

State Rail, Transit Service Upgrades Funded

Transportation Agency OKs \$2.6 Billion for Projects Under SB 1, 'Cap and Trade'

The California State Transportation Agency (CalSTA) in April allocated \$2.6 billion in grants for 28 projects intended to significantly upgrade intercity rail service, overseen by Caltrans, and expand or improve transit options around the state.

A chunk of the Transit and Intercity Rail Capital Program funding (TIRCP) is slated for rail projects that would expand Amtrak service in the Central Valley and along the Southern California coast, help the Los Angeles area prepare for the 2028 Olympics, and speed up travel times in the San Francisco Bay Area.

Caltrans gives financial support to the Pacific Surfliner (San Luis Obispo-Los Angeles-San Diego), Capitol Corridor (Auburn-Sacramento-Bay Area), and the San Joaquins (Oakland/Sacramento-Fresno-Bakersfield) route, which are some of the top-performing routes in the entire Amtrak network. Caltrans also owns much of the California intercity rail rolling stock, including train cars and locomotives, finances capital projects, and leads long-term statewide planning for intercity and commuter rail through the State Rail Plan.

Day-to-day governance of the intercity rail services is performed by area transportation agencies that have formed joint powers authorities (JPA) for each of the three routes. These JPAs contract with Amtrak to conduct the actual operations. Caltrans contracts separately with Amtrak to operate and maintain the combined fleet.

Funding for TIRCP comes from the Road Repair and Accountability Act of 2017 (Senate Bill 1) and California's "Cap and Trade" auction program, established under Assembly Bill 32 to fight climate change and greenhouse gases.

The intercity rail allocations include:

- Almost \$190 million earmarked for improvements in Pacific Surfliner service. More trips between Los Angeles, Santa Barbara and San Luis Obispo are planned that also will tie in to the Los Angeles and San Diego commuter rail services. Investments will be made to improve on-time performance, reliability, and safety. The total cost is estimated at \$267.2 million.

- \$80.3 million toward a project that will move Capitol Corridor trains to a faster Oakland to San Jose corridor, shaving 10 to 15 minutes off 2018 travel times. The grant also will help create a new ticketing system. The total project cost is estimated at \$275 million.
- \$426.7 million to help develop new round-trip services between Fresno, Merced and Sacramento on the Amtrak San Joaquins, expand the Altamont Corridor Express to service Valley cities, and improve connectivity between the Bay Area and Bakersfield. Total estimated cost: \$904.6 million.
- \$10.1 million to extend two daily round-trips from San Jose to Salinas, tying the Monterey Bay region into the statewide rail network and offering an alternative to congestion on US 101. Total estimated cost: \$81.5 million.

Other major TIRCP awards include \$763.7 million to establish more frequent and reliable rail service throughout Southern California, and improve track used by the Pacific Surfliner and Metrolink commuter lines at Los Angeles' Union Station.

Also, CalSTA directed \$330 million to the expansion and modernization of Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority service in Southern California, including extension of light rail lines, and integration with other transit services. The total cost through 2028 has been estimated at \$5.77 billion.

Other grants are slated for a variety of bus and light rail projects statewide, and to upgrade the Bay Area Rapid Transit (BART) system. The grants in April represented the beginning of SB 1's eventual \$7.6 billion investment in transit projects, and follow CalSTA's awards of \$51.9 million in State Rail Assistance program funding for projects to improve commuter and intercity rail service, reduce air pollution and ease traffic congestion. **MM**

Source: California State Transportation Agency