

California commission approves funding for ACE grade separation

The California Transportation Commission recently voted in favor of providing \$37.6 million from the state's Proposition 1B Trade Corridors Improvement Fund for the Baldwin Avenue grade separation project in El Monte. The funding will enable the Alameda Corridor-East Construction Authority (ACE) to award a construction contract for the \$85.2 million project in spring.

"State transportation bond funding approved by the voters in 2006 and allocated by the commission will be instrumental in all three ACE grade separation projects starting construction this year in El Monte, San Gabriel and Industry," said ACE Chairman David Gutierrez, who serves as mayor of San Gabriel, in a prepared statement.

The current grade crossing in El Monte is used by about 15 freight trains and several Amtrak trains daily. The project calls for building a four-lane roadway underpass and double-track railroad bridge to separate traffic, eliminating the potential for train-vehicle collisions and emergency responder delays, ACE officials said.

ACE governs grade separations and safety upgrades designed to mitigate the impacts of significant rail traffic increases on more than 70 miles of mainline track in California's San Gabriel Valley. Train traffic through the valley is projected to increase by as much as 160 percent by 2020.

Meanwhile, ACE also announced it appointed Mark Christoffels chief engineer and deputy chief executive officer. He will assume the post in early April.

Christoffels has served as city engineer for the city of Long Beach for the past 11 years. He previously served ACE as a senior project manager from 1999 to 2001, and was a city engineer/public works director for the cities of Cypress and Claremont.