



Written Remarks
Darren Kettle, Chief Executive Officer
Southern California Regional Rail Authority (Metrolink)

Subcommittee on LOSSAN Rail Corridor Resiliency – Informational Hearing
Waves & Trains – Revitalizing Rail
April 29, 2024

Good afternoon, Chair Blakespear and members of the Subcommittee. I'm Darren Kettle, CEO of the Southern California Regional Rail Authority, also known as Metrolink. Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you this afternoon. I'll discuss lessons learned from the San Clemente closure earlier this year and where we go from here.

Metrolink's regional passenger rail service offers reliable, safe, affordable and environmentally sustainable transportation throughout Southern California. Metrolink services 545.6 total service line miles across LA, Orange, Riverside, San Bernardino, Ventura and San Diego counties. Our Orange County and Inland Empire Lines service the LOSSAN corridor, providing customers easy access to Union Station, downtown San Bernardino, and much more. In total, we run 26 trains along the LOSSAN corridor – 14 Monday through Friday and 12 Saturday and Sunday. Comparatively, Amtrak runs 20 trains daily through the area.

SIGNIFICANCE OF LOSSAN CORRIDOR

This subcommittee knows well the role the LOSSAN corridor plays in supporting our economy and quality of life here in Southern California. Eight million people moved through the corridor annually pre pandemic. Today, \$1 billion dollars' worth of goods are transported along the route annually. LOSSAN is so vital to our military, the U.S. Department of Defense has designated it part of the Strategic Rail Corridor Network.

All of this brings me to a key point – the challenges and solutions for improving the resiliency of the LOSSAN corridor are bigger than just Metrolink, OCTA, or any one single entity. Given the heavy reliance by people, goods, and the military on the LOSSAN corridor, and the scope and scale of the resiliency challenges, there is a clear role for both federal and state partnership in the corridor.

LESSONS LEARNED

You will hear today about OCTA's South Coast Rail Infrastructure Feasibility Study and Alternative Concepts Analysis. Part one of the study proactively identifies



problem areas along the southern LOSSAN corridor that are prone to landslides and erosion. These solutions require funding and partnership from all stakeholders, including state agencies. Barrier wall construction is expensive. Meanwhile, neither Metrolink nor OCTA have jurisdiction over the Orange County beaches. Any placement of rip rap requires approval from the California Coastal Commission and may require involvement from California State Parks. From the recent closure and those over the last couple of years, we have learned the importance of collaboration across the various stakeholders and across all levels of government.

In the immediate future, there are strategic – albeit limited – steps Metrolink can take to monitor hillside movement in high-risk areas. In the instance of Cyprus Shores and Casa Romantica, property owners had installed inclinometer monitor devices, which provided information on the slope movement. This type of sensor is installed by drilling 80 to 100 feet into the hillside.

In the instance of the Mariposa Point slide earlier this year, there was no such technology installed on the hillside prior to the incident. Rail movement was stopped when debris from the hillside slope fell onto the right-of-way and railroad tracks. Metrolink placed tilt sensors on the surface of the slope prior to construction of the barrier wall which provided information on the degree of soil movement and constant monitoring through several inclement weather events. Tilt sensors are helpful since they provide us with some advanced notice if a hillside is moving, hopefully before falling debris encroaches onto the track. This monitoring gives us time to react and improves decision making. This approach can be duplicated and monitors could be installed at other hot spot locations until catchment walls can be built where needed. It is important to note though that while tilt sensors are important to provide notice of movement, they do not provide remediation or protection to the right-of-way. Catchment walls are necessary to provide this critical support to keep the tracks safe.

Debris falling onto the tracks from landslides is only one of the problems we face along this section of the LOSSAN corridor. The other significant issue is the erosion of the track infrastructure from the natural and relentless wave action. An engineered revetment or facade, coupled with a sand replenishment program, is desperately needed to protect the railroad right-of-way from continued erosion. This type of solution requires coordination and collaboration with multiple state and local agencies, as well as funding. To avoid the risk of continued service disruptions, an expedited permitting process to complete the armoring of the railroad right-of-way is also needed.



Aside from Metrolink, BNSF Railway and Amtrak Pacific Surfliner rely on this corridor to transport goods and people. We know how disruptive a closure is for residents, visitors, and supply chains. Our goal is always to work with our partners to restore service as quickly as possible with safety of the public and our team members guiding our decisions.

Metrolink is responsible for maintaining track structure, conducting track inspections, and providing information to our freight and agency partners on the feasibility of train movements. In the instance of this closure, due to the instability of the hillside, decisions were made day to day. On days where the track was cleared of debris and the track infrastructure was deemed safe, BNSF – which has an easement right to operate along the corridor – was given the option to resume service. When operating, BNSF assumed liability and Metrolink issued a letter explicitly stating it was not liable for hillside movement. Officials at the freight rail company also performed their own risk analysis to aid in decision making.

As construction progressed, OCTA, Metrolink and LOSSAN officials all felt it was critical to resume some level of passenger rail service as soon as possible to benefit affected customers. Like BNSF, Amtrak was offered the option to restore service when Metrolink deemed the affected track bed and rail stable. LOSSAN began operating two Pacific Surfliner trains in the morning and another two in the evening, leaving the rest of the day for construction. Similar to BSNF, Amtrak assumed liability regarding the potential for landslide movement on the hill.

With Pacific Surfliner providing passenger rail service to and from Oceanside, and to limit the number of trains affecting construction daily, Metrolink continued to limit service to Laguna Niguel/Mission Viejo Station on weekdays and San Juan Capistrano on the weekends. The ability to offer limited rail service required coordination across agency partners. This level of coordination is critical during these closures as we each have a role in restoring service and stabilizing the corridor for all that depend on it.

CONCLUSION

Metrolink is appreciative of the urgency and focus on the LOSSAN corridor resiliency challenges from the subcommittee and many of our partners. We look forward to working with local, state, and federal stakeholders on identifying and implementing short term and longer-term solutions for protecting rail movement along this critical corridor. I look forward to taking your questions.

