

Adopt Policy Regarding Trees Adjacent to the Caltrain Right of Way

JPB Meeting

September 5, 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 as 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
- Other locations on the corridor experienced fallen trees and branches 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

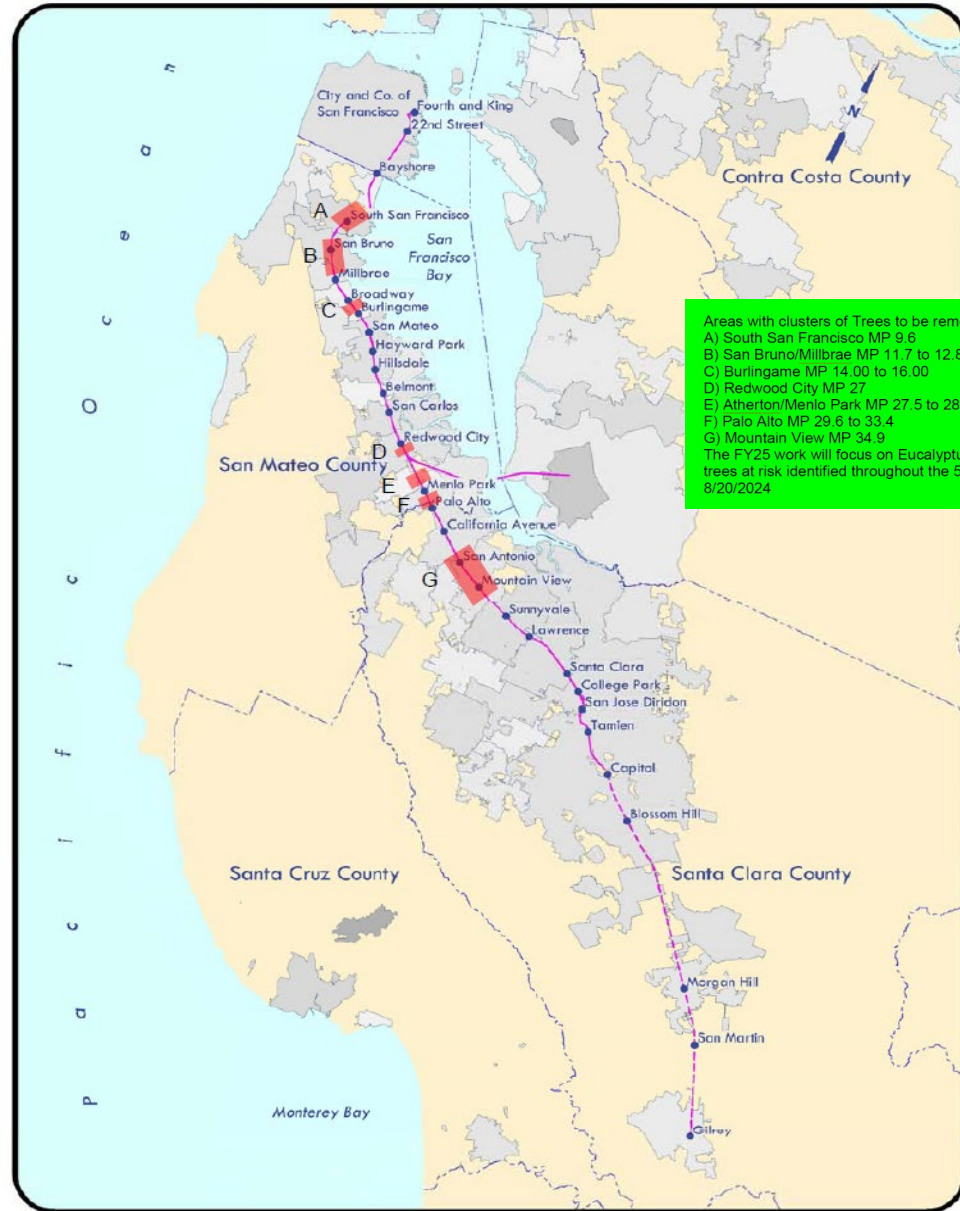


Assessing the Risk

- 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

Assessing the Risk (cont'd)

Tree Assessment Caltrain Corridor



Areas with clusters of Trees to be removed in FY25.
A) South San Francisco MP 9.6
B) San Bruno/Millbrae MP 11.7 to 12.8
C) Burlingame MP 14.00 to 16.00
D) Redwood City MP 27
E) Atherton/Menlo Park MP 27.5 to 28.6
F) Palo Alto MP 29.6 to 33.4
G) Mountain View MP 34.9
The FY25 work will focus on Eucalyptus trees and other trees at risk identified throughout the 52 miles corridor.
8/20/2024



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 Regarding Trees on Property Adjacent to ROW

- 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 adjacent to 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 the risks their trees pose to the public
 - Work proactively with municipalities to remove dangerous trees

Proposed Policy Regarding Trees on Property Adjacent to ROW

Coordinate with private property owners to safely prune or remove trees that pose a hazard to public safety

- In-kind support and subsidies to private owners to prune or remove dangerous trees
- Offer to plant new tree on private property or offer incentive for owner to replace tree
 - Up to \$1,000 per tree, based on health of tree and other factors
 - Must comply with Electrical Safety Zone requirements
 - Must be planted in a location that does not pose a risk to Caltrain infrastructure
 - If private owner rejects offer to replace a tree on their property, Caltrain will plant a new tree in the vicinity on its own property or on the property of the municipality (with municipality consent)
- Caltrain to comply with applicable laws when removing, pruning, and replanting trees on private property

Budget Impact of Proposed Policy

- Regular tree assessment and maintenance efforts are included in existing operating budget
- Staff estimate that total removal costs could be \$2,500 to \$20,000 per tree
- Caltrain does not have data regarding tree replacement or tree pruning or replacement subsidies
- Proposed initial budget cap of \$250,000 for FY 2025 for incentives and subsidies
 - Re-evaluate 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 \$250,000 for FY 2025 for tree replacement incentives and tree pruning or removal subsidies