

San Dieguito Double Track and Special Events Platform Project

Updated December 13, 2013

Frequently Asked Questions

■ OVERVIEW OF PROJECT

1. What is the purpose of the project?

The project will improve a critical part of the 351-mile Los Angeles-San Diego-San Luis Obispo (LOSSAN) rail corridor that serves as a vital link for passenger and freight movements in the San Diego region. The San Dieguito Double Track and Special Events Platform Project will increase capacity and improve system reliability by adding a one-mile segment of double track between Solana Beach and Del Mar, resulting in a continuous 2.8-mile-long segment of double track. The project also includes the replacement of the existing 97-year-old San Dieguito River wooden trestle rail bridge and the construction of a new special events platform that would directly serve the Del Mar Fairgrounds. Additional improvements include construction of new turnouts, signals, retained embankments, and drainage facilities.

2. What is the scope of the project?

The project's engineering and environmental analysis process is underway. The environmental compliance is subject to the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process and the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) is the Lead Agency under NEPA. This project is funded through environmental and design, although not funded for construction.

San Diego Association of Governments (SANDAG) works to make all projects shovel ready. Although the start date for construction has yet to be determined, the project is planned to be constructed prior to 2030 according to the SANDAG 2050 Regional Transportation Plan (RTP).

3. What agencies are involved in the planning and review of the project?

SANDAG is planning this project in collaboration with North County Transit District (NCTD), FRA, Caltrans, Amtrak, BNSF Railway, San Dieguito River Park Joint Powers Authority, 22nd District Agricultural Association, resource agencies, the cities of Del Mar and Solana Beach, and other stakeholders. SANDAG is responsible for the design, construction, and funding for the project. NCTD is the owner and operator of the rail line. The California Coastal Commission and other resource agencies will provide approvals related to the project.

4. How is the project being funded?

The project is being funded through a combination of federal and local funding sources including the Passenger Rail Investment and Improvement Act (PRIIA), an FRA program that authorized the appropriation of funds to establish several new passenger rail grant programs, including capital investment grants to support intercity passenger rail service and *TransNet*, the voter-approved one-half cent sales tax to fund a variety of local transportation projects.

The project is currently funded through the preliminary engineering and environmental phases for which \$9.5 million is secured. In the 2050 RTP the project is slated for construction before 2030. Funding for the completion of design and construction has not yet been identified.

5. When is the construction scheduled to begin?

While SANDAG works to make all projects shovel ready, the San Dieguito Double Track and Special Events Platform Project is currently funded through the preliminary engineering and environmental phases only. Therefore, the start date for construction has yet to be determined, however, it is planned to be constructed prior to 2030 according to the SANDAG 2050 RTP.

6. What type of environmental review is needed for this project?

The FRA is the lead agency for an Environmental Assessment that will be completed under NEPA guidance.

7. Will the public have an opportunity to comment on each phase of the project?

Yes. Although not required by FRA under NEPA, an environmental scoping meeting was held in January 2013, and the project team gained input from the public on issues that could be addressed during the environmental analysis phase. Additionally, an informational open house was held in October 2013 on the project alternatives. Although not a requirement, additional public outreach and meetings are planned in the future. Information about that process and the project overall will be provided on the project website, www.KeepSanDiegoMoving.com/SDDT.

8. Is the Del Mar rail tunnel a part of the project?

No. The bridge and double track alignments will not preclude future tunnel options.

9. Will the alignment of the bridge determine the future location of the Del Mar tunnel?

No. The bridge will be designed and constructed with maximum flexibility to allow for removal and reconstruction of portions of the bridge to accommodate any changes to the alignment in the future.

DOUBLE TRACKING

10. Why does the rail line need to be “double tracked”?

Double tracking, or adding a second main track, will allow for additional train frequency and improve on-time reliability of COASTER and Amtrak Pacific Surfliner train services by eliminating the need for trains to sit idle as another train uses the single track, helping to reduce the effects of cascading delays. Currently, more than half of the corridor is double tracked. The San Dieguito Double Track and Special Events Platform Project is one of many that will help advance efforts to double track the majority of the corridor’s rail system between the Orange County line and San Diego by 2050, benefiting the local economy by improving passenger travel times and freight movement.

11. Will the new second track be located east or west of the current rail line?

East. The eastern track alignment with side-loading platforms was recommended as the preferred alignment. SANDAG analyzed and evaluated three track alternatives. They included the eastern track alignment with side-loading platforms, the eastern track alignment with a shared center-loading platform, and the western track alignment with side-loading platforms.

12. Is SANDAG planning to install sound walls?

A noise study is currently being conducted as one of the technical studies in the project’s environmental document. The study is expected to be completed in 2014, at which time, SANDAG will share conclusions with the public. One of the project goals is to minimize noise with modernizing the rail improvements including constructing a new concrete rail bridge, replacing old wooden railroad ties with concrete ties, improving a rail control point south of the river, and using longer turnouts that would reduce rail noise.

SPECIAL EVENTS PLATFORM

13. Why is the new special events platform needed at the Del Mar Fairgrounds?

The purpose of the project is to provide direct passenger service to the Del Mar Fairgrounds for the San Diego County Fair, horse races, and other special events. Together, more than two million people attend these events annually and a majority of attendees drive their cars. Currently, visitors wishing to take the train to the fairgrounds must disembark at the Solana Beach train station and shuttle to special events. The proposed platform will increase transit ridership, help relieve traffic congestion on Interstate 5 (I-5) and surrounding streets, and provide easier parking at the fairgrounds.

14. How was it determined that a special events platform should be located at the fairgrounds?

A special events platform was located at the fairgrounds in the early to mid-1900s. During that time, trains stopped in Del Mar (across the river from the fairgrounds where the city's public works department yard is today), and passengers crossed over the San Dieguito River on a small pedestrian bridge to get to the fairgrounds.

For the last 20 years, a proposed special events platform at the fairgrounds has been in various stages of planning and design.

Currently, the fairgrounds is one of the main event centers in San Diego County. Millions of people travel to the fairgrounds each year. Today, the closest stop is nearly two miles away in Solana Beach. Train passengers disembark at the Solana Beach station and patrons transfer to a shuttle bus to complete their trip to the fairgrounds.

Amtrak ran 10-car trains for more than 20 event days in 2013. On their highest ridership day this year, Saturday, August 17, 2013, Amtrak had 851 passengers disembark an Amtrak train at Solana Beach. A 10-car train seats 835 passengers and was unable to provide all passengers with a seat on the train. During the 2013 season, Amtrak recorded multiple special event 10-car trains with over 600 passengers either boarding or disembarking during special events. SANDAG forecasts the number of patrons coming by train will continue to increase when a platform is located directly on fairgrounds property.

15. What are the future projections of ridership on the coastal rail line?

The LOSSAN rail line from San Luis Obispo to San Diego is the second busiest intercity passenger rail corridor in the nation and a critical component of our region's transportation system. Currently, more than 2.7 million Amtrak passengers¹ are carried annually. Commuter rail operations – COASTER and Metrolink – also use this corridor to carry an additional 4.7 million passengers² annually.

Today, approximately 50 passenger and freight trains operate on the San Diego portion of the LOSSAN rail line per day. To help remove more cars from I-5 and decrease greenhouse gas emissions to state-mandated levels, SANDAG service goals for the corridor call for doubling train service between Oceanside and San Diego by 2030. More than 100 trains are anticipated to be operating on the San Diego portion of the corridor by 2030 to reach the goals.

The LOSSAN Rail Corridor agency along with SANDAG regularly conducts detailed, corridor-wide modeling to determine future ridership and rail line capacity. Passenger rail ridership is forecasted to double from 7.4 million to 15 million passengers annually by 2030 along the entire LOSSAN corridor.

In a recent project prioritization study for the San Diego segment of the corridor, SANDAG analyzed all of the rail improvement projects necessary to support forecasted increases in train services while improving on-time performance and reliability. The San Dieguito project was identified as an important long-term project necessary to improve the frequency and reliability of train operations for the future.

In addition, SANDAG conducted a regional Special Events Survey in 2011, surveying patrons at the San Diego County Fair and the Del Mar Thoroughbred Races. Surveyors at the fairgrounds asked patrons, "If there were a train stop right at the fairgrounds, would you have taken the train for your trip here today?" A total of 367 people were asked this question and 66 percent responded they "Probably" or "Definitely" would have used the train. While all surveys include some amount of sampling error (e.g., variation from the full population), the random sample of 367 achieved for this survey provides 95% confidence with a sampling error of +/- 5%. That is, the results are off by no more than 5% as compared to if data had been collected from everyone.

¹Source: Amtrak. Ridership in 2013 for the Pacific Surfliner was 2,702,697.

²Source: Metrolink and NCTD. Ridership in 2013: COASTER – 1,629,196; Metrolink Orange County Line – 2,250,947, Metrolink Ventura County Line – 970,261.

16. How is this platform different from the temporary platform NCTD brought forward in 2010?

The proposed special events platform would be a permanent platform located north of the San Dieguito River. A few years ago, NCTD proposed a temporary seasonal train platform (expected to operate for 10 to 15 years) to be located east of 25th Street in Del Mar. Those plans have been dropped in lieu of a permanent platform adjacent to the fairgrounds to the north.

17. What type of fairgrounds events will the new platform accommodate?

Special events at the Del Mar Fairgrounds typically create significant vehicle congestion along I-5 and local streets in Del Mar and Solana Beach. The platform at the fairgrounds will provide service during well-attended, larger events. At this time, NCTD has identified passenger train service for the San Diego County Fair and Del Mar Thoroughbred Races. While it is difficult to forecast future events, NCTD would anticipate they would be similar in size and scope to the fair and horse races. NCTD will develop an operations plan prior to project completion that addresses other large events that take place at the fairgrounds, such as the Del Mar National Horse Show.

Currently, NCTD evaluates anticipated ridership, vehicle congestion, and parking capacity when deciding on whether to deploy additional or longer trains to service special events. NCTD closely monitors ridership of special events and adjusts service levels based on need.

The special events platform stop will be an attractive alternative mode of transportation for event patrons inside and outside the San Diego region, helping to alleviate local vehicle congestion.

18. Where will the new special events platform be located?

The proposed platform will be located north of the San Dieguito River with access from both tracks adjacent to the fairgrounds parking lot. The platform will be located within railroad right-of-way owned by the NCTD. Ramps, stairs, and landings will be located on the Del Mar Fairgrounds property, which is owned by the State of California.

19. Will the new special events platform be in use daily?

No. The platform is intended for use during special events only.

20. How many trains per day will use the new special events platform?

Currently, approximately 50 passenger and freight trains operate on this portion of the LOSSAN rail line per day. Service goals for the corridor call for doubling of train service between Oceanside and San Diego by 2030. However, the specific operations plan for the platform has not been determined at this time.

21. How late will the special events platform operate at night?

NCTD will develop a specific operations plan near the time of project construction. NCTD anticipates that the special events platform will operate a similar schedule or one that coordinates with the start and completion of a special event. In the summer of 2013, NCTD offered a “Summer Nite” schedule that ran from June 8 through July 4, providing train service from Solana Beach southbound until 10:52 p.m. and northbound until 12:18 a.m.

22. How does NCTD and Amtrak anticipate the horn blowing will be handled during special events?

The use of train horns is not anticipated at the special events platform. Exceptions would only occur for safety reasons, e.g. a fairgrounds patron is standing illegally on the railroad tracks. Fairgrounds patrons will only be able to access the platform during special event hours. The platform will not be accessible during non-event days and the train will continue to conduct its normal route.

Although an operations plan is not yet developed for the special events platform stop, a train operator may have the discretion to use the train bell when departing and/or arriving, which is much quieter than a train horn.

23. Will the special events platform have a public announcement (PA) system?

Yes, PA systems at NCTD and Amtrak train stops are federally required by the Americans With Disabilities (ADA) Act and for emergency announcements. Currently, SANDAG is exploring types of PA systems for future rail improvement projects on the San Diego coastal rail line that could minimize noise levels outside of stations areas.

24. How will trash and security be handled around the platform?

NCTD creates a maintenance and security plan for each unique station, including peak traffic times such as fair and race days. Currently the Solana Beach station has a maintenance and security plan that takes into account the peak ridership season in the summer. NCTD anticipates they will have similar plans in place at the special events platform.

Additionally, regarding trash, SANDAG is considering developing special signage on the platform that will ask the public to take special care not to disturb the surrounding habitat area.

■ BRIDGE REPLACEMENT

25. Why does the rail bridge need to be replaced?

The existing San Dieguito River rail bridge is a nearly 100-year-old wooden trestle bridge with narrow, 14-foot column spacing. The bridge requires regular maintenance. The rail bridge will be replaced with a modern, concrete bridge to accommodate the new double track and raised to ensure continued rail operations and provide flood protection from major storms without impacting upstream homes and businesses. The longer 56-foot column spacing will improve the overall tidal flow of the San Dieguito River and Lagoon.

26. How does NCTD evaluate bridge service life?

NCTD regularly conducts inspections and maintenance on the rail bridges in order to keep close record of the bridge's integrity. This bridge is nearing 100 years old and the wood frame of the bridge is aging and results in frequent and costly maintenance. Although the San Dieguito rail bridge was retrofitted in 2009, additional repairs are required to extend its normal service life. Further retrofitting will be required in 2014.

Throughout the San Diego LOSSAN corridor, the existing right-of-way includes 47 rail bridges, with 34 of them more than 50 years old. The loss of even a single bridge would cause severe disruption to public transportation and goods movement in Southern California. The more than 20 improvement projects that are either under construction or stages of planning and design include replacing the wooden aging rail bridges with modern, concrete structures.

27. Is the rail bridge being replaced in the same location?

Yes. The new, modern bridge will be lengthened and include wider column spacing, which will improve the tidal flow of the San Dieguito River and Lagoon. The longer pier spans will also create a more open lagoon view for residents.

28. Will the new bridge be taller than the current bridge?

Yes. Although the exact height is not yet known, it could be raised approximately eight feet in some locations. The precise height of the bridge will be determined at a later date as the team reaches conclusions from preliminary engineering and other technical reports. The bridge needs to be elevated to reduce potential damage to the rail line during severe storms, which can lead to track damage or failure and result in interrupted service and delays. Additionally, the existing structure is within the 100-year Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) flood elevation with the low point of the track south of the San Dieguito River Crossing, making the line inoperable during high river water levels and more frequent floods that occur in the 25- and 50-year storm events.

29. Why can't the new bridge be the same height as the current bridge?

Federal construction standards and regulations from the FRA and FEMA mandate an increase to the current rail bridge height to avoid floods that could cause bridge or rail line damage or failure. The bridge will be designed to avoid any increase in flood elevation for upstream properties.

30. Will this bridge affect water flow under the Camino Del Mar road bridge?

It is not anticipated that the new concrete rail bridge will adversely affect water flow under the Camino Del Mar road bridge. SANDAG is preparing hydrology and hydraulic report for the river and lagoon and has retained the same river hydraulics expert that the City of Del Mar recently used for their bridge study. The City of Del Mar will have the opportunity to review the hydrology and hydraulic report findings.

31. How will the San Dieguito River and the environment be affected?

All proposed changes to the river, lagoon, Steven's Creek, habitat, wildlife, and surrounding area will be identified and analyzed during the environmental review process. The project is expected to have environmental benefits as a result of updating the aging rail and bridge infrastructure. The new rail bridge will improve tidal flow due to wider column spacing.

32. How will the project affect the San Dieguito River Park's Reach the Beach trail program?

The San Dieguito River Park Joint Powers Authority is currently working to finalize designs for its Reach the Beach trail program, an effort to extend the 55-mile long Coast to Crest Trail an additional 0.5 miles to the coast. SANDAG and Caltrans are working in collaboration with agencies such as the Authority on projects within the North Coast Corridor, including bike and pedestrian trail improvements, to help expand coastal access and regional connectivity. SANDAG is working to incorporate a safe and legal public undercrossing under the south end of the railway bridge as part of this project. The bridge design will not preclude a future public crossing north of the river.

33. Who has jurisdiction over the floodplain?

The City of Del Mar acts as the floodplain manager for the San Dieguito River and Lagoon. They will be reviewing the project's hydraulic analysis report prepared by SANDAG for compliance with FEMA standards and regulations.

■ TRACK, PLATFORM, AND BRIDGE ALIGNMENTS

34. What is the purpose of an alternative alignment analysis report?

This project's alternative alignment analysis report was completed in September 2013. The report is at a 10 percent preliminary engineering level.

The purpose of an alternative alignment analysis report is to recommend the preferred alternatives to carry forward into the project's next phase of engineering and environmental study.

Each of the alternatives in the report are compared and contrasted from the perspective of operational impacts and performance, construction access and phasing, right-of-way, environmental impact considerations, noise and visual impacts, and cost.

35. How many double track, platform, and bridge alternatives were considered?

Three potential track alignments, two special events platform options, and four types of bridges were identified as potentially feasible alternatives.

The three alignment alternatives considered were the eastern track alignment with side-loading platforms, the eastern track alignment with a shared center-loading platform, and the western track alignment with side-loading platforms.

The two platform alternatives considered were side-loading platforms on either side of the two tracks and a wider, shared center-loading platform located between the two tracks. The four bridge types varied in construction methods, length of span between columns and bridge height.

36. How was the preferred alternative alignment evaluated?

SANDAG uses a well-established evaluation method commonly used by Caltrans and other transportation agencies. For this project, the alignment and bridge alternatives were evaluated separately. Seven evaluation categories were chosen for the double track.

The alignment categories included minimum rail operation construction impacts, agriculture district acceptance, minimum wetland impacts, maximum rail geometry, platform operations, noise, and visual. Some categories were weighted higher than others because the primary purpose of the project is to improve rail operations.

The bridge categories included minimum rail operation construction impacts, minimum wetland impacts, constructability and schedule, bridge aesthetics, bridge depth effect on the alignment, and noise.

Each of the categories was scored against each other by SANDAG staff and program management consultants who represent planning, engineering, environmental, and communications. The results were then reviewed with NCTD for concurrence and provided to the project's Technical Working Group, comprised of area stakeholders, and the City of Del Mar's Citizens Ad-Hoc Committee. The alternative with the highest overall score, the eastern track alignment with side-loading platforms, will be the only alternative to be designed at the 30 percent level.

37. What track alignment was chosen as the preferred alternative?

The eastern track alignment with side-loading platforms. The new bridge alignment allows for side-loading platforms with access to both tracks for the most direct access to special events. Additionally, the eastern track alignment maximizes the area for potential lagoon expansion and enhancement. It also shifts the tracks furthest from nearby residences south of the river, reducing noise and visual impacts as much as possible.

The western track alignment with side-loading platforms had lower scores because this alignment is the farthest from the fairgrounds and closest to the residents south of the bridge.

The eastern track alignment with a shared center-loading platform results in the greatest wetland impacts. The center-loading platform scored the lowest because NCTD and Amtrak preferred side-loading platforms to efficiently manage boarding during special events. It also had greater noise and visual impacts because the westerly track is closer to residents south of the river.

38. What platform option was chosen as the preferred option?

The side-loading platform. Amtrak, NCTD, and the 22nd District Agricultural Association (the fairgrounds) confirmed that the side-loading platform is their preference because it would help manage boarding during special events. The side-loading platform configuration also allows for narrower track centers versus the center-loading platform, thereby decreasing impacts to the surrounding lagoon and wetland areas.

39. What bridge structure was chosen as the preferred alternative?

A precast concrete bridge with 56-foot column spacing. It had the lowest effect on the track alignment and had minimal noise and wetland impacts compared to the others. Additionally, NCTD prefers precast bridges because it allows for quicker replacement of components if the bridge structure were to be damaged for any reason.

A bridge option with wider column spacing was unacceptable because it would have elevated the height of the bridge, resulting in a higher track approach and the need to replace the Camino Del Mar Bridge at the southerly end of the project, increasing the cost of the project significantly.

All bridge options provide more open lagoon views than the existing bridge. The bridge will also be 450 feet longer, removing the southerly bank for a no net loss of wetland in the lagoon.

■ MORE INFORMATION

40. 31. What if you have additional questions?

For more information, you can visit the project website at www.KeepSanDiegoMoving.com/SDDT.

To sign up for project updates, please visit <http://www.keepsandiegomoving.com/transnet-contact.aspx> or email LOSSANRail@KeepSanDiegoMoving.com.

For specific project questions, please contact Linda Culp, Project Manager, by email at Linda.Culp@sandag.org or by phone at (619) 699-6957.