647 million grant. The money represents the outstanding balance of the nearly \$2 billion project.

Two contractors that are lined up to begin replacing Caltrain's old diesel engines with electric trains remain on hold.

Caltrain officials say electrification is needed to run more trains up and down the Peninsula with greater efficiency and lower fuel costs. Ridership on the line has doubled since 2005.

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