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SF, Peninsula officials urge feds to OK Caltrain funds

Electrification project in limbo after state Republicans objected



A shovel-ready project to switch Caltrain from diesel to electric is in limbo. Voice file photo

San Francisco and Peninsula elected officials on Monday called on the Trump administration to approve federal funding for a Caltrain electrification project that is expected to add capacity to the busy transit corridor.

Speaking at an event at the Caltrain station in San Francisco April 24, officials including U.S. Reps. Jackie Speier and Anna Eshoo, as well as San Francisco Mayor Ed Lee, argued that electrifying the Caltrain corridor would reduce emissions, save fuel, reduce traffic congestion and create jobs.

It would also increase capacity on the overcrowded Caltrain system, which now carries around 65,000 passengers a day, officials said.

"This wasn't thought of in the last 100 days, this has been in the works for over 25 years," Mayor Ed Lee said today. "That extra capacity is needed now more than ever."

The nearly \$2 billion project was expected to receive the final installment of federal funding in February, a \$647 grant from the Federal Transit Administration approved in the last days of the Obama administration.

However, Transportation Secretary Elaine Chao declined to sign off on the funds after receiving a letter from members of the California Republican congressional objecting to the fact that the project also draws funds from a high-speed rail project they oppose.

The result has left the project, which is ready to break ground almost immediately after the funding is approved, in limbo, with Caltrain officials paying to extend some contracts while they wait to see if funding is included in the federal budget in May.

Speier, D-San Mateo, said the delay is costing around 9,600 jobs.

In addition, she said the Trump administration is threatening not just the Caltrain project, but the Capital Investment Grant Program that funds transit projects nationwide, at a potential cost of around 600,000 jobs nationwide.

"The president keeps saying 'Make America Great,' but the president's proposal would really make America stop," Speier said. "If in fact you're making America great again then we have got to create jobs."

Eshoo, D-Palo Alto, described Caltrain as an essential transportation system and part of the "economic backbone" of the Bay Area.

Eshoo, whose congressional district includes Mountain View, said that the project, which is backed by major business groups from San Francisco to San Jose, meets every requirement for the federal grant and is supported by state and voter-approved local funds, but is being held up by "bad politics."

"This is bad, bad politics," she said. "It's shameful that anything like this would happen. The American people deserve better, certainly the people of our region deserve better."

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