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Salinas-to-Gilroy rail extension project acquiring property, nearing start of demolition

Property acquisition under way, demolition planned for summer

By Jim Johnson, Monterey Herald

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Salinas >> With two properties acquired and negotiations under way on seven more, demolition work as part of the Salinas Rail extension project could begin as soon as this summer.

Construction is expected to begin next year on the \$69.7 million “kick-start” initial phase of the project, which aims to develop the Salinas Intermodal Transit Center at the current train station as part of the goal to extend Caltrain’s Capitol Corridor rail service between Salinas and Gilroy with connections to San Jose, Oakland and Sacramento. Service is expected to start in 2020.

But the project timeline relies entirely on acquisition of all nine properties before any other work can proceed, according to Transportation Agency of Monterey County Executive Director Debbie Hale.

On Wednesday, the TAMC board will consider authorizing Hale to enter into a short-term lease with Frank’s Fish Market owner Frank Favaloro for 90 days after escrow is expected to close this month. That will allow time to vacate the premises, which also includes Olivia’s Cafe. TAMC has already acquired the AllU.S. Credit Union building at the site, and has made offers on the other properties including the West Market Coin-Op Laundry and the El Aguila Deli, as well as an apartment complex.

“We have so many things we still have to do,” Hale said. “We’ll get more excited once we have all the property acquired. It’s starting to get very real.”

The project includes an extension of Lincoln Avenue to the transit center, as well as a train layover facility, bus facility, and car and bike parking.

Future phases call for new stations in Pajaro (with a connection to the Santa Cruz branch line) and Castroville (with a connection to the Monterey branch line), and an expanded Salinas train layover facility.

Preliminary plans call for offering seven-day-a week, twice-daily train service running from Salinas north through Castroville and Pajaro to Gilroy, and through Morgan Hill en route to downtown San Jose’s Diridon Station, then on to Oakland and Sacramento. Trains leaving Salinas at 5:06 a.m. and 6:01 a.m. would take almost an hour to reach Gilroy and about an hour and a half to reach San Jose. Trains would take a little more than an hour more to get to Oakland and about two hours more to Sacramento.

Afternoon return trips would start at 2:10 p.m. and 3:35 p.m. in Sacramento, and arrive at 5:14 p.m. and 6:45 p.m. in San Jose, and conclude at 6:45 p.m. and 8:16 p.m. in Salinas.

TAMC estimates an annual ridership of about 112,000, and annual operating budget of about \$1.2 million, with about two-thirds of the cost recovered through fares.

Eventually, up to four more round trips would be added as demand increases.

Project benefits, according to TAMC, include providing an alternative to highly congested Highway 101 to access jobs, education, health care and interregional transportation in the Silicon Valley and Greater Bay Area, and reducing air pollution, while promoting mixed-use, transit-oriented development and economic growth around the three new stations.

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