

# The Mercury News

## Editorial: Caltrain electrification needed for both U.S. and local economy

By MERCURY NEWS EDITORIAL BOARD | Mercury News  
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An artist's rendering of what Caltrain's fleet will look like once the commuter rail system switches from diesel to electric power. (Courtesy of Caltrain)

Bay Area companies — from tech to construction to health care — are all in for the fight to save Caltrain's electrification project.

We hope that Republicans — once the party of business and industry — will remember their roots and listen.

The Silicon Valley Leadership Group, representing 400 employers, sent a letter Thursday urging the Trump administration to approve the federal share of the \$1.98 billion project that's been planned for decades and is funded primarily with state and local dollars.

The feds were expected to approve a \$650 million grant, since the application won high marks from rating agencies. But the grant got iced at the last minute by 14 members of California's Republican delegation in Congress. Because the electrified line could be shared by California's high-speed rail project, they believe it advances that transportation boondoggle.

This is like refusing to fix California freeways because they could be used by an invading army from Mexico. (Which, by the way, is about as likely as high-speed rail ever getting to San Francisco.)

It's just wrong. Electrifying and otherwise modernizing Caltrain is one of the most important transit improvements for this region, which happens to be a champion job creator and major driver of the U.S. economy.

The Leadership Group is leading this fight. CEO Carl Guardino says when he put out a call for CEOs to put their names on the letter, inserted below, he got signers from more than 120 companies in just 24 hours.

Electrification has been a Caltrain goal for decades because the diesel-fueled system that's been in place since 1863 is — well, "1863" says it all about the technology, doesn't it? Hi-ho Dinosaur.

Still, the system is enormously popular. It runs at 125 percent of capacity, with standing room only at rush hours. Ridership has almost tripled in a decade to about 65,000 daily trips now. By allowing for more trains that are longer and faster — in addition to cleaner and quieter — electrification can nearly double capacity.

This project isn't just about the local economy, however. Caltrain's purchasing and construction policies will result in some 9,600 jobs across America in manufacturing and assembly, with job-creating contracts in cities including Richmond, Virginia, Salt Lake City and (who can forget) Humble, Texas.

This would appear to align with a campaign promise of President Trump's. But on another promise, the project unexpectedly hits a glitch.

Trump said he'd make unprecedented investments in infrastructure, but his recently released budget slashes transportation spending. It turns out the president only wants to fund interstate projects, not local or even regional ones.

This makes no sense. A national transportation system can't be just state to state. Successful systems worldwide have always involved national support because commerce depends on good transportation, not just over long distances but for employees commuting to jobs, for delivering goods to market or to facilitate business travel. State, county and city boundaries are irrelevant.

Japan's bullet train would be all but useless if Tokyo, for example, didn't have excellent subway and other transit systems to get around the huge city when visitors arrive there.

Great countries need systems like BART, Caltrain and good roads. The Caltrain line serves 1.6 million jobs between San Jose and San Francisco. Lets make it better.

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March 23, 2017

President Donald Trump  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Ave NW  
Washington, DC 20500

**RE: LETTER TO PRESIDENT TRUMP & TRANSPORTATION SECRETARY CHAO**

Dear President Trump and Transportation Secretary Chao:

As CEOs and senior officers in Silicon Valley, who comprise some of the 400 members of the Silicon Valley Leadership Group - an association of employers who have facilities and employees in all 50 States and most of America's 435 Congressional Districts - we encourage your support of a key, shovel-ready transportation improvement in Silicon Valley, which also creates nearly 10,000 jobs for American workers in Congressional Districts throughout the United States.

Here's context: Since 1863, when Abraham Lincoln was President of the United States during the most divisive and destructive time in our nation's history, what we now call Caltrain Commuter Rail began continuous diesel train service between San Jose and San Francisco.

For nearly two decades, employers, large and small, have placed our wallets where our words are, by successfully leading ballot campaigns to tax ourselves and our fellow local citizens to both electrify and modernize Caltrain Commuter Rail. What was cutting edge technology when Abraham Lincoln was President - diesel locomotives - is not the case today. Yet our venerable trains still lumber along on diesel, slowly but surely transporting technology workers and others along the corridor two minutes slower than they ran in 1863.

**Scribd.** 1 of 6

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