



Legislation Text

File #: 2021-0208, **Version:** 1

DATE: June 15, 2021

SUBJECT:

INFORMATIONAL PRESENTATION FROM SAN DIEGO ASSOCIATION OF GOVERNMENTS (SANDAG) STAFF ON THE SAN DIEGO - LOSSAN REGIONAL RAIL CORRIDOR IMPROVEMENTS STUDY UPDATE

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

SANDAG Staff will provide an informational presentation on the status of the San Diego - LOSSAN Regional Rail Corridor Improvements study currently underway. The LOSSAN rail corridor is a 351-mile stretch of rail line that connects counties between San Diego and San Luis Obispo. The LOSSAN corridor is the second busiest rail corridor in the country and is a critical goods movement link for the San Diego region. The study will identify improvements along the corridor that will reduce travel times, increase capacity, and enhance the safety along the corridor.

RECOMMENDATION:

Receive the presentation from SANDAG Staff on the San Diego - LOSSAN Regional Rail Corridor improvements.

FISCAL IMPACT:

There is no fiscal impact to this agenda item.

COMPASS STRATEGIC GOALS:

This agenda item supports the following Strategic Goal(s).

- A Port that the public understands and trusts.
- A thriving and modern maritime seaport.

DISCUSSION:

Background

The Los Angeles-San Diego-San Luis Obispo (LOSSAN) Rail Corridor is a 351-mile stretch of rail line that connects six southern California counties between San Luis Obispo and San Diego. The LOSSAN track is shared between both passenger and freight rail services and is the nation's second

busiest passenger rail corridor. Almost eight million passengers use the corridor's intercity and commuter rail services annually. The rail corridor is also the only viable freight rail connection to the San Diego Region, carrying \$1 billion in goods annually, including many of the automobiles that are imported through the Port's National City Marine Terminal.

The San Diego subdivision of the LOSSAN corridor is the 60.1 mile stretch from the Orange County/San Diego County line to downtown San Diego. Ownership of the San Diego subdivision is split between the North County Transit District (NCTD) and San Diego Metropolitan Transit System (MTS), with NCTD owning the portion from the City of Del Mar/City of San Diego border north, and MTS owning from the same border south. NCTD has operations and maintenance responsibilities for the entire 60-mile subdivision.

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, more than 70 trains used some or all of the San Diego segment of the LOSSAN corridor on a daily basis, including the Amtrak Pacific Surfliner intercity, the Southern California Regional Rail Authority (SCRRA) Metrolink and the North County Transit District (NCTD) COASTER commuter, and the BNSF Railway freight services. Approximately 50 trains operate each weekday just on the portion of the rail line south of Oceanside.

Corridor Studies

Since 2008, SANDAG has secured more than \$1 billion for capital improvements for the subdivision to be constructed during the next 20 years. Improvements include adding 15 miles of double track, replacing aging wooden railway bridges, and making station improvements. Currently 75% of the entire 60.1 miles is double track, allowing trains to safely pass without delays due to single track. Additional information on the LOSSAN corridor and both planned projects, and projects already completed can be found on SANDAG's website here: <https://lossanmap.sandag.org/>

SANDAG has conducted some previous studies on the LOSSAN corridor. In 2017, SANDAG completed a conceptual alignment study of a future tunnel in the City of Del Mar to realign the rail corridor away from the sensitive coastal bluffs. This study identified five potential alignments. In 2019, the California Department of Transportation (CALTRANS) completed a conceptual alignment study of a future tunnel in the City of San Diego's University City area which would realign the rail corridor from the slowest section around Miramar Hill.

In September 2019, the San Diego Association of Governments (SANDAG) Board of Directors approved \$3 million in funding to begin a study of the LOSSAN Rail Corridor with the goal of identifying improvements that will:

- (1) reduce travel times
- (2) increase capacity, and
- (3) enhance the safety of the corridor

These three study goals will facilitate service improvements that will increase the competitiveness of the rail corridor relative to the alternative of using I-5 to move people and goods. SANDAG staff also secured an additional \$220,000 in CALTRANS planning grant funding to supplement SANDAG budgeted funds.

In July 2020, SANDAG began the *San Diego Regional Rail Corridor Alternative Alignment and Improvements Conceptual Engineering Study* or SD-LOSSAN. Specifically, SD-LOSSAN will identify

alternative alignments, proposed improvements, and supporting analysis along the San Diego Subdivision that address the three study goals.

SD-LOSSAN builds upon the conceptual engineering work from the 2017 and 2019 studies. SD-LOSSAN will also complete the Alternatives Analysis phase and 10% level of design for both the Del Mar and Miramar Hill tunnel segment realignments. In addition, the study will develop improvements that address the three study goals for the remaining segments of the San Diego subdivision. A Project Development Team (PDT) comprised of eight corridor agencies provide regular review and input into the technical aspects of the study.

Key Findings

SD-LOSSAN began by analyzing the feasibility of running higher speed rail services. Through detailed modeling and input from PDT members, the study recommends a maximum speed for passenger services of 110 miles per hour (mph) (up from the current maximum speed of 90 mph). The maximum speed for freight services is proposed at 60 mph. The study found no measurable benefits for running 125 mph over 110 mph due to station spacing.

As part of the operational analysis, a zero-emission locomotive was found to have acceleration and braking benefits over a diesel locomotive. These benefits showed the most significant improvements in reducing travel times for both Pacific Surfliner (limited stop) and COASTER (all-stop) passenger services.

The preliminary travel time analysis shows a potential savings of 19 minutes for passenger service between Oceanside and Downtown San Diego, assuming a zero-emission locomotive, 110 mph maximum passenger operating speeds, and Del Mar and Miramar Hill tunnels.

The PDT developed 11 technical criteria to be used to evaluate the various alignment alternatives for both Del Mar and Miramar Hill. These included safety, connectivity and travel demand, travel time, and operations and maintenance costs. Each alignment alternative was scored based on these criteria to narrow down the number of alternatives to carry on into future phases of development.

Recent Actions and Next Steps

SANDAG convened the San Diego Regional Rail Corridor Executive Leadership Taskforce to facilitate ongoing collaboration and progress towards a long-term solution for the Del Mar Bluffs and LOSSAN Rail Corridor. The task force met on April 12, 2021, to hear an update on SD-LOSSAN, as well as current and upcoming stabilization efforts for the Del Mar Bluffs.

Workshops have been held with PDT members to review the technical design guidelines drafted for both track and tunnels. The PDT devoted considerable effort to national and international tunnel best practices, and to fire life safety requirements. A workshop with the corridor operators was also held to review the operational feasibility and future service plans for the corridor.

SD-LOSSAN held public meetings, including with the NCTD Board of Directors, on April 22, 2021. Updates will be provided to the City of Del Mar and SANDAG Board of Directors in May to gain additional comments. The study team is scheduled to complete the Alternatives Analysis for the Del Mar Tunnel this summer and for the Miramar Hill Tunnel in early fall.

SD-LOSSAN will also study the economic impact to the San Diego Region of a catastrophic failure of the Del Mar Bluffs resulting in a disruption of service for more than 10 years (i.e., a situation where

the bluffs and tracks cannot be repaired and alternative routes via tunneling become the only option). This analysis is expected in May.

A high-level planning analysis of a future branch line to the Sorrento Mesa area, in conjunction with planning underway on the South Bay to Sorrento Comprehensive Multimodal Corridor Plan is also part of the study. This is also expected in May.

SD-LOSSAN also is providing input to the development of the draft 2021 Regional Plan.

SANDAG Staff will provide an informational presentation to the Board of Port Commissioners at the June Board meeting.

General Counsel's Comments:

The Office of the General Counsel has reviewed the agenda sheet as presented to it and approves the same as to form and legality.

Environmental Review:

This item would provide a presentation regarding the Lossan Regional Rail Corridor Improvements Study. This presentation to the Board does not constitute an "approval" or a "project" under the definitions set forth in California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Guidelines Sections 15352 and 15378 because no direct or indirect changes to the physical environment would occur. CEQA requires that the District adequately assess the environmental impacts of projects and reasonably foreseeable activities that may result from projects prior to the approval of the same. Any project developed as a result of the presentation that requires the District or the Board's discretionary approval resulting in a physical change to the environment will be analyzed in accordance with CEQA prior to such approval. CEQA review may result in the District, in its sole and absolute discretion, requiring implementation of mitigation measures, adopting an alternative, including without limitation, a "no project alternative" or adopting a Statement of Overriding Consideration, if required. The presentation in no way limits the exercise of this discretion. Therefore, no further CEQA review is required.

The presentation complies with Section 35 of the Port Act, which allows the Board to do all acts necessary and convenient for the exercise of its powers. The Port Act was enacted by the California Legislature and is consistent with the Public Trust Doctrine. Consequently, the presentation is consistent with the Public Trust Doctrine.

The presentation does not allow for "development," as defined in Section 30106 of the California Coastal Act, or "new development," pursuant to Section 1.a. of the District's Coastal Development Permit (CDP) Regulations because it will not result in, without limitation, a physical change, change in use or increase the intensity of uses. Therefore, issuance of a Coastal Development Permit or exclusion is not required. However, development within the District requires processing under the District's CDP Regulations. Future development, as defined in Section 30106 of the Coastal Act, will remain subject to its own independent review pursuant to the District's certified CDP Regulations, PMP, and Chapters 3 and 8 of the Coastal Act. The presentation in no way limits the exercise of the District's discretion under the District's CDP Regulations. Therefore, issuance of a CDP or exclusion is not required at this time.

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Program:

Not applicable.

PREPARED BY:

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