



ITEM ID: 2024-138-0

TRANSMITTAL DATE: March 22, 2024

MEETING DATE: March 29, 2024

TO: Board of Directors

FROM: Paul Hubler, Chief Strategy Officer

SUBJECT: March 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

The Metrolink Community Relations team is planning outreach efforts to support a Title VI assessment of potential impacts to disadvantaged communities and populations of the expanded Antelope Valley Line service. An on-line survey will help assess the impacts, if any, on Limited English Proficiency and minority populations. The Metrolink Board will be asked at the March 2024 meeting to initiate the outreach process. Staff will provide a Title VI report and recommendations, if any, for consideration and approval by the Board at the May 2024 meeting.

In other efforts, by-line community outreach meetings regarding the Antelope Valley Line (AVL) have been scheduled for April 16 and April 24, 2024. The virtual meetings will provide updates on projects undertaken on the line as well as regarding other matters important to communities, such as quiet zones, innovative fare products, safety enhancements, and service expansion. These meetings build upon the successful San Bernardino and Ventura by-line meetings held last year. In addition, staff continues to participate in community pop-ups at local farmers markets and schedules presentations at local chambers of commerce and senior and recreation centers throughout the year. Staff has provided information regarding the virtual safety program and the Student Adventure Pass program to 5,000 public schools in the Metrolink service area.

Staff is planning to host a Community Based Organization (CBO) workshop with invitations distributed to more than 1,000 CBOs in the five-county region. The workshop will provide information regarding Metrolink service and fare products. These efforts are consistent with Metrolink's transition to a regional rail model.

State

Senator Mike McGurie (D-Healdsburg) was sworn in as President pro Tempore of the Senate and announced his leadership team and committee assignments. Senator Lena A. Gonzalez (D-Long Beach) is elevated from Chair of the Senate Transportation Committee to Senate Majority Leader; Senator Dave Cortese (D-San Jose) will be Chair of the Senate Transportation Committee.

Metrolink CEO Darren Kettle met with state lawmakers on February 13 as part of the Mobility 21 delegation to Sacramento. The Mobility 21 delegation advocated for protecting state transportation programs and funding, the need for coordination and funding support for the 2028 Olympics, and a regional approach to national goods movement impacts.

Senate Bill 1098 (Blakespear), the Southern California Rail Revitalization Act, was introduced on February 13. The legislation seeks to revitalize and transform the LOSSAN Corridor by requiring CalSTA to identify and prioritize projects along the corridor that will improve capacity and resilience. The bill also asks for improved local coordination among the Southern California Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs) to ensure better management and operations, among other provisions. Sen. Blakespear is the chair of the Senate Transportation

Subcommittee on LOSSAN Rail Corridor Resiliency and the legislation was introduced after a year of hearings and investigations into the line and its needs.

The Transit Transformation Task Force will meet for the second time on February 29 in Sacramento with a subsequent meeting scheduled for April in San Diego. The Transit Transformation Task Force, which was required to be constituted under SB 125, tasks a group of select public and private sector stakeholders with developing policy recommendations to grow ridership and improve the transit ridership experience. Recommendations are due by October 31, 2025. Riverside County Transportation Commission and LA Metro staff are among the representatives on the task force; subsequent processes to establish a technical advisory working group may be announced during the February meeting.

Federal

The FY23 Continuing Resolution (CR) that is funding federal transportation programs expires on March 1. Congressional leaders are working on FY 24 appropriations bills after an agreement was struck last month between House Republicans and Senate Democrats, but it's unclear at this time whether actual legislation will be released and voted on in time to meet the March 1 deadline. In general, the remainder of FY24 spending is expected to be in-line with last year's budget.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (US EPA) issued a proposed partial disapproval of South Coast Air Quality Management District (SCAQMD)'s contingency measure plan for the 1997 8-hour ozone standard. SCAQMD's smog-reduction plan identifies federally regulated areas such ship and airplane emissions as necessary to reduce to meet federal air quality standards for the region. US EPA's draft response maintains that states do not have the authority to direct the federal government to reduce air pollution. US EPA has until July 1 to issue its final decision. If the SCAQMD plan is disapproved, California will have 18 months to draft and seek approval of a new plan or risks losing federal highway funds for the region. Comments on the proposed disapproval are now open, with the public comment period ending on March 4, 2024.

A year after the East Palestine, Ohio train derailment disaster, legislation to regulate the transportation of hazardous materials by rail remains stalled. S. 576 would require railroads to operate with a minimum two-person crew and increase fines but is awaiting a vote on the Senate floor. House leaders announced they would wait for a final report from the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) before advancing H.R. 1633, the lower chamber's iteration of rail safety legislation. President Biden visited East Palestine on February 16 in an effort to encourage Congressional action, while NTSB announced a final report will be approved at a June 25, 2024 hearing.

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Attachment(s)

Appendix A - March 2024 Bill Matrix