



ITEM ID: 2023-395-0

TRANSMITTAL DATE: January 19, 2024

MEETING DATE: January 26, 2024

TO: Board of Directors

FROM: Paul Hubler, Chief Strategy Officer

SUBJECT: January Legislative Update

Issue

Staff provides a regular monthly update on current legislative affairs.

Recommendation

Receive and file.

Strategic Commitment

This report aligns with the Strategic Business Plan commitments of:

- **Connecting and Leveraging Partnerships:** We will forge new and enhanced relationships with our public and private partners to integrate and coordinate connecting services, providing residents throughout Southern California with better, seamless, sustainable alternatives to driving. This commitment is met by sharing news, information and the Authority’s legislative priorities with elected officials.
- **Advancing Key Regional Goals:** We will grow the role of regional rail in addressing climate change, air quality, and other pressing issues by advancing toward zero emissions, making rail a compelling alternative to single-occupant automobiles and advancing equity-focused opportunities for all communities throughout Southern California. This commitment is met by encouraging federal, state and local support for Authority priorities.

Background

Staff continues to engage with community, local, state, and federal stakeholders relating to Metrolink service and relevant policy initiatives.

Discussion

Local

As part of continued efforts to encourage the uptake by local schools of Metrolink's virtual safety program for students, staff is updating the regionwide email distribution list. To promote the Student Adventure Pass program, staff is arranging to post informational banners on campuses. Staff participated in a career day at Desert Wind High School in Lancaster on December 7 and distributed information regarding the Student Adventure Pass and Mobility 4 All programs and screened the safety video.

Staff is arranging a meeting with Los Angeles City Councilmember Imelda Padilla to discuss matters of interest, including enhanced AVL service and the Sun Valley station and Van Nuys station, which was improved in 2020.

State

The Legislative Analyst's Office (LAO) is estimating a three-year, \$68 billion state budget deficit due to lower-than-expected revenues in 2023. Closing the gap will likely require spending cuts and drawing on reserves. As a result, the Department of Finance issued a budget letter directing state entities to reduce current-year expenditures on goods and services where feasible. No hiring freezes have been announced. The Newsom Administration will release its own budget estimate and proposal by January 10.

Metrolink submitted comments on December 8 regarding the California Transportation Commission's draft State and Local Transportation System Needs Assessment. The comments drew attention to the role of passenger rail in meeting climate goals as well as the need to assess and quantify the ongoing underinvestment in passenger rail.

On December 11, the Senate Subcommittee on LOSSAN Rail Corridor Resiliency held a hearing in San Clemente. Chaired by Senator Catherine Blakespear and comprised of Senators Tom Umberg, Ben Allen, Monique Limon and Janet Nguyen, the Subcommittee is focused on ways to increase service and ensure the viability of the LOSSAN rail corridor. Opening remarks were provided by Orange County Supervisor Katrina Foley and San Clemente Mayor Victor Cabral. Additional testimony was provided by Chad Edison, Chief Deputy Secretary for Rail and Transit for the California State Transportation Agency (CALSTA) and Jason Jewell, Managing Director of the LOSSAN Rail Corridor Agency, along with a series of transportation experts including Ted Link Oberstar with the Senate Office of Research, Sarah Catz with the Institute of Transportation Studies at the University of California Irvine, Genevieve Giuliano of USC and Amy Peake with the Rebuild SoCal Partnership.

Consensus emerged on the need to develop a list of LOSSAN corridor priority improvement projects to drive efforts to secure funding. Also discussed was adding Metrolink representation to the governance board or otherwise modifying the structure of the LOSSAN Rail Corridor Agency, although governance discussions were secondary to the goal of improving rail operations, increasing transit accessibility and maintaining the strategically critical network. Metrolink provided the LOSSAN Subcommittee with a list of funded and unfunded SCORE

projects along the corridor in an effort to ensure these capital projects are included on the list of priorities.

The California legislature remains adjourned until January 3, 2024.

Federal

Members of Congress have submitted letters of support for Metrolink's application seeking grant funds to replace eight Tier 2 locomotives with Tier 4 locomotives from the Reconnecting Communities Program and Neighborhood Access and Equity discretionary grant program. Letters were submitted by Senator Alex Padilla and 16 House members. Metrolink advocates continue to engage with the office of Senator Laphonza Butler on a letter. Award decisions for the grant program are expected in mid-February.

The Brightline West high-speed rail project from Las Vegas to Southern California has secured the award of a \$3 billion federal grant. The end station to be constructed in Rancho Cucamonga will offer convenient connectivity to Metrolink service on the San Bernardino Line. Metrolink and its partner agencies are expected to be invited to attend a project ribbon-cutting ceremony early next year.

The California High-Speed Rail Authority (CAHSR) also was awarded a \$3.07 billion grant to advance the construction of the initial 119-mile segment underway in the Central Valley. The full San Francisco to Los Angeles project is estimated to cost \$88 billion to \$128 billion.

On December 13, 2023, the House Subcommittee on Highways and Transit held an oversight hearing on the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA), also known as the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law. Witnesses included the administrators of the Federal Highway Administration, Federal Transit Administration, Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration and National Highway Traffic Safety Administration.

Testimony was mainly road-focused, but two subcommittee members did offer brief remarks regarding the California high speed rail project. Rep. Seth Moulton (D-MA) defended the project as offering cost efficiencies compared to highway construction and driving. He called for more support for rail projects and CAHSR specifically. Rep. John Duarte (R-CA) spoke against the California project, citing cost overruns and delays and the need to focus on roads rather than rail to reduce congestion.

Prepared by: Jeffrey Dunn, Director, Government and Community Relations
Anna Denecke, Senior Manager, Government Relations
Sylvia Novoa, Manager, Public Affairs
Julie Nieto, Management Analyst II
Grayson Hahn, Grad on Career Track

Approved by: Paul Hubler, Chief Strategy Officer

Attachment(s)

[Appendix A - January 2024 Bill Matrix](#)
[Presentation - January Legislative Update](#)