

Head of Alameda Corridor-East project gets award

By Ryan Carter, Staff Writer
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Rick Richmond, CEO of the Alameda Corridor-East Construction Authority, stands over the grade separations on Valley Boulevard in Industry on Tuesday, June 9, 2009. (SGVN/Staff photo by Watchara Phomicinda)

INDUSTRY - Rick Richmond is making the grade, so to speak.

Richmond, CEO of the Alameda Corridor-East Construction Authority, received the 2009 Engineering Achievement Award last week from the Los Angeles Chapter of the American Council of Engineering Companies of California.

For those honoring him, the award represents Richmond's leadership achievements in making the \$1.4 billion Alameda Corridor East project happen in the San Gabriel Valley.

And that has been no easy task.

The project includes building 20 rail grade separations and safety improvements at 55 grade crossings along a 70-mile freight/passenger corridor. That corridor includes 31 cities, more than 2 million residents and many businesses.

But securing funds and right-of-ways, working with businesses and residents, weaving through the fractious politics of transportation development in California and then actually administrating a funded project is a big job. And then there's the work of making a road go underneath a rail line or above it.

It's a job that observers - and Richmond himself - say is a good fit for him to lead.

"All my life I've been working on construction projects ... I like seeing an improvement in things that are tangible, where you see the benefits," he said.

At the core of those improvements in Richmond's work is safety and mobility.

When Richmond started with the project in 1999, regional officials were concerned about the effects of increasing rail traffic in the region.

Richmond has been able to translate that concern into results, as he works with the public and private sector to make improvements happen, said Gene Bougdanos, achievement awards committee chairman for the council.

"Rick has been instrumental," he said.

The project itself is temporary - but temporary is a relative term when it comes to grade improvements, Richmond said.

Construction is complete on the project's first five grade separations. It's under way or funded for the next five of 20 planned grade separation projects. The project's remaining 10 grade separations are awaiting funding.

But given the future, finishing is vital, Richmond said.

Transportation officials estimate that train traffic through the San Gabriel Valley will increase by up to 160 percent by 2020.

Without separations, there's the chance for tragedy - as confused or over-eager motorists drive through or around crossing arms - and the guarantee of traffic congestion, Richmond said.

"It's really a tragedy," he said of rail accidents at at-grade crossings. "We ought to be able to avoid all that."

What shouldn't be avoided is the benefit of the project to business in the area, Richmond added.

"What we're doing is strengthening the viability of this freight corridor that comes through the San Gabriel Valley, he said.

For Richmond, the project is a way to protect industry from the effects of increasing road traffic and allow companies to move their goods more efficiently on local roads.

It's more efficient when a logistics carrier or a trucker doesn't have to wait for a train to pass, he said, adding that those waiting hours add up.

Many of the trains passing through are headed east, carrying goods from the ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach.

And that has Inland Empire agencies taking note of Richmond's success in the San Gabriel Valley for their own regional traffic circulation projects.

Richmond is humble about that success.

"It starts with our board, and then our staff," he said. "I take it as a compliment to everyone."

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ACE CEO Rick Richmond is presented with the Engineering Achievement Award by CALTRANS District 7 Director Doug Failing.



Doug Failing presents Rick Richmond with a proclamation from the City of Montebello.