

Memorandum

To: CHAIR AND COMMISSIONERS

CTC Meeting: September 15, 2004

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Action Item

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Ref: **REVIEW AND COMMENT ON A DRAFT PROGRAMMATIC ENVIRONMENTAL
IMPACT REPORT/ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT,
LOS ANGELES TO SAN DIEGO COUNTY – LOSSAN RAIL CORRIDOR**

ISSUE:

The California Transportation Commission (Commission) is being asked to review and comment at the September 2004 Commission meeting on a Draft Programmatic Environmental Impact Report/Environmental Impact Statement (PEIR/S) for the LOSSAN Rail Corridor.

BACKGROUND:

The Los Angeles to San Diego travel corridor links California's three most populous counties - Los Angeles, Orange and San Diego. Travel along this corridor is served largely by Interstate 5 (I-5) and the Los Angeles to San Diego (LOSSAN) rail corridor. By 2020, rail service along the corridor is projected to consist of 16 intercity trains, between 9 and 29 commuter trains (depending on the segment of the corridor), and 4 to 6 freight trains each day in each direction. The purpose of the proposed Rail Improvements in the LOSSAN corridor is to develop a faster, safer, and more reliable passenger rail system that provides added capacity in response to increased travel demand through the year 2020.

ALTERNATIVES BEING CONSIDERED:

The Draft Program EIR/EIS compares two alternatives: a No Project/No Action Alternative and a Rail Improvements Alternative. The No Project Alternative is the baseline for comparison to the Rail Improvements Alternative.

The known and potential consequences of the No Project Alternative include: higher maintenance costs; increased deaths, injuries, insurance and equipment costs due to at-grade collisions; continuing or worsening air quality; reduction in on-time performance; continuing noise impacts along corridor from the need to sound train horns when approaching at-grade crossings; and inability

to provide improvements in the lagoons of coastal San Diego County, including design options which could provide a net environmental benefit over the existing conditions.

The Rail Improvements Alternative (see attached table) would eliminate the remaining single-tracked segments, resulting in a double-tracked rail corridor with multiple tracks between Los Angeles and Fullerton. Trains will be able to operate at their maximum operational speeds of up to 110 to 125 miles per hour in portions of the corridor, reducing trip times by up to almost 1 hour from the existing time and increase the capacity of the corridor. Safety will be increased through the elimination of at-grade crossings at many locations and the installation of state-of-the-art safety and signaling systems. These improvements would meet the need for a safe and reliable mode of travel that would attract additional passengers to the rail services and provide trip times that are competitive to travel by automobile. The cost to implement the proposed Rail Improvements Alternative is estimated to range between \$3.8 billion and \$5.4 billion in 2003 dollars depending on whether the Low- or High- Build Rail Improvement option or a hybrid of the options is implemented.

Attachments

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

The Los Angeles to San Diego travel corridor links California's three most populous counties - Los Angeles, Orange and San Diego. Travel along this corridor is served largely by Interstate 5 (I-5) and the Los Angeles to San Diego (LOSSAN) rail corridor¹. The rail corridor is used by Amtrak intercity passenger rail service, Metrolink and Coaster commuter rail services, and Burlington Northern and Santa Fe Railway (BNSF) freight service, and loosely parallels I-5 from Los Angeles Union Station through Orange County to San Diego's Santa Fe Depot.

By 2020, rail service along the corridor is projected to consist of 16 intercity trains, between 9 and 29 commuter trains (depending on the segment of the corridor), and 4 to 6 freight trains each day in each direction. Service quality at this volume of trains is uncertain, with increased risk of delay risks associated with train operations, breakdowns or rail maintenance activities.

The purpose of the proposed Rail Improvements in the LOSSAN corridor is to develop a faster, safer, and more reliable passenger rail system that provides added capacity in response to increased travel demand through the year 2020 between Los Angeles, Orange, and San Diego Counties (between Los Angeles Union Station and San Diego Santa Fe Depot).

ALTERNATIVES

The Draft Program EIR/EIS compares two alternatives: a No Project/No Action (No Project) Alternative and a Rail Improvements Alternative.

The No Project Alternative (No Project) is the baseline for comparison of the Rail Improvements Alternative, and represents the LOSSAN region's transportation system (highway and conventional rail) as it would be after implementation of programs or projects that are currently programmed in Regional Transportation Plans (RTPs) and that are funded for implementation and expected to be in place by 2020.

The Rail Improvements Alternative represents the proposed action, and would eliminate the remaining single-tracked segments, resulting in a double-tracked rail corridor, with four tracks between Los Angeles Union Station and Fullerton. Trains will be able to achieve their maximum operational speeds of up to 110 to 125 miles per hour (mph), reducing trip times. Elimination of at-grade crossings in many locations and state-of-the-art safety and signaling systems throughout the corridor will also be incorporated.

The Rail Improvements Alternative will reduce train travel times (by up to almost 1 hour from the existing time) and increase the capacity of the corridor, meeting the need for a safe and reliable mode of travel that would attract additional passengers to the rail services (with trip times competitive to travel by automobile).

The cost to implement the proposed Rail Improvements Alternative is estimated to range between \$3.8 billion and \$5.4 billion (2003 dollars), depending on whether the Low- or High-Build Rail Improvements Alternative is implemented or a combination of either. The cost estimate includes right-of-way, additional track, tunneling, trenching, stations and mitigation.

¹ While the LOSSAN corridor is officially the "Los Angeles - San Diego - San Luis Obispo" Rail Corridor, the area of the corridor studied and described in this document is that portion between Los Angeles Union Station and San Diego Santa Fe Depot, and within this document, use of the term "LOSSAN" will refer to that segment only.

The process used to define and assess alternatives has been extensive and thorough, and included a series of public scoping meetings and the formation of an interagency group comprised of representatives from key federal and state agencies:

Opportunities for public involvement and input in the environmental review process has also been thorough and on-going, through the Public Scoping meetings, through meetings with individual corridor cities and stakeholders, and through the five workshops conducted in cities along the corridor during the development of the LOSSAN Corridor Strategic Plan.

CONSEQUENCES FOR LOSSAN CORRIDOR WITHOUT IMPROVEMENTS

As shown in the Purpose and Need Statement and evidenced throughout the remaining sections of this document, conventional improvements to the LOSSAN rail corridor are needed to meet current and future transportation demands.

Without these improvements, increasing costs and capacity constraints will continue to hamper existing rail services, as well as hinder the expansion of new rail service to meet projected increases in travel demand. Known and potential Impacts include:

- Higher maintenance costs due to deferred replacement of timber bridges, as well as bluff stabilization along the corridor.
- Increased deaths, injuries, insurance and equipment costs due to at-grade collisions
- Continuing or worsening air quality due to rail traffic delays at road crossings and lack of track capacity for goods movement between the Ports of Los Angeles, Long Beach, and San Diego.
- Worsening on-time performance for commuter and intercity passenger trains and the inability to expand the number of passenger trains

Proposed improvements identified in this document could address and mitigate a number of community and environmental issues, including:

- Continuing noise impacts along corridor from the need to sound train horns when approaching at-grade crossings, especially in densely populated urban areas with closely spaced crossings.
- Inability to provide improvements in the lagoons of coastal San Diego County, including design options which could provide a net environmental benefit over the existing conditions.

NEXT STEPS IN THE ENVIRONMENTAL PROCESS

The Draft Program EIR/EIS is available for public review and comment and will be the subject at public hearings held throughout the corridor. Comments on the draft document may be submitted at the public hearings and in writing to the Department and to the FRA.

After completing the program environmental process, both the Department and FRA expect to be able to make various recommendations, including selection of a preferred Program alternative, i.e. the Rail Improvements Alternative or the No-Project/No-Action Alternative, and to the extent possible, selections of preferred alignment and station options to be advanced to the next phase of project development and environmental analysis. The Department, metropolitan planning organizations, rail operators, individual corridor cities, or any combination thereof may sponsor future consideration of component Rail Improvements projects.

This Program EIR/EIS considers the No Project and Rail Improvements Alternative at a corridor-wide, program level of environmental analysis. Project-level environmental review would focus on individual projects, a portion or portions of the LOSSAN rail corridor and would provide full analysis of potential impacts and issues at an appropriate level of detail in order to obtain the necessary approvals, permits and the ability to proceed with construction.

The LOSSAN Rail Corridor



**Table S.4.3-1
Corridor Improvement Alternatives**

Segment/Alternative Considered	No-Project / No-Action Alternative*	“Low-Build” Rail Improvements Alternative	“High-Build” Rail Improvements Alternative
LA Union Station to Irvine (Central Orange County)			
	Existing Rail Corridor	Partially-grade separated system	Fully grade-separated system
L.A. Union Station Run-through tracks	X (All projects shown are programmed and assumed built by 2020)		
Continuous third main track from Union Station to Fullerton	X		
Double tracking along Lincoln Avenue in Santa Ana	X		
Addition of Fourth Main Track (including full grade separation)		X	X
Double Tracking and Curve Straightening (including Covered Trench in Orange and Santa Ana) (including full grade separation)			X
Double Tracking and Curve Straightening (including partial grade separation)		X	
Irvine to San Clemente (Central Orange County to Northern San Diego County)			
Double Tracking and Curve Straightening (including Tunnel beneath I-5 between Hwy 73 and Avenida Aeropuerto)			X
Double Tracking and Curve Straightening (including Covered Trench along Trabuco Creek and Avenida Aeropuerto)		X	
Dana Point Curve Straightening; San Clemente – Short Tunnel; Double Tracking		X	
San Clemente – Long Split Two Segment Tunnel with Station; Double Tracking			X
Camp Pendleton/Oceanside (Northern San Diego County) to San Diego			
Extension of double track at San Onofre	X		
Extension of double track in Oceanside	X		
Sorrento-Miramar double-tracking and curve realignment	X		

Segment/Alternative Considered	No-Project / No-Action Alternative*	“Low-Build” Rail Improvements Alternative	“High-Build” Rail Improvements Alternative
O’Neill to Flores double-tracking	X		
Santa Margarita River Bridge Replacement and double-tracking	X		
Del Mar Bluffs stabilization	X		
Double Tracking and Curve Straightening along existing alignment (including full grade separation) – Carlsbad/Oceanside			X
Double Tracking and Curve Straightening along existing alignment (including partial grade separation) – Carlsbad/Oceanside		X	
Double Tracking and Curve Straightening along existing alignment (including full grade separation) – Encinitas			X
At-Grade Double Tracking and Curve Straightening along existing alignment (including partial grade separation) - Encinitas		X	
Double Tracking and Curve Straightening (including tunnel along Interstate-5) – Del Mar			X
Double Tracking and Curve Straightening (including tunnel under Camino Del Mar) – Del Mar		X	
Double Tracking and Curve Straightening (including tunnel under Interstate-5 Freeway) – University Towne Centre		X	
Double Tracking and Curve Straightening (including tunnel under University City/Miramar Hill with new station) – University Towne Centre			X
Double Tracking and Curve Straightening; San Diego River Bridge		X	
Double Tracking and Curve Straightening; San Diego River Bridge; Trench between Sassafras St and Cedar St (includes partial or full grade separation)			X