We're fortunate to live in the world's innovation hub, a place where ideas born in garages can seemingly blossom overnight into global success stories. It's helpful to remind ourselves that those stories are not just reserved for startups and technology companies.
Caltrain ridership has grown by 171% since the Baby Bullet express service launched in 2004. Today, Caltrain is the nation’s seventh largest commuter railroad, and in a nod to a region that prides itself on productivity, it is also the most efficient, generating more train miles and riders per employee than any other railroad in the country. Some 65,000 riders a day in the most innovative region in the world — most of them with other options — choose Caltrain, a diesel train that is getting more crowded by the day.

Caltrain drives decisions about where employees live and where companies expand or start up. Box.com and Survey Monkey are just two of many examples. They are companies that wanted “Caltrainable” sites. Employers recognize that true congestion relief is dependent on a 21st century Caltrain service.

A major victory was realized in 2017 when we successfully secured $647 million in federal funds to electrify Caltrain. This didn’t happen without a fight when the Trump administration threatened to repeal those funds, but together with the environmental community, major employers and elected leaders, we won.

Electrification of the tracks will improve service times via faster acceleration and shorter headways, reduce air pollution and noise, and facilitate a future railway tunnel into downtown San Francisco’s Transbay Transit Center. We’re on target for completion of electrification by 2022.

Now that electrification is well under way, employers are planning major campuses next to stations, exploring expanded rail service across the Bay and, perhaps most importantly, sponsoring the development of the Caltrain Business Plan, designed to provide the roadmap for how electrified service should evolve to accommodate the region’s needs.

The plan includes a vision of how electrified service levels should grow over the next 20 years. It includes an estimated 5.5 lanes worth of commuter traffic onto Caltrain instead of Peninsula highways. Train frequency would grow from five trains per hour to 12 per hour, with an express train every 15 minutes. Approximately $9 billion would be devoted to grade separations so that traffic would continue to flow in our cities while service is expanded. By 2040, Caltrain ridership would triple to 180,000 daily riders, eliminating 825,000 car trips and 110 metric tons of carbon emissions every day.

Today, Caltrain is the only transit system in the region without a dedicated source of funding. It depends on contributions from local member agencies to keep the system running. Those contributions are not enough to support the system’s needs, and they will never be enough to grow Caltrain service in the future. A reliable funding source must be secured. Wait and delay is not a strategy.

That’s why we join with fellow South Bay Congressmen Ro Khanna and Jimmy Panetta in urging local policy makers in San Francisco, San Mateo, and Santa Clara counties to join together in support of a dedicated source of funding for Caltrain.

Caltrain continues to be the spine of our region’s transportation system benefiting our residents, neighborhoods and businesses. It has helped fuel economic competitiveness, and it is another shining regional example of how wise investments can yield incredible returns. We are a “can do people,” so let’s get this done and return. We owe it to our communities and future generations to finally provide the system they deserve.
Opinion: Caltrain needs dedicated source of revenue

Anna Eshoo represents California’s 18th District in the U.S. House of Representatives. Zoe Lofgren represents California’s 19th District in the U.S. House of Representatives. Jackie Speier represents California’s 14th District in the U.S. House of Representatives.

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