

Federal Legislation May Help California's Altamont Corridor Express Train

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Rep. Jerry McNerney, D-Stockton, announced Thursday he has introduced legislation that could bring as much as \$450 million over the next decade to speed up rail service between Stockton and the Silicon Valley and bring other changes to the Altamont Corridor Express.

Better known as the ACE train, the service makes four round trips a day, stopping in Lathrop, Tracy and other stations between the San Joaquin County line and San Jose.

A developing ACEforward plan would reduce the time of the more than two-hour ride between Stockton and San Jose and would extend the service through Manteca to Modesto and further into the San Joaquin Valley.

The program is a "smart investment" that will create jobs and reduce traffic, McNerney said in a statement released Thursday announcing the proposed legislation.

The bill would authorize the Secretary of Transportation to provide up to \$450 million in grants for engineering, design and construction, according to McNerney's office.

Besides improving regional rail service, the extensions and improvements to the ACE train would be compatible with the state's plans to build a bullet train connecting Southern and Northern California through the Central Valley. The project is eligible for state dollars, too, through high-speed rail funding approved by California voters. But building rail service is not cheap. To build just the extension to Modesto had been estimated to cost roughly \$180 million.

The existing route shares tracks with freight trains, which can cause delays. The project would establish 85 miles of track dedicated to passenger rail.

The bill drew support from transportation officials in statements included in the announcement.

ACEforward is "critical" to expanding the region's transportation network, said Scott Haggerty, Alameda County Supervisor and member of the San Joaquin Regional Rail Commission, which owns and operates ACE.

Rail Commission Executive Director Stacey Mortensen said the bill "opens the door" to improvement and expansion.

Andrew Chesley, executive director of the San Joaquin Council of Governments, called the ACE train a "great success" in connecting San Joaquin County to the Bay Area.

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<http://www.govtech.com/transportation/Bill-in-DC-May-Help-ACE-Train.html>