

Investing in California Small Businesses

SMALL BUSINESS NEWSLETTER • Volume 13: Issue 02

SPRING 2025



Small Business Program

The Authority is committed to small businesses playing a major role in building the statewide high-speed rail system.

SMALL BUSINESS NEWSLETTER VOLUME 13 • ISSUE 02 SPRING 2025

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To access and download more information pertaining to the small business program, visit the Small Business Resources webpage at <https://hsr.ca.gov/small-business/>

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To view past newsletters visit:

<https://hsr.ca.gov/business-opportunities/small-business-program/small-business-newsletter/>

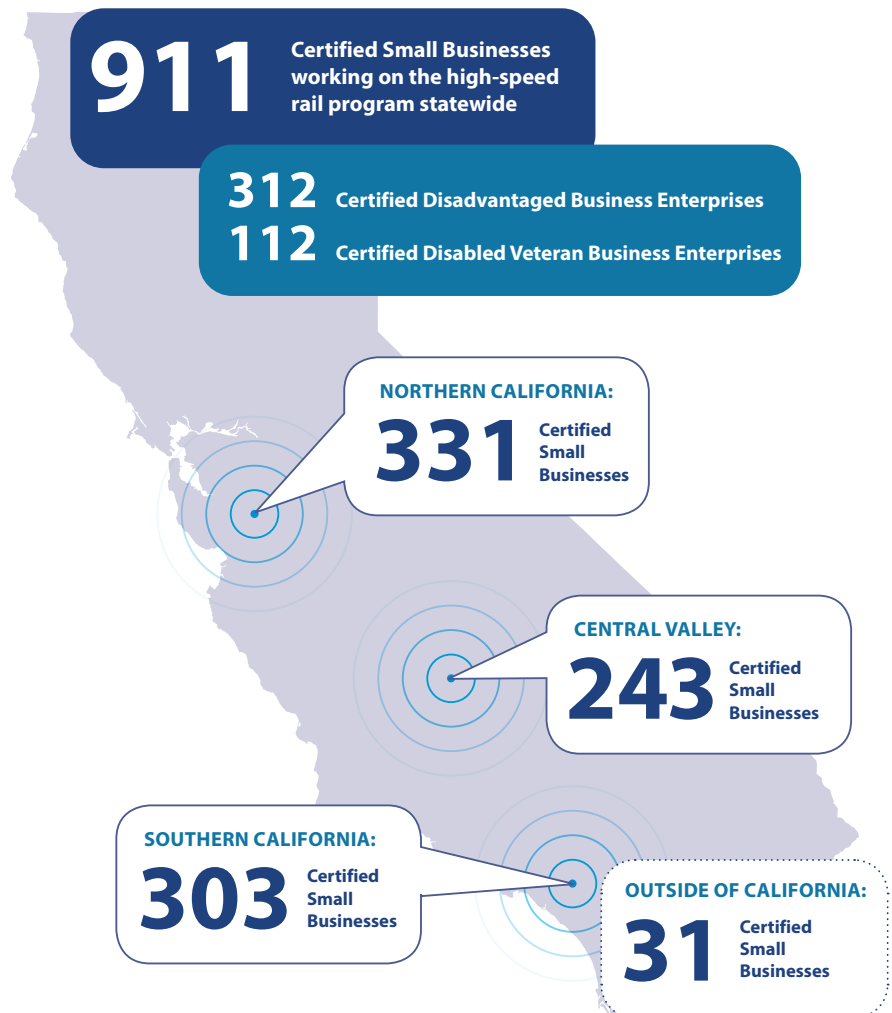
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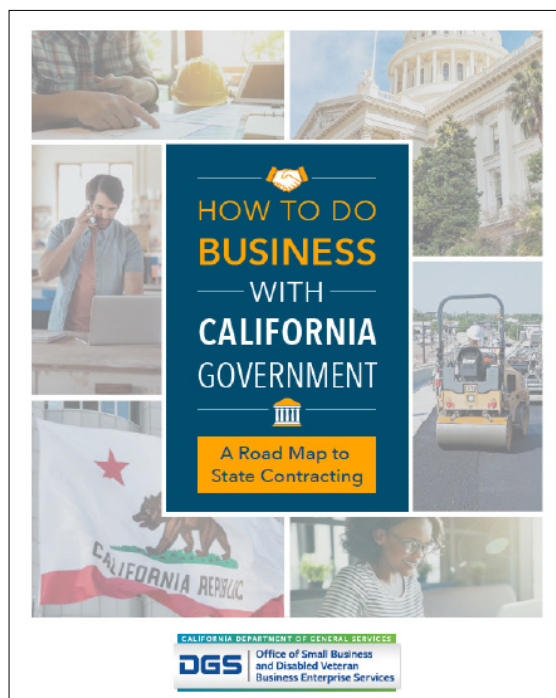
SMALL BUSINESS PARTICIPATION

as of March 31, 2025



How to Do Business with the State of California

Visit these resources for education, training, and support for growing a thriving business, doing business with the state of California, and connecting with the High-Speed Rail Authority.



Chardená Shares



Chardená Valley, Assistant Chief of Small Business

Spring is in full swing here at the California High-Speed Rail Authority, and we are all looking forward to a busy summer.

As part of the state budget process, Governor Newsom has proposed a Cap-and-Trade commitment of a minimum of \$1 billion per year will help us finish the Merced to Bakersfield line and build on that momentum to extend out to the Bay Area and Los Angeles. It puts us on the right track to attract and utilize private investment in the system and get clean, electrified high-speed rail delivered as quickly as possible. We appreciate Governor Newsom's commitment to delivering the nation's first high-speed rail system right here in California.

In the Authority's Small Business Program, we have made some recent movements. Our own Catrina Blair was promoted to Chief of Small Business within the Administration Office's Small Business Development and Compliance Branch. In her new role, she will be overseeing the Small Business Support Services and Title VI, Small Business Outreach, and Small Business Compliance Sections.

Catrina originally joined the Authority in June 2018 as our Small Business Advocate and was later promoted to Chief of Process and Program Development. In her time at the Authority, she built strong relationships within our

organization, with our partners at state and federal agencies, the public, and small business owners across the state.

She also oversaw the creation and implementation of various policies, procedures, and programs, including managing our Business Advisory Council and the implementation of our new small business program goals.

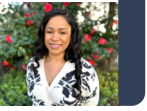
A huge congratulations to her from all of us. We're pleased to continue this important program under her excellent leadership.

As part of this shift, I also had the opportunity to promote into Catrina's former position, with a new title of Assistant Chief of Small Business. I am extremely excited for this opportunity to continue the great work our branch is doing to recruit and support small business participation in our program.

When I joined the program in October 2023 as the Authority's Small Business Advocate, I was able to jump right in and support the annual Small Business Diversity and Resource Fair that happened less than two weeks later. I am excited to advance my career in public service to this next level, where I can continue to help small businesses navigate the small business certification process and support their growth.



Catrina Blair, Chief of Small Business



Bianca Openiano, Small Business Support Services and Title VI/Civil Rights

In the coming weeks, we'll be looking forward to backfilling our Small Business Advocate position. Keep an eye out in future columns for an introduction.

We also welcomed Bianca Openiano to oversee our Small Business Support Services and Title VI/Civil Rights section. She joined us from the Authority's Document Control Branch, and with this reorganization, she is taking on a larger role in ensuring the small businesses under contract with the Authority have the support they need.

In February and April, we hosted workshops with our Authority chief auditor, Paula Rivera. These workshops were open to small businesses currently working on our project, and those interested in working on the project, so they know what to expect under contract. These trainings covered a variety of topics, including how to determine overhead rates, billing, and other important information. We'll be holding future sessions in the coming months.

The theme of this newsletter edition is "Seeds of Success: Cultivating Your Business This Spring." Building from that and recognizing we will have many procurement opportunities in the coming months, now is the time to do a little spring cleaning of your own to make sure your business is well positioned to compete for work on this project. Here are a few tips:

- *Make sure your capability statement and resumes are updated and current.*
- *Invest in and/or utilize a financial management system so it is in place to help you be prepared to bid for future opportunities.*
- *All things human resources! Having a robust HR program will help you with employee retention and identify and elevate talent.*
- *Keep your contacts list full! Networking and connections are the name of the game for small businesses, so it's important to attend events and build connections to help position you for success.*
- *Make sure your business information is current in our [ConnectHSR](#) vendor registry so you can get your business out there and be kept up to date on important procurements.*

Speaking of networking, be sure to keep an eye out for more information about our annual Small Business Diversity and Resources Fair this fall in the Bay Area. [Last year's event](#) at UC Merced attracted more than 200 participants who spent the day networking and attending sessions with more than 30 prime contractors on the project. We hope to see you there!

I want to close out this column by recognizing May was Small Business Month, and we want to celebrate and thank our Business Advisory Council and our small businesses that are doing important work on this first-in-the-nation high-speed rail project. As of March 31, 2025, there are 911 small businesses actively working on the project, including 312 Disadvantaged Business Enterprises and 112 certified Disabled Veteran Business Enterprises. We want to see that number to go up as we continue to work to meet our small business participation goals. There are more than 4.1 million small business in California that serve as the backbone of the state's economy, and we are committed to your success as it benefits all Californians.

Have a great summer, and my team and I look forward to seeing you at our next event!

Small Business Events



Small Business Outreach Coordinator Damon Dorn discusses the project with an attendee at the Fall 2024 Authority Small Business Diversity and Resources Fair.



Matchmaking sessions between small businesses and prime contractors create business connections that support industry and high-speed rail.

June 10, 2025

[NLBWA California State Matchmaking Summit](#)

9:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m.

2200 E. Holt Blvd., Ontario, CA 91761

June 17, 2025

[SamTrans – Caltrain DBE Outreach Event](#)

10:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m.

1250 San Carlos Ave. San Carlos, CA. 94070

June 24, 2025

[Caltrans North Region Resource Roundtable](#)

10:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m.

Online / Virtual

June 25, 2025

[SBDC's Orange County-Inland Empire Contracting Conference](#)

8:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m.

3637 5th Street Riverside, CA. 92501

June 26, 2025

[Santa Clara Valley Transportation Authority \(VTA\) Contracts & Contacts 2025](#)

11:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m.

3331 N.1st Street San Jose, CA. 95134

June 27, 2025

[5th Annual BELL Business & Government Contracting Summit](#)

11:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m.

1100 Market Place, San Diego, CA. 92101

Did You Know?



Frequently Asked Questions from Small Businesses

Question: How do I get more information about the certifications that apply to the Authority's Small Business participation goal?

Answer: While the Authority is not a small business certifying agency, it recognizes the following federal and state small business certifications.

[California Unified Certification Program](#)

Disadvantaged Business Enterprise (DBE)

[California Department of General Services](#)

Small / Micro Business (SB/MB)

Disabled Veteran Business Enterprise (DVBE)

Small Business for Public Works (SB-PW)

Business Advisory Council Profiles



Debra Roak, Owner and CEO, The CRA Consultancy Group

Remembering Debra Roak, CRA Consultancy Group, Small Business Owner and Advocate

In remembrance and gratitude, we honor the legacy of Debra Roak, a visionary leader, mentor, and advocate.

As the owner and CEO of CRA Consultancy Group, Debra dedicated herself to empowering businesses, forging strong partnerships, and championing diversity, equity, and inclusion. Her commitment to fostering success for small businesses, particularly those owned by women and minorities, was unmatched.

Debra's unwavering passion and innovative thinking helped CRA Consultancy Group become a force in the business consulting space, connecting clients with public sector contracts, and creating powerful collaborations that propelled growth. Her expertise in executive coaching and consulting ensured organizations thrived through authentic, strength-based leadership and human connectedness.

Beyond her professional achievements, Debra served as the Primary Representative on the Business Advisory Council and Chair of the Outreach Committee, always ready to offer her wisdom, insight, and motivation. She had a remarkable ability to inspire and uplift those around her, leaving an indelible mark on everyone she worked with.

Debra's presence was more than leadership — it was a source of encouragement, empowerment, and transformation. Her legacy lives on in the businesses she supported, the relationships she nurtured, and the positive change she created. She is deeply missed, but her impact endures.

Thank you, Debra, for your service, leadership, and boundless generosity. You will always be remembered.



Steven Koenig, Vice President of Sales and Diversity, Celestial Freight Solutions

Steven Koenig, Vice President, Celestial Freight Solutions, Primary Representative

At the center of Celestial Freight Solutions' business development efforts is Steven Koenig, who has served as Vice President of Sales and Diversity for nearly eight years.

Founded in 2006, Celestial Freight Solutions is a certified Small Business for the Purpose of Public Works (SB-PW) and Disadvantaged Business Enterprise (DBE) that offers a wide range of transportation services, including shipping, ground, ocean, air, and warehousing solutions. Some of Celestial Freight Solutions' current and past customers include RAND Corporation, FEMA, Harman, JBL, Walt Disney, American Red Cross, Paramount, COX, Allied Signal, and Technicolor.

When asked what drives his passion for securing contracts and expanding procurement opportunities, Steven's response is refreshingly straightforward: "It's what I do." That simple statement speaks volumes, revealing a deep-seated dedication that has become second nature.

Steven's influence extends beyond day-to-day operations. His active participation on the High-Speed Rail Authority's Business Advisory Council showcases his passion for advocating on behalf of small and diverse businesses. Whether contributing innovative strategies or amplifying outreach for high-speed rail events and procurement opportunities, Steven consistently shows up with purpose and persistence — through both challenges and successes.

Q&A with Matthew Alix: How NorCal SBDC Can Help Small Businesses Unlock Big Opportunities



Matthew Alix, Regional Lead Procurement Program Manager for NorCal Small Business Development Center (SBDC) ProBiz

Small businesses play a vital role in delivering California's high-speed rail system and understanding government contracting can open doors to new opportunities. We sat down with Matthew Alix, Regional Lead Procurement Program Manager for NorCal Small Business Development Center (SBDC) ProBiz, to gain insight on how small businesses can utilize NorCal SBDC to collaborate with the Authority.

Q: Can you explain what NorCal Small Business Development Center (SBDC) is and what the ProBiz program does?

NorCal SBDC is a Lead Center that oversees a network of 17 Small Business Development Centers across Northern California. We provide technical assistance to small businesses, helping them with startup, business planning, formation, execution, access to capital, and preparing for contracts.

Our ProBiz program equips small businesses with the tools they need to succeed in government contracting. We help them find relevant opportunities, respond to bids, research agency purchasing needs, and apply for small business certifications.

Q: How can NorCal SBDC ProBiz help small businesses connect with the Authority?

There is growing excitement surrounding the opportunities available with the California high-speed rail project. Through free one-on-one advising, trainings, workshops, procurement networking events, and collaboration with the Authority, we help create connections between small businesses and the agency. The more we educate businesses about these opportunities and facilitate introductions, the greater the likelihood of them securing contracts with the Authority.

Q: What are some key steps small businesses should take to prepare for procurement opportunities?

The first step is defining their business purpose and understanding the services they provide. From there, the business must research which opportunities align with their offerings and develop a focused strategy. Having a structured plan, maximizing resources, and seeking professional guidance will significantly increase their chances of success. Procurement is a collaborative effort — business owners shouldn't go at it alone.

Q: Anything else you'd like to share with small businesses eager to work with the Authority?

The high-speed rail project offers a wealth of opportunities for qualified, certified small businesses across California. The Authority is actively seeking capable firms to participate in their procurement programs, and NorCal SBDC ProBiz is ready to help small businesses become prime or subcontractors for the project — all at no cost!

For more information, visit <https://www.norcal sbdc.org/probiz> and explore how NorCal SBDC ProBiz can support your journey in contracting with the Authority.

Midori Dobson

Making the World a Quieter Place: A Chat with Acoustical Consultant Deborah Jue



Acoustical consultant Deborah Jue takes a sound reading.

Deborah Jue has served as an acoustical consultant on transportation projects around the world for 35 years, including projects with the California high-speed rail. She is a Principal at [Wilson Ihrig](#), a certified Microbusiness that conducted noise and vibration studies for the Authority for many years, as well as for many other public transit organizations. She joined us for a conversation to discuss the path she took toward her specialty.

Q: When did you first become interested in acoustical consulting?

I played musical instruments all through school and even after college. The bassoon was my main instrument. One day one of my music teachers suggested I look into

acoustics as my field of study. He knew I was strong at science and math, which matters because acoustics is basically physics. I was interested, but this was before the internet, and it was hard to find a college with a specific degree program in acoustics.

I went to Stanford for my undergraduate study, and after a while I opted to create a general engineering degree with a focus in acoustics. I took a class on noise pollution in the Aeronautics and Astronautics Department, and I included several electrical engineering classes, and other subjects like physics of music, and computer music to broaden my scope. As a graduate student, I studied mechanical engineering and studied dynamics and controls.



Deborah Jue, Principal, Wilson Ihrig

Q: How did your background prepare you for acoustical consulting?

Acoustical consulting, especially as it relates to transportation, is an inter-disciplinary field. I'm fortunate to have this multi-disciplinary background.

I don't just work with other acoustical consultants all day long. I get to talk with smart architects, engineers, planners, agency staff, mechanics, and others that work in transportation. Depending on the project, I might work with mechanical engineers, geo-technical engineers, structural engineers, and civil engineers. We are often looking at similar things in different ways.

Q: What are some of the benefits of acoustical engineering?

A lot of our work is creating "environmental comfort," founded on academic studies that assessed issues like annoyance and the psychological impacts of noise. In the recent years, there's been an awareness we need to have health studies on things like sleep disturbance and stress. These can compound the annoyance impacts from project noise. Also, noise can be a diagnostic tool that tells us something is wrong with the machinery or the system, so we want to understand that.

That's why understanding the noise and vibration impacts of transportation is important — we are talking about connecting people to families, jobs, and communities. We are talking about improving equality and diversifying our society. We need to get it right.

Q: Why do you like acoustical consulting?

I truly enjoy the work. I like the idea that I'm helping make the world a quieter place. With more and more people sharing space on this planet, there's so much potential for increasing noise. Helping to prevent that feels restorative to me.

You can read more about Wilson Ihrig's work on California High-Speed Rail in [Volume 12, Issue 3 of the Small Business Newsletter](#).

Shum Preston



WILSON IHRIG
ACOUSTICS, NOISE & VIBRATION

Doing the Invisible Work with Mahaffey Drilling



Workers from Mahaffey Drilling work on a metal rebar tube that will help build the foundation of a high-speed rail structure.

In the middle of a cool Fresno night in late March, the team at Mahaffey Drilling was gearing up to start work at 1 a.m. on the Construction Package 2-3 segment of the California high-speed rail project.

“We think we know coming in what our job is going to look like, but Mother Nature, and project circumstances, often result in different plans,” says Ashley Mahaffey, CEO of [Mahaffey Drilling](#). “It’s a testament to the work ethic, the perseverance, the grit, the aptitude of our team. You don’t do what we do unless you love it, and I’m very grateful.”

Mahaffey Drilling Co. is a small, Compton-based, minority-woman-owned business enterprise that has been in Ashley Mahaffey’s family for four generations — since the 1920s. Her father, the third CEO, died unexpectedly when she was

a child. Her mother did not want to be the one to end the family legacy and left it to her daughter to decide.

“She asked me when I was 6 if I wanted it. I said yes. Fortunately, she stuck it out until I was ready,” she remembers fondly.

Unseen, this small and mighty team of 12 has shaped the literal foundations of Los Angeles and greater California with major construction projects like the Los Angeles Coliseum, the LAX People Mover/Tom Bradley International Terminal Interface, and multiple Disneyland rides. They work through rain and hail, through heat and freezing cold, often changing work hours at the last minute and missing time with their families.

"Dreams don't become reality without sweat, long hours, hard work, and determination," says Raul Villarreal. "I've been with many drilling companies when I started in this industry, but Mahaffey Drilling is where I found my home."

It is a tall order to make such sacrifices and create something steady and foundational under sometimes complicated conditions. Foundations are not as visible as soaring arches and towering grade separations, and the Mahaffey team is used to doing the essential invisible work that few will ever know was done at all. But the culture at Mahaffey gives the team purpose and drive.

"From the first day working for them, there was a feeling of being a group of family and friends," says Salvador Farias, Jr. "You feel cared for and listened to in any situation that

arises. As a first-generation citizen in the United States, I work every day to achieve the life my family moved here for."

The team also has fun as "professional mud enthusiasts," as Ashley calls them.

"I often tell my kids that we play for a living," she says. "We do all things kids enjoy: playing with heavy equipment, playing in the mud, and playing outside."

When Ashley Mahaffey gets home from work, her 4-year-old daughter scolds her for coming home dirty and muddy. It's too soon to tell whether she wants to follow in her mother's footsteps, but the foundations are there.

Diana Delgado Cornejo



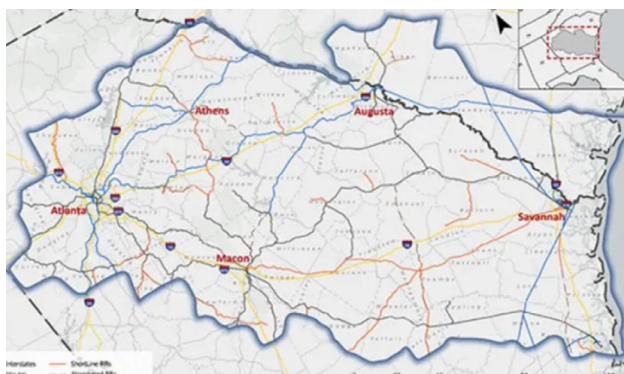
Mahaffey uses a portable drill to make way for the foundations of structures for this historic project.



Workers from Mahaffey help prepare a metal rebar tube for placement on a construction site.



Speed Reads



HIGH SPEED TRAIN ERA IN GEORGIA WILL BEGIN IN 2035

The Georgia Department of Transportation is taking its first step toward a high-speed rail line connecting Atlanta to Savannah by launching a comprehensive feasibility study to evaluate proposed rail routes. There are three main types of routes: sharing with current freight rail lines, building new ones, or a combination. The planning process for this project will continue through 2027 and, if it is deemed feasible, the environmental impact assessment process will begin in 2028 with goals of having the rail line built and operational by 2035.



HIGH-SPEED RAIL: DRIVING ECONOMIC GROWTH AND SUSTAINABILITY IN INDIA

India's high-speed rail system is expected to cover 508 km (315 miles) between Mumbai and Ahmedabad, reducing travel time from approximately nine hours to two. The first corridor is expected to be operational by 2026. To discuss the economic impacts and challenges high-speed rail faces in India, a group of experts were brought together for the Mint Rail Vision by Alstom panel. The group discussed hurdles with land acquisition, geography, private funding, and the current railway system already carrying more than 8 billion passengers annually. The proposed high-speed rail network is part of India's goal to be net zero by 2070.

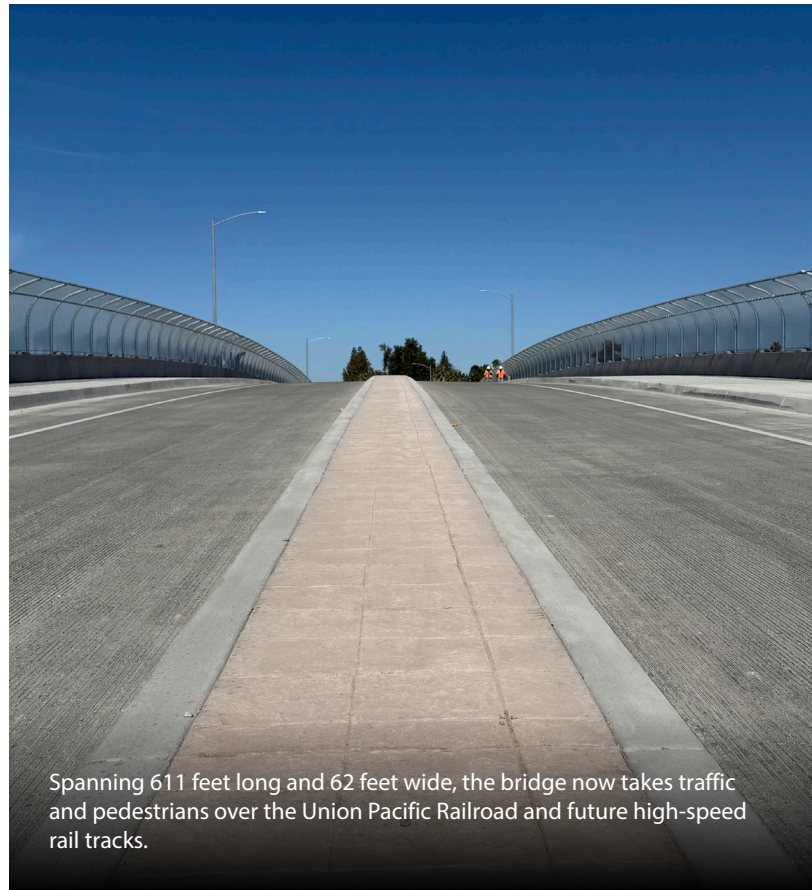


BELMONT AVE. AND CENTRAL AVE. GRADE SEPARATIONS

LATEST VIDEOS: WWW.YOUTUBE.COM/CAHIGHSPEEDRAIL



The Belmont Avenue Grade Separation in the City of Fresno was completed on May 23 and is the third structure to be completed this year.



Spanning 611 feet long and 62 feet wide, the bridge now takes traffic and pedestrians over the Union Pacific Railroad and future high-speed rail tracks.



The Central Avenue Grade Separation located in south Fresno was completed on May 23 and is the fourth structure to be completed this year.



Spanning 432 feet long and more than 42 feet wide, the overpass now takes traffic and pedestrians over BNSF railroad and future high-speed rail tracks.