Caltrain approves plan to basically turn into BART for the Peninsula

By Dianne de Guzman, SFGATE  Published 11:02 am PDT, Friday, October 4, 2019

Caltrain is hoping to help ease traffic in the Peninsula through an ambitious plan which will see the transit agency increase service for its growing customer base.

Caltrain’s Board of Directors approved its 2040 Service Vision plan Thursday, and one of the biggest planned changes is an increase to the number of trains running in each direction during peak hours. The plan seeks to run a minimum of eight trains an hour between San Jose and San Francisco, up from its current service of five trains an hour during peak commuting times.

Among the other big changes outlined in the plan is the expansion of express train sets to run every 15 minutes, while also increasing service during off-peak hours and weekends.

Caltrain’s ridership has more than doubled in the last 15 years, with its transit agency said in its announcement of the approved plan. With its ridership could nearly triple to 180,000 daily riders by 2040, estimating trips and 110 metric tons of carbon emissions daily, while placing “an estimated 5.5 lanes worth of commuter traffic onto Caltrain” instead of local freeways.
The increased service does come at a price, of course: The annual operating costs under its new plan is projected to reach $370 million, with just $266 million estimated to be covered by fares, according to Thursday's presentation. Caltrain will then be forced to find "new revenues and significant ongoing funding" to meet those estimated operating costs.

Currently, the total operating costs for Caltrain stands at $135 million for 2018.

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The question that still remains unanswered is just how Caltrain plans to fund 2040 Service Vision, but receiving board approval at this stage is expected to help the agency "identify funding needs" before moving on to finding funding through subsidies, grants and other sources.

Two possible options could come from a one-cent sales tax across the Bay Area that is expected to bring in over $100 billion over 40 years or for Caltrain to start its own sales tax on the ballot for the counties it serves (namely San Francisco, San Mateo and Santa Clara), the San Jose Mercury reported. But as of now, a Caltrain spokesman confirmed to the newspaper that it has not yet figured out a way to pay for its plan.

Dianne de Guzman is a Digital Senior Editor at SFGATE. Email: dianne.deguzman@sfgate.com