

ACE: Rebuild crossings for traffic and safety

By Bethania Palma



Tim Spohn, chairman of the board of directors for the Alameda Corridor East Construction Authority (ACE)

The proposed Baldwin Avenue roadway underpass with two separate bridges for trains and pedestrians.

Commencing in 2012, the Alameda Corridor-East Construction Authority expects to create roughly 11,000 new jobs during several years of construction of rail-highway grade separation projects, said Tim Spohn, chairman of the board of directors for the Alameda Corridor East Construction Authority, or ACE.

The agency is tasked with building grade separations, where the road goes over or under the railroad, at crossings throughout the San Gabriel Valley to alleviate traffic congestion and improve safety.

"The ACE projects will create jobs, particularly in the hard-hit construction sector," Spohn said.

The Baldwin Avenue roadway underpass between Rose Avenue and Gidley Street in El Monte is expected to create 1,370 jobs over two years of construction.

The Nogales Street underpass in Industry between Gale Avenue and San Jose Avenue

is expected to bring in 1,480 new jobs. Finally 8,900 jobs will be created over four years of construction of the San Gabriel railroad trench grade separation project, with bridges built at Ramona Street, Mission Road, Del Mar Avenue and San Gabriel Boulevard in the City of San Gabriel, Spohn said.

Spohn said ACE expects next year to complete engineering and environmental documents for grade separation projects at Puente Avenue and at Fairway Drive, both located in the City of Industry and Los Angeles County.

The agency expects to get more bang for its buck with construction contractors bidding more competitively than ever during the recession.

"With the economy slowed down the way it is, it creates a good environment for bids," Spohn said. "Construction bids are coming in favorably."

The goals of the ACE projects include relieving traffic chokepoints and reducing vehicle emissions caused by idling cars waiting for trains to go by at crossings, Spohn said.

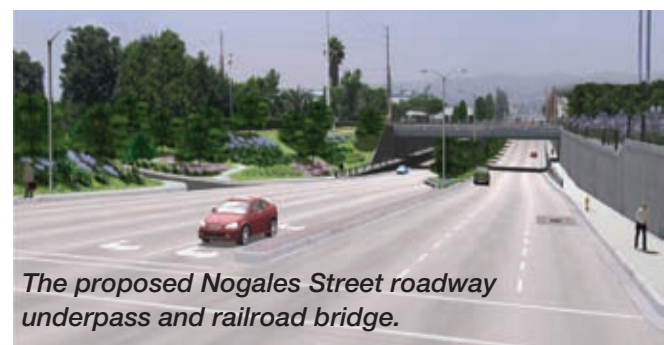
The projects also help increase safety by eliminating the intersections between cars and pedestrians and passing trains, he added.

Another goal is provide a boon to the U.S. economy by increasing the reliability of freight train service and supporting rail capacity increases to help sustain the growth in goods movement expected as imports and exports through the San Pedro Bay ports rebound, Spohn said.

The project is important, he said, because with plans under way to improve rail facilities near docks, transportation of goods from Southern California ports via rail will only lead to longer and more frequent trains that cross San Gabriel Valley roadways.

Southern California ports currently handle 44 percent of the country's shipping containers. About 60 percent of those are shipped through the San Gabriel Valley on transcontinental rail and highway networks to reach destinations in other parts of the country.

The ACE projects have received support from both voters and policy makers at all levels of



The proposed Nogales Street roadway underpass and railroad bridge.

And on the federal level, the ACE projects have secured support and recognition as a congressionally designated Project of National and Regional Significance, according to Spohn. A Senate committee in November would provide billions in new federal program funds for nationally and regionally significant freight projects, like the ACE grade separations.

"ACE has been recognized as a national model for the cost-effective funding and delivery of goods movement infrastructure projects," Spohn said. "With sufficient additional funding support, ACE can complete the remaining projects in its program of grade separations for the benefit of our region and our nation."



Cars (above and below) idle as a freight train passes in the City of San Gabriel.



ACE will construct a railroad trench in San Gabriel, allowing cars and pedestrians to cross on bridges.



Traffic backs up at the Mission Road crossing in San Gabriel.



Trucks and cars idle while waiting for a freight train to pass on Nogales Street in the City of Industry near Rowland Heights.