California Coastal Commission
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FACT SHEET

Coastal Commission calls for beach restoration, long-term plan for Orange County's imperiled coastal railroad

The LOSSAN Rail Corridor, which stretches 351 miles from San Diego to San Luis Obispo, is increasingly threatened by coastal erosion and flooding, particularly in San Clemente. Despite ongoing emergency efforts to stabilize the train tracks, Orange County transportation officials have in recent years repeatedly halted passenger and freight service for weeks, sometimes months, due to public safety concerns related to beach loss and landslides.

The California Coastal Commission is scheduled to vote Thursday, Nov. 5, 2026 on a package of immediate as well as long-term actions to address sea level rise and other impacts to the rail corridor in southern Orange County. Commission staff are recommending approval of coastal armoring on the condition that regional transportation officials, among other things, replenish beaches with new sand, study the behavior of the sand, and study the feasibility of relocating the rail line out of harm's way.

Permit applicants

- Orange County Transportation Authority (OCTA), which owns the right-of-way extending 50 feet on either side of the tracks between Fullerton and San Clemente
- Southern California Regional Rail Authority, which operates the Metrolink commuter rail service

Project location

The project includes two locations in San Clemente:

- North Beach/San Clemente City Beach (from approximately Avenida Pico to Mariposa Point)
- San Clemente State Beach/Cyprus Shore (from approximately the Riviera beach access point to the county line to the south)

Project proposal

The proposed project includes the retention and placement of shoreline protection for 1.5 miles along the LOSSAN railroad corridor in San Clemente, including:

- More than 46,000 tons of large rocks, also known as riprap
- Construction of an approximately 1,200-foot-long engineered seawall
- About 700 feet of tiebacks along the bluff inland of the railroad

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Project conditions

Staff have proposed approval of the project with conditions, such as:

- Placement of at least 690,000 cubic yards of sand to replenish the beaches north and south of the San Clemente Pier within one year of approval, unless otherwise extended by the executive director
- Monitoring and reporting on sand movement, including impacts on nearby kelp and reef habitat, with a final report due in 10 years
- Creating a Long-Term Railroad Adaption Study due by November 2030
- Convening a working group that includes railroad officials, Caltrans, California State Parks, tribal governments and community-based organizations, including those representing environmental justice communities
- Providing a long-term analysis for maintaining rail service in the face of coastal hazards between Doheny State Beach and U.S. Marine Corps Base Camp Pendleton
- Studying the relocation of the rail line and providing regular progress reports to the Coastal Commission starting in 2028 and every three years thereafter
- Submitting a report within a year on the feasibility of providing lower-cost transit fares
- Creating an online portal for the public that will include, among other things, monitoring data and final reports required by the permit, as well as an interactive map showing the location of seawalls, boulders and other shoreline protection

History

The railroad tracks in this area were built in 1888. OCTA, which purchased the right-of-way in 1993, maintains that the 7-mile stretch of rail line between Dana Point and southern San Clemente is among the most vulnerable rail corridors in the state.

The applicants have routinely dumped large rocks from railroad cars along sections of the tracks threatened by wave action and beach erosion. The transportation agency has also placed about 40,000 cubic yards of sand in the area to replenish the beach.

Other efforts to place sand on San Clemente beaches include:

- United States Army Corps of Engineers has started placing 250,000 cubic yards of sand every 5 to 6 years.
- City of San Clemente plans to place up to 300,000 cubic yards of sand annually.
- Orange County plans to place up to 300,000 cubic yards of sand annually.