



RailPAC
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Senator Catherine Blakespear, Chair
Subcommittee on LOSSAN Rail Corridor Resiliency
California State Senate (Via Email only)

June 2, 2025

RE: Tracks to the Future: Strengthening the LOSSAN Corridor for California's Global Stage – Oversight Hearing 5/30/25

Honorable Chair Blakespear,

I am writing on behalf of the members of the Rail Passenger Association of California and Nevada (RailPAC) living, working, and traveling along the LOSSAN Corridor. RailPAC is an all-volunteer statewide organization that advocates for the improvement of commuter and intercity passenger rail service.

RailPAC strongly supports your vision of a high-performance auto competitive rail corridor creating tremendous value for Southern California residents while reducing GHG emissions and avoiding ever widening freeways. RailPAC also wants to thank you for coordinating this highly informative hearing with its comprehensive overview of the issues and planning underway for the Corridor.

Outlined below are comments and observations from the oversight hearing:

Olympics and Governance - The Honorable Paul Krekorian's presentation was outstanding. He was very knowledgeable and clearly showed the level of planning and the huge scale of the upcoming events in Southern California. Unfortunately, his remarks were overshadowed by what could have been – a higher capacity LAUS with run-through tracks enhancing its capacity. Instead, SoCal has a capacity constrained LAUS and a damning indictment of the current governance structure.

LOSSAN Corridor Service Planning - On the positive side Mr. Edison's presentation showed what is possible when Caltrans focuses its full attention on maximizing the potential of the rail network even in a constrained environment. The statewide surge of equipment to Southern California and collaborating with stakeholders to operate the maximum seating capacity and frequencies possible is to be commended. Mr. Edison mentioned that there were capacity projects under construction that would be completed by 2028, but the specific projects were not listed.

A key facet not discussed (and maybe this is for a future presentation) was how the developing Integrated Ticketing Project can be used to lower payment barriers and ease ticketing for visitors. There could be three zonal fares valid on all trains and buses and useful to visitors as soon as they board Metro at the LAX station.

Reliability – In the discussion regarding the importance of reliability, especially from incidents outside the control of the operator, it should be noted that capacity improvements beyond the minimum necessary are often critical in speeding service recovery when an incident occurs. In the State Rail Plan Caltrans indicated that it was undertaking a process to directly match capacity investments with service requirements. RailPAC's concern is that without extra capacity for service recovery, this process may in fact create a very unstable service.

Hydrogen – In the discussion of the operational reliability of the new Caltrans H2 Multiple-Units, the key question is not whether these units will work, the key questions are in the areas of fuel source, fuel cost, leakage of hydrogen during the supply chain and fueling process (hydrogen extends the life of methane, a potent greenhouse gas, in the atmosphere) and the GHG emissions by diesel tanker trucks delivering hydrogen to the fueling facility. Note: because of the low energy density of hydrogen compared to renewable diesel it takes multiple tanker truck trips to deliver the equivalent energy of one tanker truck of renewable diesel.

CARB – Ms. Gress presentation was a disappointment. She appeared to provide just an outline of CARB processes in a hearing where presenters should be “thinking outside the box.” When you asked a question regarding mode shift, Ms. Gress seemed unaware of the concept of mode shift as a strategy to reduce GHG. This reinforces RailPAC’s concerns about CARB’s inability to recognize the efficiency of the rail mode as it applies to GHG reduction via mode shift and the downstream impacts of much reduced energy generation requirements electric rail vs electric/hydrogen highway.

In terms of rail decarbonization, CARB has presented itself as inflexible with no ability to create incentives for mode shift to rail. A rider or ton of freight that is shifted from the highway mode to a train powered by a Tier 4 diesel powered with renewable fuel results in a 80% reduction in GHG gases. A hybrid diesel battery locomotive would yield even higher GHG reduction.

Ridership, Coordination and Policy – As an economist, transportation planner and one who dealt with ridership and ridership forecasting, Mr. Wasserman’s presentation was excellent, timely and right in my area of expertise. A note on Slide 6 (ridership), at least some of the shortfall for the Pacific Surfliner and Metrolink are likely due to the extended track outages at San Clemente.

My only criticism (minor) was his comparison of LOSSAN ridership to regionwide transit ridership. In my view a more appropriate comparison would be LOSSAN ridership to transit and auto trips between the specific city pairs served by the corridor. The reason being that high-capacity rail systems are constructed to serve specific high-volume corridors.

The discussion of governance was timely and certainly directly linked to the future of the corridor and its transition to Regional Rail. As RailPAC has noted, the current structure simply does not work and generates suboptimal performance.

In the area of governance, the lack of through running San Diego County to LA and Orange and LA Counties, was also discussed. Yes, this is an agency coordination issue, but it is also a capacity issue. Lack of capacity at Oceanside was once an obstacle, but capacity investments have addressed that. Now the problem is the location where “clock-face” scheduled through trains would meet, Serra Siding. To assure reliability and resiliency a long-siding mid-way on the route allows for “running meets” to compensate for minor delays. Trying to offset the lack of capacity at Dana Point by moving away from “clock-face” scheduling for both Pacific Surfliner and a through Metrolink/Coaster train would simply create capacity challenges at other locations.

Fare Box Recovery – Mr. Wasserman’s answer to the “free-fare” question, free fares generate little additional ridership while frequency increases generate substantial ridership increases, needs a broader discussion. Customers, even the working poor, will pay for good transit, and they will pay even more for good quality transit. The problem is the current transit systems are mediocre at best, in short, they are so bad you cannot give the product away to anyone with a choice. Current transit customers face personal safety concerns, infrequent schedules, exceptionally long trip times, missed connections and subsequent long transfer wait times due to delays. This is why adding frequencies yields ridership growth, it improves trip-times and reliability.

Given that the average cost of owning and operating a car is about \$10,000 per year vs. a market-based cost for transit of about \$1,500 to \$2,000 per year, the greatest financial benefit for the working poor or even the middle class would be to create an auto-competitive high quality transportation network that would allow families to forgo a second car or even go car-free. A transit network with a high-farebox recovery also aids in the political sphere. It helps isolate the network from criticism, allows supporters to focus on capital funds (projects that make the system more competitive) and avoids a large yearly funding request for operations in competition with social programs.

Geo-Hazards – As if we did have enough to worry about, Mr. Stewart’s presentation broadened the view of potential hazards and the need to proactively plan for them. One potential benefit of actively monitoring geo-hazards, beyond an early warning, is to recover more quickly from a geological incident because the area impacted can be specifically determined without the delay of physical inspections.

RailPAC Olympic Asks – Given the focus on the Olympics during this hearing, RailPAC is making some recommendations for additional capacity. This would improve resiliency and allow operators to “flex” beyond Caltrans current frequency plans. Some of these projects are gridlocked by political stakeholders – time to break the gridlock to avoid Olympic carnageddon on I-5. These proposed projects are:

- Serra Siding North and South
- Orange County Maintenance Facility Irvine
- San Onofre to Pulgas Dbl. Track Stage 2
- To add platform capacity/flexibility at LAUS, construct a Temporary Relief Terminal at Metrolink’s Keller Street yard as a LA station stop for two of Amtrak’s long-distance trains, a layover facility for LAUS turnaround trains and as an emergency relief capacity in case of LAUS track outages.
- Double track between Raymer and Bernson facilitating enhanced frequencies on the Ventura County Line to Chatsworth.

As was noted by Mr. Wasserman (Slide 20), great things are possible when there is a sense of urgency and community purpose.

Sincerely,

Steve Roberts

Steve Roberts, President Rail Passenger Association of California and Nevada