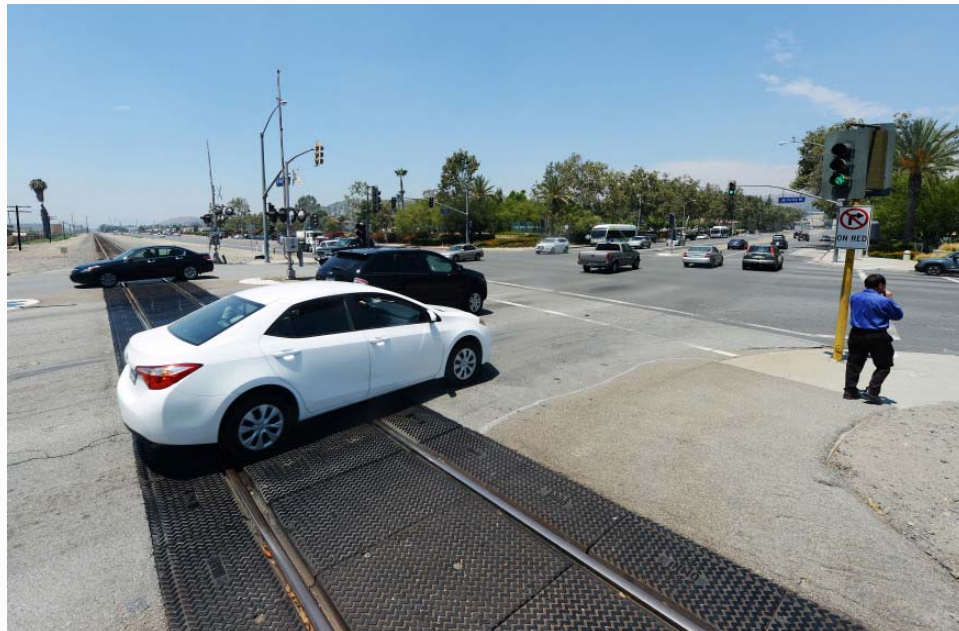


LOCAL NEWS

# Why Cal Poly Pomona students will never get stuck behind the train again



Vehicles cross over a train track at the intersection of Valley Blvd. and Temple Ave. near Cal Poly Pomona on Thursday, July 5, 2018. Freight trains will no longer be using the line which has caused heavy traffic congestion in the area for years. Trains heading through the area have been diverted to another track. (Photo by Will Lester, Inland Valley Daily Bulletin/SCNG)

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A few months ago, Cal Poly Pomona student Jenny Greenberg had paid to attend a workshop on campus.

She waited more than hour before the instructors finally arrived. It was then she realized they had been struck at the at-grade train crossing at Temple Avenue and Valley Boulevard. The gates were down and vehicles had to be rerouted.

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“It’s one of the many instances this railroad crossing has caused people to be late or caused a disruption in their daily lives,” Greenberg, a sociology major and president of Associated Students Incorporated, said Thursday morning.

Temple Avenue was among the busier at-grade crossing thoroughfares in Pomona – until Monday.

A new 2.3-mile freight railroad diversion route now takes freight trains across university farmland and away from the busy intersection. It brings an end to blocked crossings, collisions and train horn noise, said San Gabriel Councilwoman Juli Costanzo, who chairs the San Gabriel Valley Council of Governments capital projects and construction committee.

Officials say the project was key because it is one of the main connections for the 27,000 students and employees at Cal Poly Pomona. Streetside, Temple Avenue sees an average of nearly 34,000 vehicle trips a day.

The Temple Avenue Train Diversion Project not only reroutes freight trains from the tracks at Temple Avenue but Pomona Boulevard as well. It took about 10 years to build and was managed by the Council of Governments as part of the Alameda Corridor-East Program.

The project cost \$94.8 million. Of that, 52 percent came from federal funds, 40 percent from Los Angeles Metro, 7 percent from Union Pacific Railroad and 1 percent from state sources.

“Fixing our infrastructure is one of the best ways possible to strengthen our nation’s most basic foundation,” said Rep. Norma Torres, D-Ontario.

The ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach are key partners in the economy of the Inland Empire, with about 40 percent of U.S. cargo coming through the two ports, Torres said. “It only makes sense one of the busiest intersections in the region gets this project.”

Although only a sliver of her district lies in Pomona, Rep. Grace Napolitano, D-El Monte, the ranking Californian on the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee was heavily involved in seeing the project through completion. Napolitano said the project will not only impact Cal Poly students but also Mount San Antonio College students and the thousands of other motorists who commute through the intersection.

The Alameda Corridor-East Construction Authority will add 19 bridges for trains. The Temple Avenue project was one of the higher priorities when the authority was created in 1999, said Mark Christoffels on Thursday morning as a steady stream of vehicles passed through the intersection unimpeded.

“We studied this thing to death,” said Christoffels, chief engineer.

Staff considered the typical options: building a bridge over the tracks or lowering the streets under the tracks but neither worked, Christoffels said. Lowering Temple Avenue under the tracks wouldn’t work because it would lose the connection to Valley Boulevard. Elevating the street over the tracks would mean the entrances on Temple Avenue for nearby businesses and a Cal Poly student housing development would have been obstructed or eliminated.

“That’s when we decided to have a discussion with the university: ‘Could we divert these tracks through your agricultural fields?’ They agreed because they want to see the project done as well,” Christoffels said.

“So what you have to do, as you can imagine, is construct a whole another set of railroad tracks.” The diversion begins on the Spadra agriculture field owned by Cal Poly. A portion runs parallel to the former Lantern Development Center and eventually connects to the original freight track near Hamilton Avenue, he said.

A portion of the diversion track was on land owned by an oil company. Union Pacific Railroad and the gas company got into a disagreement over the relocation of the lines. The project was on hold for several years while the two agencies litigated the matter, Christoffels said.

“There was a flurry of activity and then we sat around and waited. Two years ago, that litigation finally came to conclusion and we could the finish the project,” he said.

There were two major collisions in the last 10 years at this intersection, added Rep. Judy Chu, D-San Gabriel, an advocate of the corridor project.

It is only because of the corridor project that the region is modernizing train traffic and the routes, she said.

“The whole thing will not be successful unless we have the entire corridor fixed so that train traffic can easily go through the San Gabriel Valley,” Chu said. “This will make sure that the train traffic will benefit our area economically as these goods are able to move through so smoothly.”

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## Liset Márquez

Liset Márquez covers the cities of Pomona, Claremont, La Verne and San Dimas for the Inland Valley Daily Bulletin. A beat reporter for the Bulletin since 2006, she previously wrote for the Chattanooga Times Free Press. She keeps a watchful eye on city councils and the Dodgers.

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