

STAFF REPORT

SUBJECT: South Coast Passenger Rail Update

MEETING DATE: July 7, 2010

AGENDA ITEM: 5

STAFF CONTACT: Scott Spaulding

RECOMMENDATION:

Receive update on rail service improvement activities including LOSSAN corridor service integration, SBCAG requested retiming of Pacific Surfliner service and Ortega Siding improvement project.

SUMMARY:

With the adoption of *101 in Motion*, SBCAG began planning for how to improve passenger rail service in the Highway 101 corridor to reduce congestion and provide an alternative to driving. The passage of Measure A in November 2008, which includes \$25 million for improving passenger/commuter rail, is an important step in expanding the options available to commuters between Ventura and Santa Barbara counties. Although Union Pacific Railroad owns the rail corridor and must approve any track construction projects or service improvements, SBCAG staff continues to work with UP, Caltrans Division of Rail, the Ventura County Transportation Commission, and local agencies to plan for and fund regional passenger rail system improvements. SBCAG is also a member of the Los Angeles-San Diego-San Luis Obispo Rail Corridor Agency (LOSSAN), which assists Caltrans in coordinating passenger and commuter rail service in Southern California. Staff is currently pursuing several efforts to improve regional rail service, including participating in the LOSSAN effort to better integrate commuter and intercity passenger rail services in the corridor, discussing with Caltrans and Amtrak the modeling results for adjusting two state-funded Pacific Surfliner trains to serve peak hour commuters, and identifying and obtaining additional discretionary funding for rail infrastructure improvements to improve rail capacity between Ventura and Santa Barbara counties.

DISCUSSION:

LOSSAN Integration Study/Business Plan

SBCAG is a member and active participant in the LOSSAN Rail Corridor Agency, comprised of regional government agencies served by the state-supported Amtrak Pacific Surfliner rail service operating in the coastal rail corridor between San Diego and San Luis Obispo. Three passenger/commuter rail services operate in the LOSSAN corridor—the state supported Amtrak Pacific Surfliner, Metrolink commuter rail, serving Ventura, Los Angeles, and Orange counties, and the Coaster rail service operating in San Diego County. The rail tracks, stations, and facilities in the corridor are owned by a variety of government agencies and private freight railroads, and the passenger and commuter services are not well integrated, with each agency creating and maintaining their own fare structure and policies, marketing efforts, and schedules.

In 2008 LOSSAN initiated a strategic assessment to develop options to better integrate rail service in the corridor, with the goal of providing service that appears more cohesive and seamless to rail customers and to more efficiently and effectively use the existing rail equipment and infrastructure. SBCAG's LOSSAN representative, Supervisor Carbajal and the Executive Director were directly involved in negotiations to develop an MOU intended to explore the potential for creating a single corridor-wide administrative agency. The MOU commits the LOSSAN member agencies to taking early actions to better integrate the passenger rail services in the corridor. Of particular significance to our region is an early action to revise the Amtrak Pacific Surfliner schedule to better serve the Ventura—Santa Barbara peak period market. Supervisor Carbajal and the Executive Director have also been part of the screening and selection committees to hire a LOSSAN program manager to implement the business objectives identified in the MOU. The revised LOSSAN MOU was approved by the SBCAG board in December, 2009.

At the June 23 LOSSAN board meeting, the board authorized negotiation of an agreement to hire Gene Skoropowski of HNTB as the LOSSAN Project Manager. Mr. Skoropowski was formerly the General Manager of the Capital Corridor which is a Joint Powers Authority that operates state supported Amtrak service between San Jose and Auburn. Mr. Skoropowski is a highly qualified veteran rail industry executive and will lead a concentrated effort to develop and implement the Business Plan specified in the newly revised LOSSAN MOU.

Pacific Surfliner Schedule revision

One near term option for improving passenger rail service in our region explicitly identified in the LOSSAN service integration MOU and Business Plan is to adjust the Pacific Surfliner schedule to better serve commuters traveling from Ventura County to Goleta and Santa Barbara. Currently one northbound Surfliner train arrives in Santa Barbara at 10:12AM (Surfliner #799) and one southbound train departs at 4:31PM (Surfliner #798). The current schedule does not serve a standard workday, but if the schedule were modified to better serve the commuter market, there is little doubt train boardings would increase in Ventura and Santa Barbara counties. Caltrans Division of Rail has been reluctant in the past to adjust the schedule because of their concern that moving the morning train's Los Angeles departure (#799) earlier might reduce boardings in Los Angeles County, though doing so could also increase ridership if it attracts early morning commuters traveling from Los Angeles to the San Fernando Valley, a market not served by Metrolink. The City and County of Santa Barbara, the City of Goleta, SBCAG, the Ventura County Transportation Commission, the City of Ventura, and LOSSAN have all publicly endorsed adjusting the Pacific Surfliner schedule to better serve commuters between Ventura and Santa Barbara.

To underscore our region's commitment to improving peak hour rail service, the SBCAG board authorized the chair to send a letter to Caltrans Division of Rail requesting trains #799 and #798 be adjusted to better serve commuters who currently have no alternative to the congested Highway 101 corridor between Santa Barbara and Ventura counties. In January, chair Carbajal sent a letter requesting that Caltrans Division of Rail examine options for revising the Surfliner schedule to include an arrival in Santa Barbara before 8:00AM and a departure after 5:00PM. Caltrans responded to SBCAG's request by directing their partner in the service, Amtrak, to conduct modeling to try to determine the effect on ridership and revenue of revising the schedule.

In May, Caltrans provided a letter to Chair Carbajal and included the preliminary modeling results, shown in the table below. Following receipt of this information, SBCAG staff have been in discussions with Caltrans and Amtrak about the model's methodology and assumptions. Staff has expressed a number of questions and concerns about the assumptions used in the

model and the accuracy of the results. Of primary importance is that the model is based on inter-city travelers, and does not include the impact on ridership of commuters who could be expected to take advantage of peak hour rail service between Ventura/Oxnard and Santa Barbara/Goleta. For example, of the 900 daily Coastal Express commuter bus passengers, the model only assumes a handful will choose to make their commute by rail, far less that what SBCAG staff would anticipate.

Pacific Surfliner Service Options North of Los Angeles Impact of Service Scenarios in Comparison to Existing Service for Trains 798 and 799		
Description	Estimated Annual Operating Cost Change	Estimated Annual Ridership Change
M-F, Depart LA Union Station 5:00 AM arrives SB 7:30AM, Goleta 7:51 AM. Lays over in Goleta. Departs SB 5:30PM arrives LA Union Station 8:20 PM. Does not serve SLO.	+ \$430,000	-46,600
M-Thurs, arrives SB 7:30AM, departs 5:30PM Returns to LA Union Station and back mid day. Fri-Sun, continues to SLO and returns	- \$757,000	-15,900
M-Thurs, arrives SB 7:30AM, departs 5:30PM Fri, continues to SLO and returns Sat/Sun, same as current 799/798	- \$148,000	-16,900

SBCAG staff has had follow up conversations with both Division of Rail staff and Amtrak regarding the modeling results and continue to express concern over the accuracy of the initial results. Staff has requested that Amtrak provide the model's predictions of the increase or decrease in boardings at all stations in the corridor so that we can have a better understanding of what their model predicts for ridership increases between Ventura-Santa Barbara counties. Amtrak did acknowledge that fare price could be individually manipulated within the model and that doing so would have a significant impact on projected ridership. With the cost of an unsubsidized single trip of \$3.58 between Ventura and Santa Barbara using a monthly pass, the model would very likely predict a far larger number of riders than the fare mix the model initially used, which ranged from \$6 to \$20. Reducing the cost of a single trip even further through selling discounted multi-ride and monthly passes (using Measure A Rail funds as a subsidy), ridership figures would be even higher, potentially leading to an overall ridership increase under some or all of the schedule revision scenarios.

Staff continues to work with Caltrans and Amtrak to further refine the modeling results and to find other models or methods of more accurately predicting the impact of modifying the Pacific Surfliner schedule to meet the peak hour demand between Ventura and Santa Barbara counties. Other issues raised by the state that will need to be addressed to move forward on any of the retiming options include identifying a source of funding, such as Measure A, for any operating deficits and capital needs and reaching agreements with the railroad owners and operators.

It is expected that Caltrans will report on the initial modeling results for the Surfliner retiming proposal at its July 28th meeting in LA. It will be important to continue working on the retiming proposal with Caltrans and other agencies that may be impacted by the retiming including Amtrak, UPRR, Metrolink and other LOSSAN members. The new LOSSAN project manager being hired (Gene Skoropowski) will be tasked with carrying out the early action items identified in the new LOSSAN MOU. The MOU identifies the retiming of the Surfliner trains to better serve the Ventura—Santa Barbara peak period market as the sole early action item in the LOSSAN North corridor.

ARRA Stimulus Applications

Under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA), the Federal Railroad Administration's High Speed and Intercity Passenger Rail Program (HSIPR) was infused with \$8 billion in funding to help stimulate the economy. Although LOSSAN staff identified over \$2.5 billion in rail improvements and prepared individual applications for over 50 projects in the LOSSAN corridor alone, Governor Schwarzenegger submitted just 22 LOSSAN rail improvement project applications, totaling \$380 million. An application for \$950,000 for the Ortega Siding project was prepared by SBCAG with assistance from Caltrans. The siding project was submitted by the Governor's office and approved by the Federal Railroad Administration. The funding will be used to pay for preliminary engineering and environmental work to reestablish the Ortega siding which was destroyed by storm damage in the 1990's. Constructing additional sidings along the single track section of the rail corridor between Santa Barbara and Ventura is critical to increasing capacity for additional passenger rail service. The discretionary federal funding will be matched by \$250,000 in Measure A funds from the South Coast Passenger and Commuter Rail program. Staffs from Caltrans Division of Rail, Caltrans District 5 and SBCAG have begun discussing which agency should be the lead agency for preparing the environmental document for the project.

The State Transportation Improvement Program (STIP) includes \$19 million to construct rail sidings in Santa Barbara and Ventura counties, and although the state budget crisis has postponed most STIP funding, the Ortega project, and a potential project at Seacliff in Ventura County, are the primary candidates when this rail capacity improvement funding becomes available.

ATTACHMENTS: None.