

## Guest commentary: San Gabriel Valley could benefit from freight funding programs



Motorists wait as a freight train crosses Montebello Boulevard in Montebello in this June 3, 2013 file photo. (Keith Durflinger / Staff Photographer)

By Jack Hadjinian

Posted: 09/15/15

Thousands of motorists, pedestrians and bicyclists encounter delays every day at the railroad crossings in the San Gabriel Valley, waiting for long and lumbering freight trains to pass. These cargo shipments along the Alameda Corridor-East (ACE) transcontinental rail route are driven by surging imports and exports at the San Pedro Bay ports, our nation's leading trade gateway.

Freight trains through the San Gabriel Valley — numbering 70 a day in 2009 — are expected to grow to nearly 130 by 2025, causing delays to double or triple and significantly increasing safety risks. The latter was underscored recently by two collisions over two weeks at a crossing at Fairway Drive in the City of Industry and community of Rowland Heights. And another crossing in the San

Gabriel Valley experienced 10 collisions over 10 years and is now closed for construction of a railroad grade separation.

Balancing these challenges with the profound economic benefits of a robust freight industry requires commitment and funding, and to that end, we're encouraged that legislators in Sacramento and in Washington, D.C., are currently considering new programs for freight system improvements.

Over the years, with the support of the San Gabriel Valley's legislative champions, the ACE Construction Authority has secured more than \$1.6 billion in government grants and other funds to construct its comprehensive program of 20 grade separations, where the road goes over or under the railroad, and safety improvements at 53 of the valley's crossings.

In Sacramento, the ACE Construction Authority recently joined with ports and other trade corridor agencies in urging state legislators and the Administration to provide robust funding for the highly successful Trade Corridor Improvement Fund (TCIF) program. Established in 2008 using state transportation bond revenues and made permanent in state law last year, the TCIF program has been instrumental in the construction of scores of significant trade corridor projects and is the main source of state funds for the ACE grade separation projects. Legislators and Gov. Brown have separately proposed providing hundreds of millions of dollars needed each year for the TCIF program statewide, funds that can be used to augment our freight system while simultaneously supporting projects, like grade separations, that mitigate the impacts of freight movement on local communities.

In Washington, D.C., the six-year highway program bill passed by the Senate this summer features a first-ever National Highway Freight Program that would provide states with up to \$2 billion a year to pay for improvements to the national highway freight network, including critical urban freight corridors. Additional funds would be distributed through competitive grant programs, including for rail-roadway grade separations. The House of Representatives is expected to release its version of the highway program bill this month. We are heartened that a bipartisan House freight panel issued a report in 2013 calling for dedicated funding for a multimodal federal freight project grant program. We are hopeful that the ACE projects will be eligible for funding if and when federal programs are enacted into law.

In addition to the state and federal legislation described above, the Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority, or L.A. Metro, sponsored state legislation and is gathering transportation project and program information to place a possible countywide sales tax measure on the ballot in 2016. The San Gabriel Valley's proposed priority list of projects for the ballot measure includes more than \$30 million for eliminating or improving rail-roadway grade crossings.

With funding proposed at the federal, state and county levels, we are optimistic that sufficient funding will be made available to complete the ACE grade separation projects, delivering significant safety, traffic mobility, freight reliability, emissions and community benefits to the San Gabriel Valley.

*Jack Hadjinian is mayor of Montebello and chair of the Board of Directors of the Alameda Corridor-East Construction Authority; [www.theaceproject.org](http://www.theaceproject.org).*