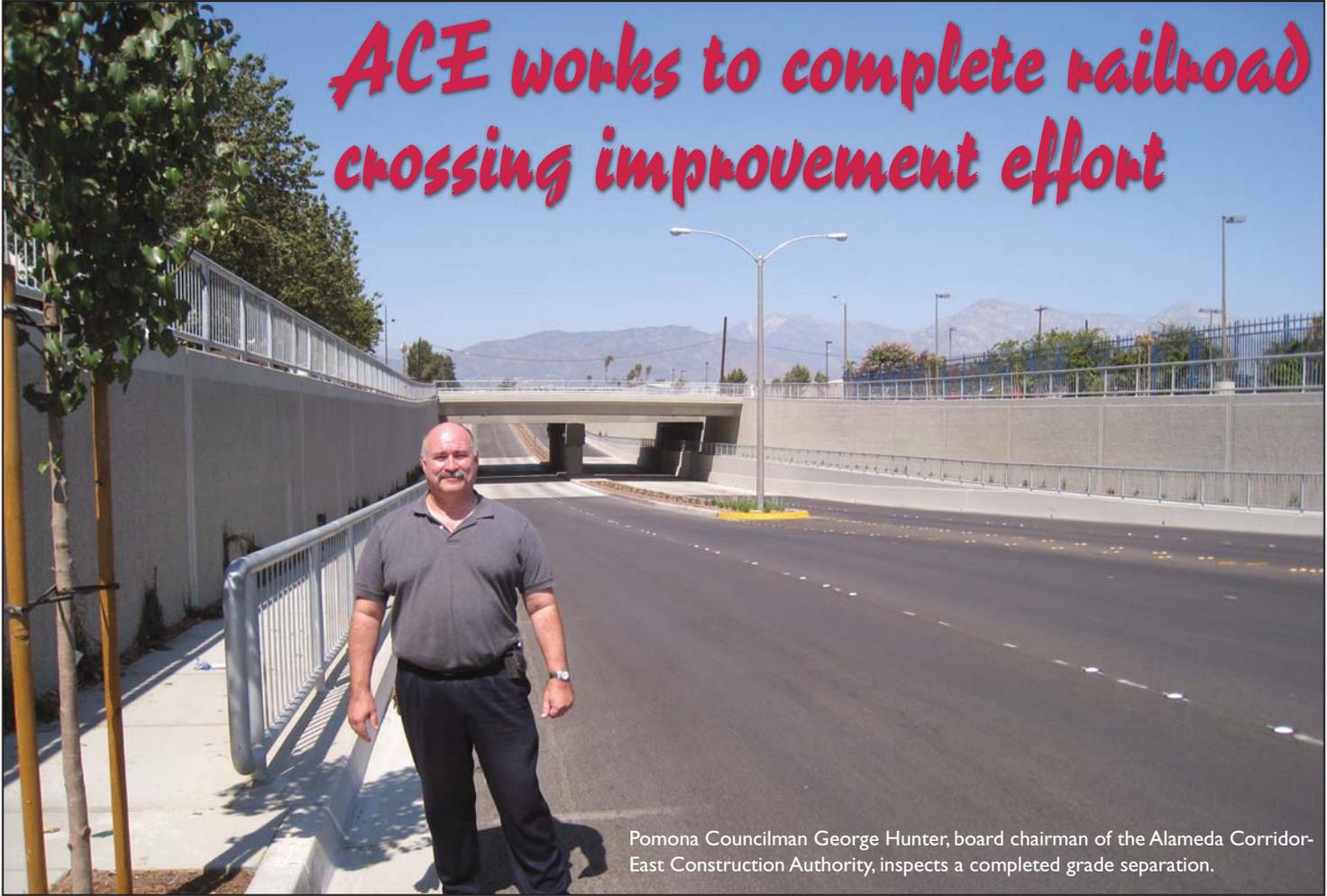


ACE works to complete railroad crossing improvement effort



Pomona Councilman George Hunter, board chairman of the Alameda Corridor-East Construction Authority, inspects a completed grade separation.

By Jeff Schenkel
Correspondent

When Pomona Councilman George Hunter stops at a railroad crossing, his thoughts turn to how taking that railroad track over or under the roadway could provide benefits ranging from improving traffic flow to decreasing vehicular emissions from cars idling while waiting for the train to pass.

And as board chairman of the Alameda Corridor-East Construction Authority, he's been working to do just that — four grade separations, as they are known, are open to traffic, three more are under construction and two more will begin construction next year.

In addition, design has started for the San Gabriel Trench Project, resulting in grade separations at Ramona Street, Mission Road, Del Mar Avenue and San Gabriel Boulevard near the San Gabriel Mission in the city of San Gabriel. In all, ACE has secured more than \$1 billion in federal, state, local and railroad funds to build these projects in an ambitious program that calls for building a total of 20 grade separations in two phases.

It is not an inexpensive proposition — each grade separation generally costs in the neighborhood of \$40 million.

Another 39 crossings already have received safety enhancements through ACE infrastructure improvements.

Eliminating the possibility of train / vehicle collisions and the eliminating of the need for train horn noise at former "at-grade" crossings are yet additional benefits.

The Authority was created in 1998 as a single-purpose construction authority by the San Gabriel Valley Council of Governments to mitigate the impacts of significant increases in rail traffic over 70 miles of railroad tracks in the San Gabriel Valley.

Train traffic here is expected to increase by as much as 160 percent by the year 2020 as railroads continue to dramatically increase shipments from the Ports of Long Beach and Los Angeles through the San Gabriel Valley and on to the rest of the country.

In anticipation of all of this, ACE was created with a goal of making railroad crossings in the region safer, more efficient and more environmentally "green" than ever before.

Hunter is especially proud of the work in his home city of Pomona where Reservoir Street and East End Avenue already are open to traffic.

But he said the entire project is "extremely important."

"A lot of it (the completed projects) is the most significant part that has come to fruition so far," Hunter said, adding that ACE success is a "testament to the professionalism that our construc-

tion brings to the table."

He added that others have already come in to take a look "to see how we do it."

"We've gotten a reputation of being an organization that can get projects done," he said. "And we've developed that credibility."

Hunter explained the success of the agency extends all the way from its ability to obtain the funding necessary to do the work to the professionalism to bring the projects to completion.

"People are looking at us saying these guys can get the work done and get it done well," he said. "I'm very proud of our work."

One recent funding mechanism ACE has supported was Senate Bill 974, awaiting the governor's signature.

The bill would levy modest fees on cargo containers to fund clean air projects and congestion relief projects in response to the flood of cargo containers on trucks and trains on roadways through the San Gabriel Valley heading for destinations across the country.

Hunter said fees from that measure could provide revenues to help construct the ACE grade separation projects where many of those cargo containers would be traveling on their way out of the Ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach, the busiest port complex in the nation.

He said the rest of the country benefits from goods moving through the San Gabriel Valley "but the reality is that it shouldn't be on the

PASADENA

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 11

through a combination of gas tax proceeds and a fee charged to new development to help pay for the transportation system.

Another exciting component of the traffic management system is a parking guidance program, in which sub-surface loops in parking structures count cars and will actually "know" when the parking structure fills up.

"We'll be able to put this information on line," Yamarone said, enabling the public to access the information either by computer or cell phone and avoid having to drive around through parking structures looking for a vacant parking spot. Benefits to this program will include traffic congestion reduction as well as fuel savings and air quality emissions reductions from idling automobile engines.

In the long term, the program also will transmit information regarding parking availability to electronic signs at the gate, including a changeable message sign directing drivers to structures with available parking.

And as yet another feature, the system will be able to track buses in the city's Area Rapid Transit System. The system, which operates along seven routes and carries three million passengers each year, will notify riders seven or eight minutes ahead that the bus - which generally operates on half-hour "headways" - is coming.

Yamarone said studies have shown that one of the major reasons more people choose to take alternate transportation rather than the bus is the



uncertainty.

"Taking the uncertainty away using that technology is really a great way of encouraging people to ride the bus," he said.

The city also is beginning to use technology to notify drivers of traffic congested areas resulting from construction or street repairs by placing information on the city's website. The information can be accessed at www.cityofpasadena.net and by clicking on "departments" and then "Department of Transportation."

The idea, Yamarone said, is to enable drivers to avoid the area by taking an alternate route to prevent becoming a part of yet additional traffic congestion.

"We've really taken that to a new level of technology rather than just posting signs out there," Yamarone said, adding that the city is incorporating satellite map illustrations on the website.

Then what does the future hold for this forward-thinking Department of Transportation?

"We're currently updating our Transit Plan (and the) plan for ARTS buses is updated every several years," Yamarone said. "(We're) taking a fresh look at how to best serve our city with local transit, (and we're) looking at a bicycle plan for a variety of facilities around town."

He said the "big picture" look at the city's Mobility Element in conjunction with land use will be starting in the fall.

The city plans a massive communications and outreach program to solicit public input into all of these review elements and will invite everything from public participation at the hearings to e-mails and telephone calls with input from the public.

In fact, residents can go online right away and respond to polling questions or submit a suggestion.

For more information, contact the Department of Transportation general information line at (626) 744-TRIP.

ACE WORKS

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 12

backs of our residents."

Even so, the measure would only add "a penny or two to a pair of shoes" or "five to 10 cents on a DVD player," he said. "You're not talking about a huge assessment."

That assessment, expected to be about \$60 per cargo container, should generate some \$500 million annually that will be split between "clean air" programs coordinated through the South Coast Air Quality Management District and infrastructure for congestion relief.

He added it is "a pretty small cost to pay for the mitigation of those impacts."

The alternative, he explained, would be increased train traffic through the San Gabriel Valley with congested vehicle traffic waiting for trains for as long as 15 to 20 minutes in some cases.

And cars idling at crossings can generate as much as 221 tons of pollution annually, all of which will be eliminated through the ACE construction program.

"Rail traffic is still by far the most cost effective way to move commerce," Hunter said.

The four grade separation projects already open to traffic are Nogales Street (between the City of Industry and West Covina), Reservoir Street (Pomona), East End Avenue (also in



Grade Separation, Ramona Blvd. in the city of El Monte.

Pomona) and Ramona Boulevard (El Monte). Construction is still under way at Brea Canyon Road (Diamond Bar / City of Industry), Sunset and Orange avenues (also City of Industry) and the Temple Avenue Train Diversion (Pomona), which will result in trains no longer being required to cross busy Pomona Boulevard and Temple Avenue.

In line for construction in 2009 are Baldwin Avenue (El Monte) and Nogales Street (unincorporated Los Angeles County).

Among all the other benefits, some railroad-adjacent properties in the area are blighted and the ACE project creates opportunities to develop these properties to better uses, bringing even greater benefit to the community in a "win-win" opportunity for participating cities.

"I am just very proud of the benefits we're bringing the Alameda Corridor cities and I think we are doing a great job of working with those cities," Hunter said. "I look forward to that process continuing."