

# Construction to start on \$100 million railroad underpass on Puente Avenue

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Elected officials participate in the groundbreaking ceremony for a four-lane roadway underpass contraction project on Puente Avenue and a railroad bridge to carry freight trains over Puente Avenue and Workman Mill Road in the City of Industry on Wednesday, Oct. 22, 2014. The \$99.6 million project will create 1,780 jobs over four years of construction with completion scheduled for early 2018. (Photo by Watchara Phomicinda/ San Gabriel Valley Tribune)

Anthony Duarte of La Puente grew up with the sounds of train whistles and crossing bells 24 hours a day.

“We just learned to block it out,” the Hacienda La Puente Unified board member explained. “When I was talking to someone on the telephone they would tell me they couldn’t hear because of the train in the background.”

The bells and whistles will become a thing of the past as civic leaders gathered with the Alameda Corridor East Construction Authority to break ground for a new \$100 million railroad underpass on Puente Avenue on Wednesday.

“Most frustrating to the residents are the constant whistles and bells,” agreed Rep. Ed Royce of Rowland Heights. “But they will soon be silenced.”

Royce said he had been working in tandem with fellow Reps. Grace Napolitano and Judy Chu to get the railroad line through the City of Industry designated part of the primary freight network for federal funds.

“Forty percent of the shipping containers come in through Los Angeles and Long Beach ports,” Royce explained. “Then they are shipped by rail or trucks along the 60 Freeway.”

A new four-lane underpass on Puente Avenue will be built under the Union Pacific Railroad line in the City of Industry. A railroad bridge and loop connector road will also be constructed between Workman Mill Road and Valley Boulevard.

“This is what we fight for in Washington,” noted Rep. Napolitano. “Better lives for everyone while helping the environment and reducing pollution... As a member of the House Transportation Committee, I will continue to work to reduce traffic problems.”

She pointed out traffic backs up on busy Valley Boulevard waiting for freight trains. Twenty trains a day block the intersection every day. This is expected to more than double to 42 trains a day by 2025.

That means lengthy delays for the 31,000 vehicles that pass through the crossroad every day. Without the underpass, traffic delays would more than double by 2025, and triple if the mainline is double tracked as planned by Union Pacific.

To put that in perspective, that’s 13 hours of daily delay for area motorists. That will increase to 31 hours a day by 2025 or 46 hours with two tracks.

“With this project, we won’t have to wait 15 minutes in line for the train to pass,” said Los Angeles County Supervisor-elect Hilda Solis. “Sometimes we can’t wait for Washington to move... This is a wise investment for taxpayers.”

Solis said the local project will create 1,780 jobs over four years of construction. “That’s something I know something about,” said the former U.S. Secretary of Labor.

Safety is also a big concern for the civic leaders.

“There have been five collisions at this intersection, killing one and injuring three others,” Rep. Chu said. “This project will eliminate the hazard for all.”

Chu said the traffic congestion costs businesses and consumers billions of dollars every year. She has cosponsored legislation to use part of the import duties for a new national freight network trust fund to pay for projects like the underpass.

But this new underpass will be built with \$99.6 million from the California Transportation Commission and Los Angeles County Metro. Another \$2 million will come from Union Pacific.

“When we have an ACE project come before us, we know all the i’s have been dotted and the t’s have been crossed,” said Commissioner Fran Inman. “These projects are in good hands. And when you have limited resources that’s important.”

All the civic leaders praised the authority for keeping its projects on time and under budget.

“Los Angeles County sales tax measures for transportation are contributing more than 40 percent of ACE program funding,” noted L.A. County Metro CEO Art Leahy. “We are pleased to be part of this ongoing partnership.”

A partnership that does away with all the bells and whistles.





