Introduction

The North County Transit District (NCTD) currently provides COASTER commuter rail service between the Oceanside Transit Center in Oceanside and the Santa Fe Depot in San Diego, California, serving the coastal communities of San Diego County. COASTER commuter rail service currently terminates at Santa Fe Depot on Broadway in downtown San Diego. The BNSF Railway also operates freight rail service on the same line.

Since COASTER commuter rail service began in 1995, major redevelopment has occurred in the downtown area in areas south of the Santa Fe Depot, including the San Diego Convention Center, Petco Park, and an extensively redeveloped mixed-use commercial and residential area known as the Gaslamp Quarter. Based on information from NCTD, in 2017, over 149 events were hosted at the San Diego Convention Center with almost 1 million attendees, over 100 baseball games and events were held at Petco Park, and over 9 million people from 166 countries visited the Gaslamp Quarter.

The San Diego Convention Center is currently served by light rail transit from the Metropolitan Transit System (MTS) Trolley system, via an existing station platform located on Harbor Drive. The San Diego Convention Center Platform Project (Project or proposed action) would extend NCTD's existing COASTER commuter rail service to the San Diego Convention Center thereby enabling one-seat rides for COASTER patrons from the North County to downtown San Diego.

Project Location

The Project is located in downtown San Diego, north of the San Diego Convention Center between First Avenue and Fifth Avenue, within and adjacent to railroad right-of-way (ROW) along Harbor Drive. The Project site extends from Control Point (CP) Broadway at Milepost (MP) 267.6 to CP Ballpark (MP 268.7). Figure 1 depicts the location of the Project within the San Diego County region.

Project Purpose and Need

The Project is needed to extend COASTER rail service to the San Diego Convention Center and adjacent venues, such as Petco Park. The purpose for the proposed action is to enhance connectivity of NCTD's COASTER commuter rail service to areas south of the existing Santa Fe Depot.

The proposed Project would have the following objectives:

- Provide a direct connection to the San Diego Convention Center, Petco Park, and the Gaslamp District for COASTER trains through the provision of a new station platform to reduce commute times
- Reduce passenger train congestion at the Santa Fe Depot
- Increase existing freight speed through the Project limits via upgraded signaling in the area

Major Project Components

The Project includes construction of a new platform and associated platform features, pedestrian access improvements, track improvements, signal improvements, and utility improvements. Figure 2 depicts the major Project components and the Project Footprint, which is synonymous to the Area of Potential Effects (APE) being used to evaluate historic properties under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA). Each of the major Project components are further described below.

Platform Improvements

The Project includes a new platform that would be approximately 16 feet wide and 850 feet long to accommodate an 8-car COASTER train. New benches, trash receptacles, and map display cases would be located on the new platform along with three new canopy structures that would extend up to 12 feet in height. Bike lockers would be installed on the concrete walkways leading to the new platform. Existing retaining walls located in the vicinity of platform improvements would be protected in place. Stormwater drainage facilities to support the platform would include grate inlets, storm drains, and underdrains. These facilities would connect to existing storm drain infrastructure.

Pedestrian Access Improvements

The Project includes new ADA-accessible enhanced concrete walkways that with adjacent landscaped areas to provide access to the new platform from First and Fifth Avenues, respectively. Modification to approximately 422 feet of the Martin Luther King, Jr. Promenade (also a portion of the Bayshore Bikeway) and its connection to Fifth Avenue, is required to accommodate the new siding track and at-grade crossing at Fifth Avenue. A portion of the Martin Luther King, Jr. Promenade would be realigned to be parallel to the BNSF mainline track.

Track Improvements

The Project includes 1,773 feet of dedicated siding track for platform dwelling along with modification to the existing mainline track to maintain freight movements and improve track geometry while COASTER trains would be located at the platform. Other track improvements include two new control points at CP Gaslamp and CP Ballpark located at MP 268.2 and MP 268.6, respectively.

A No. 11 turnout would be installed at Milepost 268.3 to allow COASTER trains to access the siding track from the north (railroad west). Two additional pairs of No. 11 turnouts would also be installed to the south (railroad east) of the platform siding at Milepost 268.6 to form a crossover between the main track and existing yard lead, allowing flexibility of movements between the San Diego Convention Center platform, the MTS layover yard, and the BNSF 22nd Street Yard. The BNSF mainline tracks would be shifted approximately 2 feet west to accommodate for the tight geometry constraints between the Martin Luther King, Jr. Promenade and the existing retaining wall on Harbor Drive while maintaining 15 feet track center requirements per BNSF standard.

Signal Improvements

As part of the Project, Centralized Traffic Control (CTC) wayside signaling, and a Positive Train Control (PTC) safety overlay would be implemented through the Project limits. CTC and PTC signal infrastructure would allow NCTD to safely and efficiently authorize and sequence passenger train movements with BNSF freight train movements through the Project limits. Underground conduit would be installed at a depth of five feet below ground surface within the railroad ROW.

Traffic signal improvements are also proposed at the following five locations within BNSF-owned and City of San Diego-owned roadway ROWs:

1. Kettner Boulevard and G Street – New traffic signal controller cabinet
2. Market Street and Harbor Drive – New traffic signal controller cabinet
3. Front Street and Harbor Drive – New traffic signal controller cabinet
4. First Avenue and Harbor Drive – New traffic signal controller cabinet and new signal house (8 feet wide, 10 feet long)
5. Fifth Avenue and Harbor Drive - New traffic signal controller cabinet

Each of the existing at-grade crossings above are within a Quiet Zone in downtown San Diego. The existing preemption inputs and traffic signal elements installed at the Quiet Zones will be maintained. The installation of modern traffic signal controllers and cabinets will allow for more efficient traffic signal operations. This will have the net effect of reducing traffic congestion on surface streets and delays to motor vehicles caused by at-grade crossing gate-down times.

Rail signal improvements include a new signal house (8 feet wide, 10 feet long) at First Avenue and Harbor Drive, and replacement of a communications shelter (9 feet wide, 14 feet long), installation of a PTC tower, shifting of existing signal house, and shifting of an existing railroad flashing light signal at Fifth Avenue and Harbor Drive. Installation of CTC signal infrastructure at each of the grade crossings above will allow for modest increases in existing train speed through the Project limits (from 10 miles per hour to 20 miles per hour), resulting in reduced at-grade crossing gate-down times each time the crossing warning system is activated by a train.

Table 1 lists the at-grade crossings through the Project limits.

Table 1. At-Grade Crossings through Project Limits

Owner	DOT #	Street Name	Milepost Location
BNSF	026874D	Kettner Boulevard/G Street	Milepost 267.82
BNSF	026875K	Market Street	Milepost 267.98
BNSF	026935S	Front Street	Milepost 268.24
BNSF	026877Y	1st Avenue	Milepost 268.30
BNSF	026878F	5th Avenue	Milepost 268.61

Utility Improvements

Utilities within the Project study area include gas lines, electrical power lines, communications/fiber optic lines, and municipal water and sewer pipes. To avoid potential utility conflicts, potentially impacted utilities would either be protected in place, extended, or relocated. Specifically, the Project may require relocation or casing extensions for the following utilities:

- Streetlight poles and associated electrical conduit and boxes
- Storm drain inlets along existing Martin Luther King, Jr. Promenade
- Irrigation lines

Operation

NCTD operates 22 COASTER trains per day (11 northbound and 11 southbound) Monday through Friday, (24 during Baseball Season), along with 4 additional trains on Friday nights from April through September between Oceanside and the Santa Fe Depot in downtown San Diego. NCTD operates 12 COASTER trains per day on Saturday and 8 trains per day on Sunday. The Project would result in a 1-mile extension of existing COASTER commuter rail service from the Santa Fe Depot to the proposed platform at the San Diego Convention Center. Extending COASTER service to the San Diego Convention Center will not only improve passenger convenience, but will also alleviate congestion at the Santa Fe Depot as COASTER trains would now terminate and complete their turnaround activities on a siding at the Convention Center, allowing freight trains to pass on the main track.

Construction

Construction of the Project would start in 2023 and last for up 2 years. Intermittent nighttime construction could be required, and would comply with City of San Diego nighttime construction requirements. Table 2 shows the activities that would occur throughout the 2-year construction timeframe. The anticipated number of workers and equipment needed to construct the major Project components is also shown in Table 3.

Table 2. Construction Duration Summary

Construction Component	Duration
Grading and drainage	4 months
Track construction	3 months
Platform construction	10 months
Landscape	6 months
Traffic signal	1 month
Rail Signals Systems	18 months (concurrent activity with other components)

Table 3. Construction Equipment Summary

Construction Component	Number of Workers	Anticipated equipment
Grading and drainage	8	1 Excavator (CAT316, 117HP), 1 motor grader (250HP), 2 backhoe (104HP), 1 rubber front end loader (CAT972K, 322HP), 1 water truck (200HP)
Track construction	12	1 Flatbed truck (250HP), 2 rubber front end loader (CAT972K, 322HP), track and tie handling equipment, 1 ballast tamper (HARSCO 6700 PD, 280HP), 2 backhoe loader (104HP); 1 dump truck (6 CY, 500 HP), welding truck
Platform construction	12	1 Concrete transit mixer (250HP), 1 rubber front end loader (320HP), crane (300HP)
Landscape	8	1 Flatbed truck (250HP), 1 crane (300HP), 1 pick-up truck
Traffic signal	4	1 Pick-up truck, 1 bobcat (45HP), 1 backhoe (104HP)

During construction, a short portion (approximately 400 feet) of the Bayshore Bikeway and Martin Luther King, Jr. Promenade would be temporarily closed to accommodate the installation of the siding track between First and Fifth Avenues. A detour would be required to maintain access to the unaffected portions of the pedestrian/bike path north and south of the proposed platform during the construction period. Detour routes could be routed from the Martin Luther King, Jr. Promenade at First Avenue to travel south along Harbor Drive. An alternate route would utilize the Gaslamp Diagonal connecting to the Harbor Drive Pedestrian Bridge to connect back to Harbor Drive.

Project Approvals/Permits

The Project may require the following approvals and permits to facilitate construction and/or operation:

- City of San Diego, applicable ministerial permits (e.g., traffic safety, grading, and roadway encroachment)
- Section 106 Consultation under the National Historic Preservation Act
- Permits from or agreements with affected utility providers (e.g. San Diego Gas and Electric and City of San Diego Public Utilities Department)
- San Diego Regional Water Quality Control Board (RWQCB): National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES), General Construction Permit
- California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC), compliance with General Orders
- California Coastal Commission (CCC), Coastal Act Federal Coastal Consistency Certification
- San Diego County Air Pollution Control District: Fugitive dust permit

Figure 1. Regional Vicinity Map

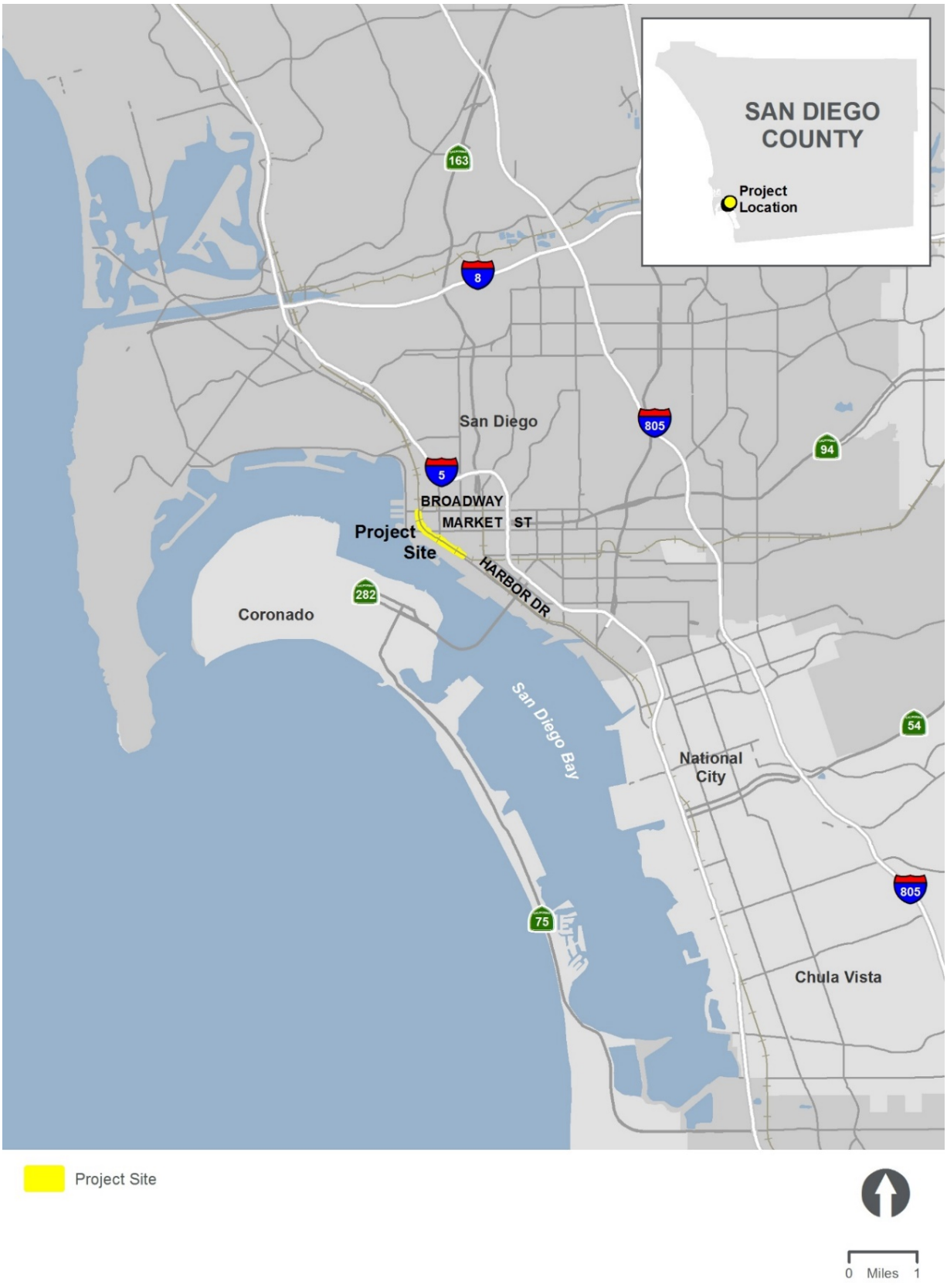
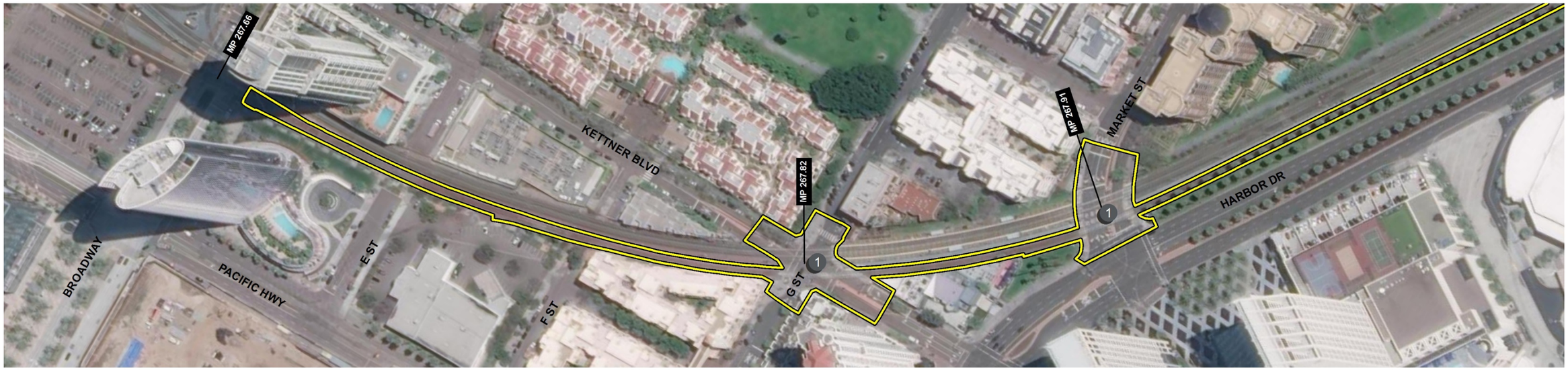
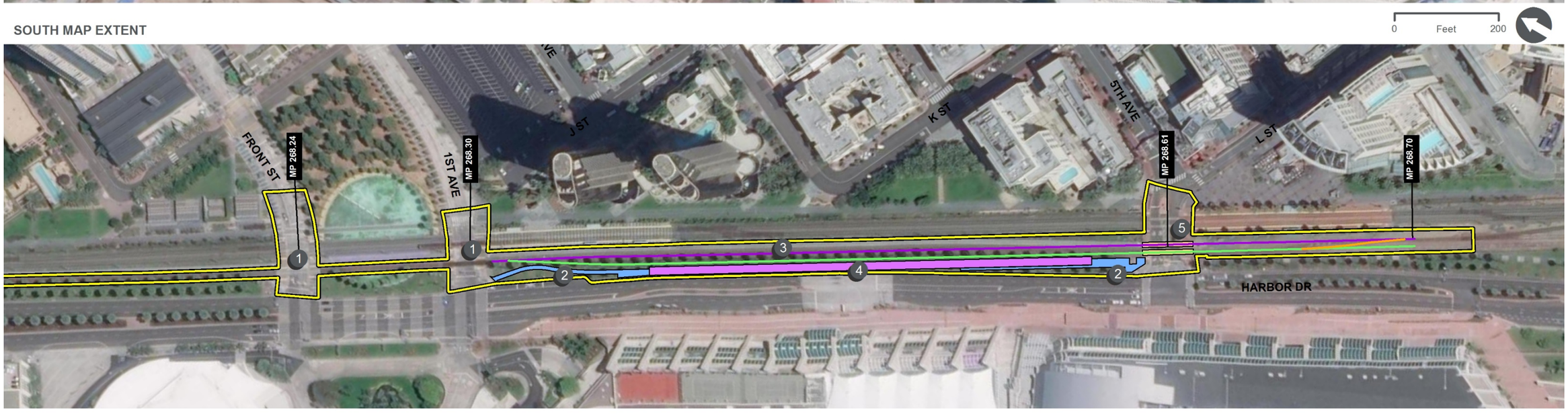


Figure 2. Project Footprint Map

NORTH MAP EXTENT



SOUTH MAP EXTENT



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- Project Footprint/Area of Potential Effect
- Proposed Platform
- Proposed Walkway
- Proposed Grade Crossing
- Modified BNSF Mainline Track (1,773 ft)
- New Siding Track (1,742 ft)
- New Crossover

1. Install new controller cabinet
2. Creation of new ADA compliant pathways
3. Modification to existing main track (1,773 ft) and new siding track (1,742 ft)
4. New 850' platform
5. Install new controller cabinet
   Replace existing signal house
   Shift signal house
   Shift railroad flashing light signal