



Caltrans photo by Thomas Ritter

Much of the freight that goes through the sprawling ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach, shown here from the Vincent Thomas Bridge, is transported by train. The California Transportation Commission awarded \$128.6 million to upgrade the rail system near the ports for goods movement.

Vital Corridor Work Gets SB 1 Funding Boost

Commission OKs \$2.4 Billion for Freight, Congestion Programs Under New Law

With more California drivers snarled in traffic congestion that wastes fuel, time and profits, and produces more smog, the California Transportation Commission funded a pair of programs aimed at whittling down those idling hours.

At their May meeting, commissioners approved \$1 billion in funding for nine projects through the Congested Corridors Program, created and funded by Road Repair and Accountability Act of 2017, or Senate Bill 1. The new law devotes \$250 million annually to projects designed to reduce traffic congestion, and this allocation was the first from SB 1 that will cover a four-year funding cycle.

The Commission also approved a total of almost \$1.4 billion for 28 projects to reduce route delays for freight-carrying trucks and trains in California as part of SB 1's 2018 Trade Corridor Enhancement Program. The program is projected to receive about \$300 million annually from SB 1 revenues.

Congested Corridors Program

The Commission originally received 32 proposals from 15 agencies requesting more than \$2.5 billion in funding from the Congested Corridors Program. Planning for the program and development of selection criteria began last year. Here are some approved projects and estimated construction costs:

- In Los Angeles County, a new transit station to link Los Angeles International Airport with the regional transit system — total cost \$525.2 million, of which \$150 million will come from SB 1.
- In Sacramento County, HOV improvements to Interstate 5 and corridor enhancements to U.S. Highway 50 — \$872 million total, with \$125 million coming from SB 1.
- In Sonoma County, HOV lane gap closure work at Marin-Sonoma Narrows project on Highway 101 — \$121.5 million total, SB 1 share \$84 million.

Traffic congestion has increased from an average of about 250,000 hours each commute day in 2011 to

about 504,000 daily hours in 2017, Caltrans reported. (Congestion is defined as the amount of time vehicles travel at highway speeds below 35 mph.)

Altogether in 2016, California drivers spent a total of 125 million hours caught up in highway congestion, Caltrans estimated.

Caltrans charts daily hours of delay (DVHD) as part of its performance standards in its 2015-2020 Strategic Management Plan.

During the Great Recession that began about 2007, DVHD actually fell. But delays caused by traffic increased at double-digit rate as the economy improved, and that trend continued in 2017 with a 12.5 percent jump.

The increase exceeded the performance target set by Caltrans to limit DVHD growth to 8 percent annually on urban state highways.

Trade Corridor Enhancement Program

An evaluation team of Commission and Caltrans staff recommended, and commissioners approved, \$1.4 billion in SB 1 funds for 28 projects that have a total estimated cost of more than \$4 billion. The Commission reviewed 55 proposals seeking nearly \$2 billion in SB 1 funding.

The projects, from Sacramento to San Diego, are intended to increase on-dock rail capacity, eliminate at-grade rail street crossings to prevent vehicle-train collisions, lessen impacts to surrounding communities, reduce wait times at the border, and increase rail capacity.

Some of the approved projects included:

- In Los Angeles County, relief of “choke points” on Interstate 5 and at the confluence of State Routes 57 and 60 projects estimated to cost a total of more than \$800 million to build.
- In Stanislaus County, State Route 132 West expressway project, estimated to cost about \$150 million to construct.
- Improvements along the California/Mexico border network that have a projected construction cost of more than \$372 million.

SB 1 requires that 60 percent of the funds go to projects nominated by regional transportation agencies and other local entities; the other 40 percent is earmarked for projects nominated by Caltrans.

California is the fifth-largest economy in the world, and it’s estimated that the ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach combined handle 35 percent of all waterborne cargo in the U.S. The number of containers processed

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through those ports increased from 5.7 million in 1996 to 15.5 million in 2016, according to the Legislative Analyst’s Office.

From that port complex, most of the arriving goods are shipped by trucks and rail. Many rail cars travel the Alameda Corridor, a 20-mile-long cargo line that connects the two ports to the transcontinental rail network near downtown Los Angeles.

Seven of the nation’s top 65 truck bottlenecks are in California, according to American Transportation Research Institute. Three Southern California pinch points — at State Routes 60 and 57, Interstates 710 and 105 and Interstates 10 and 15 — fall within the top 27.

The industry projected that congestion will cost the trucking industry \$63.4 billion in 2018 just from lost hours. That is the equivalent of 362,000 truck drivers sitting still for a year. **MM**

Source: California Transportation Commission



Some Southern California highways see a heavy proportion of trucks carrying freight containers picked up at L.A. and Long Beach ports.