

Adopt Policy Regarding Trees Adjacent to the Caltrain Right of Way

JPB TOPS Meeting

July 24, 2024



Background

- Intense winter storms in 2023 and 2024 caused trees along the Caltrain Right of Way (ROW) to fall
 - At least 30 trees and dozens of branches
 - Construction and service delays
 - Damage to Caltrain infrastructure
- Large trees with shallow root systems or that grow in groves present the greatest risk of falling
- Greater safety risk and likelihood of system disruption once Caltrain transitions to electrified system

2024 Storms/Trees – Impact to Caltrain

- February 4, 2024, high winds and rain caused major disruptions in passenger service
- A tree fell across tracks and took down Overhead Contact System (OCS) as train was arriving near Burlingame Station
 - Wires wrapped around the train
 - All passengers and crew were safely evacuated
 - Caltrain paid for repairs to OCS and train, and removed tree
- Other locations on the corridor saw trees and branches fell on to tracks and OCS wire



2023 Storms/Trees – Impact to Caltrain

- 25+ trees and dozens of branches fell on tracks and ROW
- 5,000 feet of OCS wire, 9 OCS poles and a dozen cantilever arms damaged
- 33 hours of service delays along the corridor due to complete track closures
- If electric trains had been in operation, service delays could have been multiple days for each event



Assessing the Risk

- Caltrain has undertaken a tree risk assessment and maintenance program along the ROW, including pruning or removal of trees that arborist determined to be a high risk to public safety
- Caltrain plans to conduct regular assessments, including a Corridor-wide assessment by an arborist every three years
- At Caltrain's direction, TASI has established an on-call bench of emergency tree removal contractors in the event a tree falls

Addressing our Right of Way & Adjacent properties

- Caltrain has the authority to assess and mitigate risk from trees on its own property to protect public safety
- Caltrain may not do so on adjacent private and municipal property without the coordination or consent of the property owners
- Staff have engaged with municipalities to coordinate assessments and removal of trees adjacent to the ROW with city arborists in accordance with city policies
 - All 18 municipalities on the alignment will have met with Caltrain staff by the end of summer 2024
 - Meetings create relationships and foster dialogue regarding the tree policies of Caltrain and each city
- Government Affairs staff are working with the cities to conduct outreach and inform the public regarding the need to assess, prune, and potentially remove trees adjacent to Caltrain ROW

Proposed Policy re Trees

- Policy to address potential safety risk posed by trees adjacent to Caltrain's property
 - Prevent damage to Caltrain's infrastructure and harm to public
 - Protect against potential liability
- Approach
 - Contract with arborists to continue to assess trees along the corridor and outside the ROW
 - Primary focus on tree species that pose greatest risk
 - Minimum every three years
 - Comply with Caltrain Vegetation Management Plan
 - Coordinate with arborists of municipalities along the ROW to identify high risk trees on adjacent property
 - Written notice to property owners regarding risks their trees pose to the public
 - Work proactively with municipalities and private property owners to remove trees

Proposed Policy re Trees

- Approach (cont.)
 - Develop joint mitigation plans with municipal and private landowners
 - Identified trees
 - Responsible party
 - Target dates for removal or pruning
 - Notify municipal and private owners in writing regarding high-risk trees
 - Coordinate safe removal of trees
 - Incentives for replacing trees at Caltrain's request
 - \$250 per tree
 - Must comply with Electrical Safety Zone requirements
 - Must be planted in a location that does not pose a risk to Caltrain infrastructure
 - Owners responsible for removing and pruning trees, and compliance with state and federal law
 - Coordinate with local governments to mitigate risk of harm to Caltrain infrastructure
 - Caltrain may subsidize the cost of removal or mitigation when necessary to reduce risk

Budget Impact of Proposed Policy

- Regular tree assessment and maintenance efforts are included in existing operating budget
- Impact of \$250 incentive uncertain
 - How many trees on adjacent property identified as risk?
 - How many of those trees did Caltrain request be removed, rather than pruned?
 - How many replacement trees planted that comply with the tree policy?
- Staff estimate that total removal costs could be \$5,000 to \$10,000 per tree
- Caltrain does not have data regarding tree replacement or tree pruning or replacement subsidies
- Proposed initial budget cap of \$100,000 for FY 2025 for incentives and subsidies
 - Re-evaluated based on data collected after the first year the policy is in effect

Recommended Motion

- Recommend Board approval of Tree Policy
- Adopt budget cap of \$100,000 for FY 2025 for tree replacement incentives and tree pruning or removal subsidies