

Notice of Preparation of a Draft Environmental Impact Report

June 4, 2024

Subject

Notice of Preparation (NOP) of a Draft Environmental Impact Report (EIR) for the [San Diego-Los Angeles-San Diego-San Luis Obispo \(LOSSAN\) Rail Realignment \(SDLRR\) Project](#) (Project) located in the cities of Solana Beach, Del Mar, and San Diego, California.

Introduction

The San Diego Association of Governments (SANDAG), as the Lead Agency under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), is initiating the preparation of a Draft EIR for the SDLRR Project and is issuing this NOP to initiate scoping to solicit input on the Project, including alternatives under consideration and environmental effects. SANDAG has decided to forego preparing an Initial Study (*CEQA Guidelines* 15063(a)) and move directly into the preparation of a Draft EIR. In addition to soliciting input from the public, SANDAG is requesting feedback from agencies as to the scope and content of environmental information that is relevant to an agency's statutory responsibilities in connection with the SDLRR Project (e.g., if this Draft Environmental Impact Report [EIR] will be used by an agency to issue an approval for the SDLRR Project).

The SDLRR Project may require approvals and/or permits from agencies that would be subject to environmental review pursuant to the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). A NEPA Lead Agency has not yet been identified. Once the NEPA Lead Agency is identified, that agency will formally initiate the NEPA process.

Background

The San Diego Subdivision is an approximately 60-mile section of the 351-mile LOSSAN Rail Corridor, linking San Diego, Los Angeles, and San Luis Obispo from the Orange County line to the Santa Fe Depot in Downtown San Diego. The LOSSAN Rail Corridor is the second busiest intercity passenger rail corridor in the United States and supports commuter (COASTER), intercity (Pacific Surfliner), and freight (BNSF) rail services. Currently, three quarters of the San Diego Subdivision is double tracked, resulting in a total of approximately 15 miles of single track and 45 miles of double track.

SANDAG Responsibilities

The San Diego Regional Transportation Consolidation Act (Senate Bill [SB] 1703 Peace) assigned SANDAG the responsibility for planning, funding allocation, project development, and construction in the San Diego region for all transit projects, including heavy rail. The North County Transit District and San Diego Metropolitan Transit System retained the responsibility for the maintenance and operation of the rail services. As such, SANDAG is the CEQA Lead Agency for rail line construction projects proposed in San Diego County. In its role as the Metropolitan Planning Organization under federal and state law, SANDAG is also responsible for the development of the Regional Transportation Plan and a Sustainable Communities Strategy. The Regional Transportation Plan identifies transportation infrastructure investments and programming of transportation funding over a 30-year

timeframe within the San Diego region in consideration of projected economic and population growth. The 2021 Regional Plan combines the Regional Transportation Plan and Sustainable Communities Strategy to achieve the regional greenhouse gas emissions reduction targets set by the California Air Resources Board. SANDAG's current plan was adopted by the SANDAG Board of Directors in December 2021, with an amendment approved in October 2023.

As described in the 2021 Regional Plan, the regional vision for the San Diego Subdivision would result in an increase in commuter rail service operating at higher speeds in order to reduce travel times and provide a competitive alternative to driving, as well as aiding in continuation of goods movement through the region. The 2021 Regional Plan contemplates double tracking the remaining single-track segments of the LOSSAN Rail Corridor within San Diego County, modifications to the track configuration to accommodate higher speeds, and relocation of rail track into more climate resilient areas.

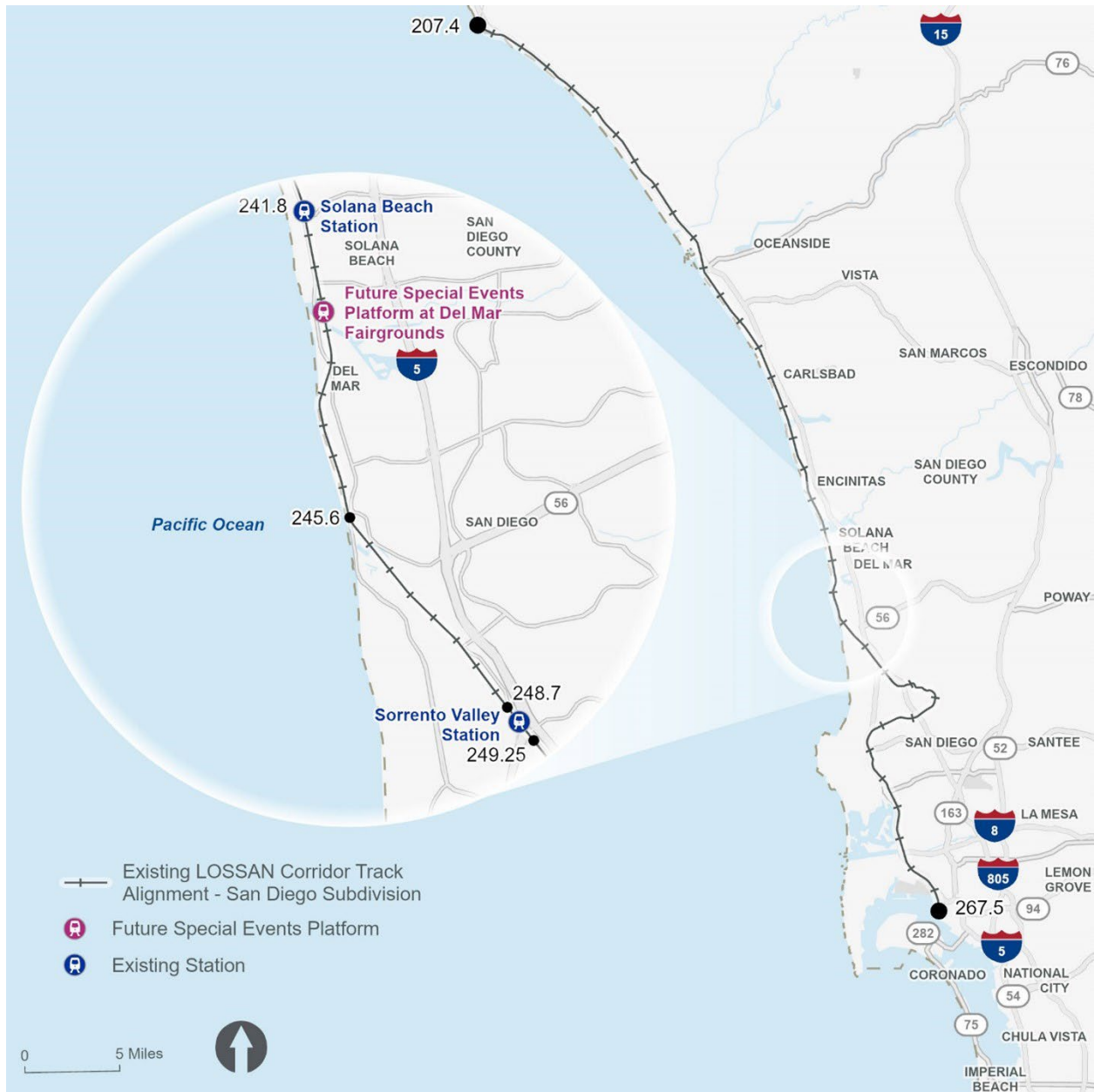
The segment of the San Diego Subdivision within the SDLRR Project area has experienced temporary closures and speed reductions resulting from bluff collapses, erosion, and repair work to stabilize the bluffs and protect the rail corridor from more substantial erosion effects. Four bluff stabilization projects have been completed in Del Mar since 2003, with the construction of Phase 4 recently completed in 2021. A fifth stabilization project (Phase 5) began construction in spring 2024. Phase 5 focuses on addressing additional seismic and stabilization needs, installing additional support columns, and replacing aging drainage structures to support the existing tracks.

In addition to the stabilization projects, several emergency repairs have been required since 1996 due to bluff failures that threatened train operations. While the Phase 5 stabilization project addresses safety and operational concerns with a 30-year design life, the stabilization projects and emergency repairs do not provide a long-term solution for sea level rise and the ongoing coastal erosion that pose substantial safety and economic risks to the region. Bluff retreat is estimated to occur at an average rate of 0.4 to 0.6 foot per year; however, large episodic bluff failures can result in more than 20 feet of bluff edge retreat in a single event. The California Coastal Commission has required that SANDAG evaluate realignment of the rail corridor off the bluffs to a more resilient location as part of their condition of approval for Phases 4 and 5 of the above-mentioned stabilization work. Further stabilization and emergency repair projects are likely to be required until the rail corridor is relocated from the coastal bluffs.

Study Area

The Project is located within portions of the cities of Solana Beach, Del Mar, and San Diego, as depicted on Figure 1. The Project study area begins at Solana Beach Station in the north and ends at the Sorrento Valley Station in the south. The study area is generally bounded to the west by the Pacific Ocean and to the east by Interstate 5 (I-5).

Figure 1. Project Location



Note: Within the San Diego Subdivision, right-of-way north of Milepost 245.6 is owned by North County Transit District and right-of-way south of Milepost 245.6 is owned by Metropolitan Transit System. The Future Special Events Platform has been approved and fully funded but will be constructed as part of the San Dieguito Double Track Project.

Planning Documents and Prior Studies

The Project is part of a larger program of improvements to be implemented on the LOSSAN Rail Corridor to enhance the reliability of existing services between San Luis Obispo, Los Angeles, and San Diego. Previous planning and environmental studies have been undertaken to analyze the potential for realigning the San Diego Subdivision in the Project study area away from the coastal bluffs and primarily within tunnels through the cities of Del Mar and San Diego.

- In **2007**, the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) and the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) finalized the **Los Angeles—San Diego Final Program EIR/Environmental Impact Statement (EIS)**¹, and on March 18, 2009, a **Record of Decision**² was published which records the decisions the United States Department of Transportation (U.S. DOT) made for proposed improvements to the LOSSAN Rail Corridor between Los Angeles and San Diego. The Program EIR/EIS carried forward two alternatives proposing tunnel options that deviated from the existing railroad alignment.
- In **August 2014**, the California Coastal Commission unanimously approved the North Coast Corridor Public Works Plan/Transportation and Resource Enhancement Program (**PWP/TREP**). Jointly prepared by SANDAG and Caltrans, the PWP/TREP is a single, integrated document that establishes a framework for comprehensively planning, reviewing, and permitting of multimodal transportation improvements along a 27-mile corridor in North San Diego County that maintains and enhances public access and protects sensitive coastal resources. The scope of improvements discussed within the Project study area includes two conceptual alignments for a “rail tunnel to move the existing rail alignment away from the Del Mar bluffs, which are susceptible to failure and unable to accommodate double tracking due to significant excavation, stabilization and ongoing maintenance needs of such a facility” (Chapter 4).
- In **December 2017**, SANDAG published a report entitled Conceptual Engineering and Environmental Constraints for Double Track Alignment Alternatives Between Del Mar Fairgrounds and Sorrento Valley³ that analyzed the feasibility of five potential options for relocating the existing San Diego Subdivision onto a new alignment with a double track tunnel away from the Del Mar bluffs. The study included conceptual engineering and preliminary construction costs for each alignment option.

¹ Web Page: <https://railroads.dot.gov/elibrary/los-angeles-san-diego-lossan-corridor-program-final-programmatic-eireis>
PDF: https://railroads.dot.gov/sites/fra.dot.gov/files/2023-10/2.2.11%20LOSSAN%20Programmatic%20EIR-EIS%20%282007%29_PDFa.pdf

² Web Page: <https://railroads.dot.gov/elibrary/los-angeles-san-diego-lossan-corridor-program-eireis-record-decision>
PDF: https://railroads.dot.gov/sites/fra.dot.gov/files/fra_net/192/LOSSAN_ROD_FINAL_2009.pdf

³ Web Page: <https://www.SANDAG.org/-/media/SANDAG/Documents/PDF/projects-and-programs/featured-projects/lossan-rail-improvements-del-mar-bluffs/del-mar-bluffs-stabilization/alignment-alternatives-and-environmental-constraints-study-2017-2023-09-08.pdf>
Appendices: <https://www.SANDAG.org/-/media/SANDAG/Documents/PDF/projects-and-programs/featured-projects/lossan-rail-improvements-del-mar-bluffs/del-mar-bluffs-stabilization/alignment-alternatives-and-environmental-constraints-study-2017-appendices-2023-09-08.pdf>

- In **September 2018**, Caltrans released the *2018 California State Rail Plan*, which established a statewide vision describing a future integrated rail system that provides comprehensive and coordinated service to passengers through more frequent service, and convenient transfers between rail services and transit. The plan recognized the challenges coastal erosion and sea level rise pose to the railroad tracks atop the eroding bluffs in Del Mar. It noted that about 50 trains on weekdays (mostly passenger), traverse the Del Mar Bluffs, and sea level rise will accelerate erosion of the bluffs, threatening stability and the viability of the route. The plan states “erosion by 2100 could eliminate the rail line completely, as well as adjacent homes, absent preventative measures.”
- In **December 2021**, SANDAG adopted the 2021 Regional Plan, which envisioned an expanded system of transit services to reduce greenhouse gases from automobiles, while promoting safe, clean, and economically friendly ways to move goods throughout the region and beyond. The 2021 Regional Plan envisioned the relocation, straightening, and double tracking of the rail line through the study area to a more climate resilient location that could reduce travel time and service reliability.
- In **June 2022**, the California Coastal Commission issued a Federal Consistency Certification (No. 0005-21) for the Del Mar Bluff Stabilization V project, which required the removal of all shoreline armoring after the expiration of the 30-year authorization period. The 30-year authorization period was to “allow SANDAG to protect the important railway line while planning of the pursuing [its] relocation.”
- In **August 2023**, SANDAG released the [San Dieguito to Sorrento Valley Double Track Del Mar Tunnels Alternatives Analysis Report](#), which refined five potential alignment alternatives based on the previous conceptual engineering study and evaluated them against a set of performance criteria. Two of these alternatives were advanced to 10 percent conceptual engineering and were further analyzed for engineering and environmental considerations. Based on feedback from stakeholders and community groups, four additional potential tunnel portal locations were then also evaluated to further minimize impacts on the community and private properties. Additional conceptual alignments were considered at a high level to demonstrate potential connections between various portal locations.

Recent Public Outreach

Leading up to the release of the NOP, SANDAG conducted public outreach events to inform, engage, and solicit public input to refine the description of the Project and the range of alternatives to be identified in the NOP. The meetings are listed below and videos for many of these meetings are available on the [SANDAG website](#).

- July 24, 2023: SANDAG presentation to Del Mar City Council
- August 30, 2023: SD LOSSAN Rail Realignment Del Mar Community Open House
- October 4, 2023: LOSSAN Tunneling Workshop
- October 19, 2023: LOSSAN Virtual Information Session
- November 6, 2023: LOSSAN Alignments Workshop Del Mar
- November 7, 2023 – December 19, 2023: Weekly Community Field Office Hours
- November 15, 2023: LOSSAN Alignments Workshop Carmel Valley
- February 5, 2024: SANDAG presentation to Del Mar City Council

- March 19, 2024: SANDAG presentation to Torrey Pines Community Planning Board

Project Objectives

The Project objectives are as follows:

- Improve rail service reliability by relocating the existing railroad tracks away from the eroding coastal bluffs in Del Mar.
- Maintain passenger rail service to the existing train stations serving Solana Beach and Sorrento Valley and accommodate direct rail access to the 22nd District Agricultural Association (Del Mar Fairgrounds).
- Minimize impacts in the surrounding communities during and after construction.
- Avoid and/or minimize impacts on biological, cultural, and recreational resources of national, state, or local significance, including publicly owned parks, beaches, wetlands, ecological reserves, wildlife or waterfowl refuges, and any publicly or privately owned historic site listed or eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places.
- Help meet the goals of the 2021 Regional Plan and the 2018 California State Rail Plan by increasing passenger and freight train capacity, further reducing travel times, improving reliability, and accommodating additional rail service.
- Improve coastal access and safety by eliminating at-grade railroad crossings and minimizing other pedestrian-rail points of interaction.

Project Description

SANDAG proposes to relocate the existing single-track alignment of the San Diego Subdivision potentially through the Cities of Solana Beach, Del Mar, and San Diego, where the rail line runs along a terrace on the coastal bluffs, to a double-track alignment between the Solana Beach Station and the north end of Sorrento Valley in the City of San Diego. The new alignment would relocate existing rail service from along the coastal bluffs to a new alignment away from the bluffs, primarily located within tunnels through Del Mar and San Diego. The new alignment may include aerial structures and berms. The relocation and double tracking of the alignment would eliminate reliability risks caused by bluff erosion and provide greater track capacity and a higher operating speed for trains that use the corridor, enabling projected increases in service and minimizing conflicts with pedestrians. The Project will include removal of existing stabilization infrastructure, consistent with the California Coastal Commission's conditions of approval for the Del Mar stabilization projects.

Pursuant to State CEQA Guidelines, the SDLRR Draft EIR will consider a No Project Alternative and a reasonable range of Project alternatives. In accordance with CEQA, SANDAG has identified alternatives to be analyzed in the Draft EIR based on their potential feasibility, ability to attain the majority of the Project objectives, and potential to avoid or substantially lessen the significant effects of the Project and evaluate the comparative merits of the alternatives (California Code of Regulations title 14 § 15126.6).

As a result of prior planning studies and community engagement, in addition to the No Project alternative, three Project alternatives are proposed for analysis in the Draft EIR, as depicted on Figure 3. Each Project alternative would require a north and south portal, a tunnel connecting the portals, and double tracking of the rail line.

The Project comprises the following infrastructure components, which are also included in each of the three Project alternatives (definitions for several of these components are included in the callout box and depicted on Figure 2).

- Removal of existing rail infrastructure (e.g. rail track, ties, and ballast) on areas no longer needed after track relocation
- Construction of bridge structures
- Construction of U-structures, retaining walls, and floodwalls
- Construction of twin-bored tunnels and cut-and-cover tunnels
- Construction of tunnel portals and associated portal infrastructure
- Installation of a tunnel system power supply
- Installation of tunnel ventilation systems
- Installation of communication systems, including signals, switches, and control points
- Modifications to drainage and roadways, as needed
- Relocation of utilities, as needed
- Potential placement of beach-quality sand excavated from tunnel boring activities onto beach(es) or near shore, in the vicinity of the study area
- Removal of prior bluff stabilization improvements consistent with the California Coastal Commission's certification of Federal Consistency Certifications

Graded: rail tracks constructed on flat ground, earthen berms, or cuts into hillsides.

Floodwalls: a freestanding structure built along a shore or bank to prevent encroachment of floodwaters.

Berm: a segment of track that is on raised ground.

U-structure: a rectangular shaped structure with only three sides that is excavated from the surface and leaves an opening in the surface to allow the track to transition from a tunnel to the surface level.

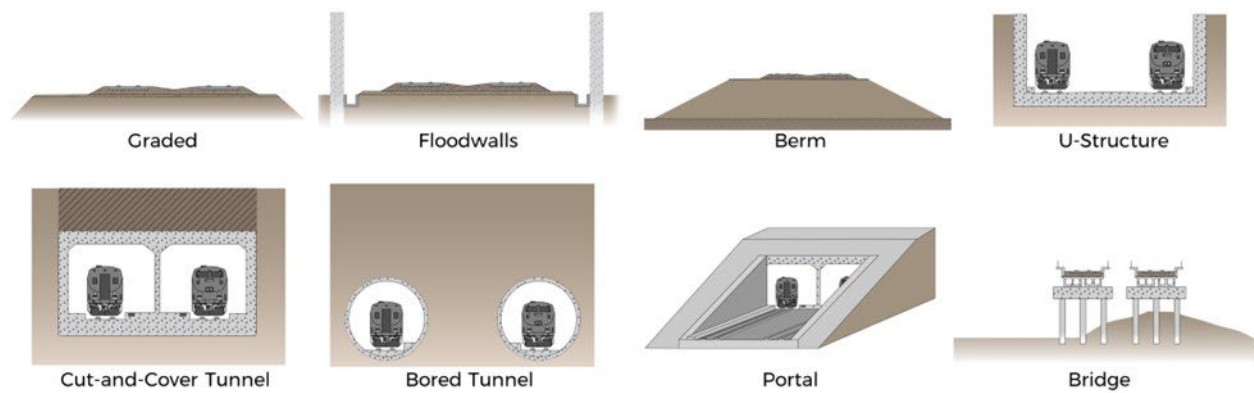
Cut-and-cover tunnel: a rectangular shaped tunnel that is constructed within a trench which is excavated from the surface and then covered after it is constructed.

Bored tunnel: a circular shaped tunnel that is constructed using a tunnel boring machine that digs or bores through the earth without removing the ground above.

Portal: entrance to the tunnel.

Bridge: aerial structure carrying the rail tracks over roadways, canyons, or water.

Figure 2. Project Components



North Portals

Two north portal locations have been identified depending on the track alignment. The portal locations are as follows:

Under Jimmy Durante Boulevard

This proposed portal would be located north of the intersection of Camino Del Mar and Jimmy Durante Boulevard. The portal's infrastructure would cross underneath Jimmy Durante Boulevard, which would be raised. The portal structures would potentially extend into commercial and residential properties.

Fairgrounds North

This proposed portal would be located north of the fairgrounds within the railroad trench in Solana Beach. The portal's infrastructure would start south of the existing Solana Beach Station.

South Portals

Two south portal locations have been identified depending on the track alignment. The portal locations are as follows:

Torrey Pines Road

This proposed portal would be located near the intersection of Carmel Valley Road and North Torrey Pines Road. The portal infrastructure would cross underneath Carmel Valley Road and potentially extend into residential properties.

Knoll Near I-5

This proposed portal would be located at a knoll south of Carmel Valley Road between I-5 and the segment of Sorrento Valley Road Trail that is closed to public vehicular traffic but open for bikes, pedestrians, and authorized vehicles. The portal infrastructure would be within the undeveloped knoll and extend into the Los Peñasquitos Lagoon.

Alternative A I-5 Alignment:

As depicted on Figure 4, Alternative A is approximately 6.8 miles in length and would descend immediately south of the Solana Beach Station, enter the Fairgrounds North Portal, then continue south into the fairgrounds, where there would be a new underground special events platform. The alignment would continue under the San Dieguito Lagoon and turn to follow under the I-5 freeway, then continue south and exit at the Knoll Near I-5 South Portal. The alignment would then rise above ground as it transitions back into the existing railroad alignment north of the Sorrento Valley Station.

Alternative B Crest Canyon Alignment:

As depicted on Figure 5, Alternative B is approximately 5.3 miles in length and would descend immediately south of the rail bridge that spans over the San Dieguito Lagoon and enter the Under Jimmy Durante Boulevard North Portal, then continue south and exit at the Knoll Near I-5 South Portal. The tracks would then rise as it transitions back into the existing railroad alignment north of the Sorrento Valley Station.

Alternative C Camino del Mar Alignment:

As depicted on Figure 6, Alternative C is approximately 4.9 miles in length and would descend immediately south of the rail bridge that spans over the San Dieguito Lagoon and enter the Under Jimmy Durante Boulevard North Portal. This alternative would continue south and exit at the Torrey Pines Road South Portal, bridge over the Los Peñasquitos Lagoon, and then transition back to the existing railroad alignment. The existing railroad alignment within Los Peñasquitos Lagoon would be double tracked, which would require raising and widening the existing berm in the lagoon to address flooding and sea level rise projections.

Potential Environmental Effects

The EIR will address impacts to the following resource categories listed in Appendix G:

- | | |
|------------------------------------|----------------------------------------|
| 1. Aesthetics | 11. Mineral Resources |
| 2. Air Quality | 12. Noise and Vibration |
| 3. Biological Resources | 13. Population and Housing |
| 4. Cultural Resources | 14. Public Services |
| 5. Energy | 15. Recreation |
| 6. Geology and Soils | 16. Transportation |
| 7. Greenhouse Gas Emissions | 17. Tribal Cultural Resources |
| 8. Hazards and Hazardous Materials | 18. Utilities and Service Systems |
| 9. Hydrology and Water Quality | 19. Wildfire |
| 10. Land Use and Planning | 20. Mandatory Findings of Significance |

In addition, the EIR will address cumulative impacts, growth-inducing impacts, and other mandatory CEQA topics.

Comments Requested

Comments in response to this NOP should be provided to SANDAG at the earliest possible date but not later than 45 days after receipt of this notice (June 4, 2024). Your comments may be submitted in writing to SANDAG no later than **July 19, 2024**.

SANDAG is seeking input on the Draft EIR scope, including the alternatives under consideration and potential environmental effects. A public scoping meeting is scheduled on June 18, 2024, from 6:00 to 7:30 p.m., as noted below. Written comments should be sent to SANDAG, 401 B Street, Suite 800, San Diego, CA 92101, ATTN: Tim Pesce; via email with subject line "SDLRR Project NOP" to: LOSSANcorridor@sandag.org; or online at SANDAG.org/railrealignment. Comments may also be provided orally or in writing via the public scoping meeting.

Public Scoping Meetings

Pursuant to Public Resources Code Section 21083.9, a public scoping meeting is scheduled for June 18, 2024, from 6:00 – 7:30 p.m. at the San Diego Marriott Del Mar, 11966 El Camino Real, San Diego, CA 92130.

Additional Information

For additional information regarding the SDLRR Project, the scoping period, or the environmental process, please contact LOSSANcorridor@sandag.org or visit SANDAG.org/railrealignment.

Figure 3. Three Project Alternatives



LEGEND

- Alternative A
- Alternative B
- Alternative C
- Portal Location
- Mile Post Marker
- Existing LOSSAN Corridor Track Alignment
- Municipal Boundary

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Figure 4. Alternative A I-5 Alignment



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Figure 5. Alternative B Crest Canyon Alignment



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Figure 6. Alternative C Camino del Mar Alignment



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