

Nogales Street closed for 2 years as community leaders tout \$117 million project



Artist rendering of the \$117 million underpass on Nogales Street. (Courtesy Alameda Corridor-East Construction Authority)

By [Richard Irwin](#), San Gabriel Valley Tribune

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Nogales Street will be closed tomorrow morning at 6 a.m., marking the next phase of the \$117 million project to build a railroad underpass there. The closure will cut off the 42,680 vehicles that use the busy street every day.

Nogales Street will be closed between San Jose Avenue and Gale Avenue in the City of Industry for the next two years. That's how long officials with the Alameda Corridor-East Construction Authority (ACE) say it will take to construct the six-lane roadway underpass and double-track railway bridge.

"We're asking drivers to use Fullerton Road and Fairway Drive as north-south detours," said CEO Mark Christoffels on Friday as he showed U.S. Transportation Secretary Anthony Foxx the new project.

To prepare for the underpass, ACE has added two more lanes to Gale Avenue and is widening Walnut Drive North to ease any traffic bottlenecks.

“Gale is done and we should finish Walnut within the next 60 days,” Christoffels said.

ACE has also constructed a temporary railroad crossing at Charlie Road that will open on Saturday. A new two-lane road runs from Gale Avenue to Railroad Street behind the 99 Ranch Market. This detour will be used for local access as well as transit and school buses.

The underpass project will block the main access between the two high schools in the Rowland Unified School District. Students and staff use the busy byway daily to travel from Nogales High to Rowland High.

Rowland Unified’s Transportation Director Keith Moore doesn’t anticipate major problems with his school buses.

“They’ll use Fairway Drive and Fullerton Road whenever possible as well as the Charlie Street detour,” Moore reported.

Moore has asked some bus drivers to report at 5 a.m. Monday instead of 5:15 to give them extra time on the road. The director will be in constant radio contact with the school buses as they deal with the closure.

Area businesses are concerned about the closure, though all have entrances on other roads.

“I’m sure it will have an effect, but I don’t know how much,” admitted Johnson Liu, manager of the 99 Ranch Market on Nogales Street. It also has an entrance on Gale Avenue.

Everybody agrees the underpass will be a big improvement over the present situation. U.S. Rep. Ed Royce of Rowland Heights and Rep. Grace Napolitano of El Monte joined local mayors in praising the project.

“The Nogales Street railroad crossing is the third most dangerous in the nation, not in California, in the United States,” pointed out Rep. Napolitano.

In fact, the Federal Railroad Administration also ranks the crossing as the most hazardous in California. Authorities have recorded 10 collisions at the busy crossing in the past decade.

“We recently had a tractor trailer hit by a passing train,” said Christoffels. “The trailer was caught on the tracks and struck by a train.”

Separating the track and roadway will completely eliminate the chance of such an accident.

“Today has actually been very instructive to me ... I’ve seen two projects, one that has being funded and getting done, and another one that is still looking for resources to get done and is badly needed in another part of Southern California,” Foxx said.

“We are enthusiastic about the fact that Secretary Foxx is with us today because he’s able to see firsthand what the local community is working on in conjunction with Caltrans and in conjunction now with the federal government,” Royce added.

The federal government contributed \$30 million toward the railroad underpass.

Once completed, the project will reduce the terrible traffic congestion that had been caused by the 40 freight and 12 passenger trains that rumble across Nogales Street every day.

The new underpass will also eliminate delays for police and fire responders. It will also reduce locomotive horn and crossing bell noise.