

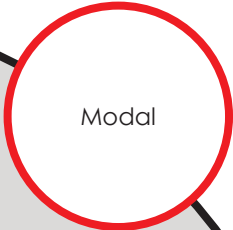


Caltrans Division of Research,
Innovation and System Information

Research



Results



Modal

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Project Title:
Zero-Emission Rail Feasibility Study

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Task Manager:
Fouad Ziaa
Transportation Engineer (Electrical)
fouad.ziaa@dot.ca.gov

Zero-Emission Rail Feasibility Study

Low- and Zero-Emission rail research and feasibility assessment of fuel propulsion technology alternatives for California inter-city rail services.

WHAT WAS THE NEED?

Railways are the most environmentally friendly mode of transportation on land per passenger-or ton-mile. Diesel provides the majority of energy for rail transportation, both in the United State. and California. Most of the fleet is older than 10 years and do not meet the latest emission standards, Tier 4.

Even where Tier 4 standards are met, (e.g., latest model of passenger locomotives) emissions are significantly higher than the 2010 onward standards for on-road heavy-duty diesel engines on a grams per brake horsepower-hour basis (e.g., oxides of nitrogen emissions are approximately seven times higher and particulate matter (is approximately three times higher). Diesel exhaust is responsible for 70 percent of the cancer risk from airborne toxics and its combustion results in greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions.

California has a statewide goal to significantly reduce its GHG emissions and improve air quality while offering alternative modes of transportation. Rail is an essential part of the transportation mix to achieve the state's goals. The California Department of Transportation owns large parts of the intercity fleet, which is usually operated by one of the joint power authorities.

Transitioning the state-owned fleet to low-and zero-emission options is essential to ensure contribution to overall state goals and for rail to remain as a credible alternative compared to other modes. Technology shift is enabled by state organizations taking the lead, so that private operators will follow.

WHAT WAS OUR GOAL?

The study was intended to identify and recommend alternative potentially viable zero and near zero emissions technology options that Caltrans and Joint Powers Authorities can evaluate to apply for funding to convert/purchase rolling stock.



DRISI provides solutions and knowledge that improves California's transportation system

WHAT DID WE DO?

This research identified and evaluated suitable technologies for intercity passenger rail to reduce or eliminate airborne toxics and GHG emissions resulting from motive power, considering economic implications and implementation constraints. Technologies included conventional options such as wayside electrification; different fuels/energy carriers such as renewable fuels, natural gas, and hydrogen; and hybrid options with on-board energy storage devices such as batteries. The emphasis was on options that eliminate toxic exhaust gases at point-of-use.

Hydrogen fuel cell systems are capable of a zero emissions solution since the only by-products are water and oxygen. The energy supply chain and associated emissions will be considered in California's context including future emission reduction potential (e.g., more renewables in electricity generation), thereby providing a well-to-wheel assessment. Technological challenges and practicality of options for intercity services were considered.

WHAT WAS THE OUTCOME?

STADLER, the California State Transportation Agency (CalSTA) and the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) for the design and delivery of four zero-emission hydrogen four-car Flirt trains for California at InnoTrans on September 20, 2022. The contract includes options for 25 more trains, which would replace existing diesel locomotives operating push-pull sets used for state-funded Amtrak California services.

WHAT IS THE BENEFIT?

This work will contribute to better-informed decision-making to help achieve California's goals of GHG and airborne toxic reductions while offering increased quality of life to the State's

residents through modal choice. The work will allow Caltrans and sister agencies to develop a cohesive policy and plan combined with targeted regulation and funding to ensure sustainable rail transportation while reducing the potential for stranded investment.

Joint powers authorities will benefit through avoiding duplication of effort, assistance with decision making, and technology selection. Further, they benefit from the possibility of shared design, development, purchase, and deployment of zero-emission equipment with a stronger negotiation position with equipment suppliers. Changes in motive power technology will benefit everyone along rail corridors, passengers, and personnel. California could become a national and potentially global leader in zero-emission rail technology and innovation, like the success in the automotive sector.

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