



June 22, 2026

Senator Catherine Blakespear (North Coast San Diego County; South Coast Orange County)
(SB1098 sponsoring senator); Chair, Senate Committee on Environmental Quality

Senator.Blakespear@senate.ca.gov

Senator Robert Archuleta (Pico Rivera)

Senator.Archuleta@senate.ca.gov

Senator Benjamin Allen (24th Dist. Los Angeles cities)

Senator.Allen@senate.ca.gov

Senator Sabrina Cervantes (Riverside)

Senator.Cervantes@senate.ca.gov

Senator John Laird (Santa Cruz)

Senator.Laird@senate.ca.gov

Senator Monique Limón (Santa Barbara).

Senator.Limon@Senate.ca.gov

Senator Tom Umberg (Santa Ana)

Senator.Umberg@senate.ca.gov

Assembly Member Tasha Boerner (Solana Beach)

Assemblymember.BoernerHorvath@assembly.ca.gov

Assembly Member Laurie Davis

Assemblymember.Davis@assembly.ca.gov

Assembly Member Diane Dixon (Newport Beach)

Assemblymember.Dixon@assembly.ca.gov

Southern California Rail Revitalization Act Working Group

Attention: Anthony J. Serna, Senior Advisor and Policy Lead, Rail and Transit

LOSSAN.SB1098@calsta.ca.gov

anthony.serna@calsta.ca.gov

**Re: Comments to Southern California Rail Revitalization Act (SB 1098) Working Group's "Public Comment Draft"
Dated June 10, 2026**

Dear Senator Blakespear, other distinguished members of the Senate and Assembly, and members of the Southern California Rail Revitalization Act Working Group:

Save Our Beaches SC (SOB-SC) is a grassroots organization of citizens dedicated to preserving, restoring, and protecting the San Clemente coastline. Established in 2021, we are a 501(c)3 organization representing thousands of local citizens, taxpayers and voters.

We reviewed the initial **draft** recommendations published on **May 11, 2026** of the Working Group created by the Southern California Rail Revitalization Act sponsored by Senator Blakespear, enacted on September 24, 2024 (the "Legislation").

What follows are comments and concerns regarding the **"Public Comment Draft"** of the Working Group recommendations to the Legislature published **June 11, 2026**. The final version of the draft recommendations is to be submitted by the Working Group to the Legislature on the specific topics outlined in the Legislation.

We support Senator Blakespear's proposed legislation (SB 1324) that would provide a year's extension to the original February 2026 deadline for the required report because the public will not have had sufficient time to digest and comment on the June 11, 2026 Draft by July 3, 2026 and because, as discussed in the attached letter from the Coalition for Safer Trains, the Working Group should be augmented to comply with the Legislation.

We fully support the comments provided by the "Coalition for Safer Trains" dated June 22, 2026 and attached hereto, and provide our additional comments below.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS FROM SOB-SC

Over the past five years, LOSSAN, through its member agency Orange County Transportation Authority (OCTA), has placed about 30,000 tons of riprap on the beaches of San Clemente, resulting in the complete loss of the sandy beach across about 1 mile of our 5-mile coastline. **Most of this hard armoring has been placed under Emergency Permits issued by the California Coastal Commission:** a significant amount of riprap has been placed without permit authority at all. LOSSAN and OCTA have thus **destroyed about 20% of our coastline** with no Environmental Impact Assessment, and now seeks the authority to never conduct appropriate assessment of this environmentally devastating behavior.

OCTA continues to seek Emergency Permits for placement of unnecessary hard armoring on our coastline, instead of conducting proper planning and environmental impact assessment. The public has made its interests clear: we do not want any additional hard armoring on our beaches. **The public, and local academic experts, all believe that sand is the preferred alternative**, however OCTA continues to seek the placement of tens of thousands of tons of riprap on our beaches.

In August 2025, OCTA applied for emergency permits to place 35,000 tons of riprap on two areas of our beaches: 1. The City-owned beach locally known as Mariposa Promontory; and 2. San Clemente State Beach. The Coastal Commission issued an emergency permit for the Mariposa work, under the stipulation that the rocks be placed on existing revetment, with no expansion of the rock revetment. The placement of rock on the San Clemente beach, however, would necessitate the widening of the existing revetment over 50 feet width of beach – representing the entire dry sandy beach width. **Thus, they were proposing the wholesale destruction of one of our State’s most popular beaches.**

The Coastal Commission denied OCTA an Emergency Permit for the 35,000 tons of riprap on State Beach, citing that no emergency existed. Since then, OCTA has spent additional taxpayer money in trying to obtain this authority to issue their own Emergency Permit rather than progressing with regular permits for the sand placement as is the preference of the public.

The Coastal Commission did issue Emergency Permits for placement of 540,000 CY of sand on the beaches of San Clemente. OCTA has to date placed about 2,500 CY of sand and has **failed to submit any permit application to any federal agency to place larger quantities of sand.**

OCTA has also presented its plans to continue hard armoring in the future, across almost the entire San Clemente shoreline. **This legislation would assure the complete destruction of one of California’s most treasured shorelines.**

It should be noted that beyond Emergency Permitting, the creation of a non-existent “Emergency” also allows OCTA to proceed with **Emergency Procurement practices, including a sole-source, lump-sum, no-bid contract for up to \$300M of taxpayer monies.**

WORKING GROUP MEMBERSHIP

The Legislation mandates that the Secretary of Transportation create a Working Group whose member entities are described in Government Code section 14072.6(b). The Working Group entities are to include track owners and certain governmental agencies as well as **“business, community, transportation, environmental, labor, and civic organizations.”**

The members of the WG do not include representatives from: “business, community, ... environmental, labor, and civic organizations” as the Legislation requires.

SOB-SC is the premier organization representing the environmental interests of the local community and we respectfully request membership and/or meaningful participation in the Working Group.

PRESERVE CEQA

The proposed new CEQA exemption needlessly abdicates the State of California’s power over rail development projects in California. The exemption transfers environmental oversight of our coast and inland cities through which LOSSAN passes to the **Surface Transportation Board, a remote federal agency whose primary purpose is the economic regulation of freight transport, with no inherent interest in protecting the environment or passenger rail lines.**

The recommendation is not a “clarification” of CEQA as characterized in the draft; it is a **dramatic change** to current California law. It would profoundly affect the San Clemente coastal environment by weakening environmental protections on coastal and inland railroad projects, including construction of all rail “facilities” and auxiliary and other track projects on bluffs, beaches, bridges, lagoons or anywhere.

The Working Group has **failed to explain why this statutory exemption is required to boost ridership** and improve passenger rail lines in the LOSSAN corridor. OCTA continues to cite past disruptions in service, however none of those disruptions was caused by coastal erosion, only landslides on the east side of the rail. **Rail service has never been halted due to coastal erosion.** Furthermore, during each of those disruptions, passenger service was fully maintained by using bus services. **The only transportation that was actually affected was freight.**

California environmental laws are intentionally stronger than federal laws. The recommendation is the latest attempt by some railroad interests to preempt or eviscerate California's environmental laws and substitute a remote federal agency governing freight as the decision-maker over California's environment. The STB is a remote Washington D.C.-based administrative agency of unelected appointees focused on advancing the economic interests of freight carriers.

The Legislation asked the Working Group for recommendations regarding “(C) Changes to state statutes, rules, or funding necessary to improve the **quality, performance, usage, management, or frequency of passenger rail services** with a focus on streamlining, clarifying, and improving existing processes or procedures.”⁸ The Working Group's recommendation to add a **sweeping exemption to CEQA is not “necessary” or even germane** to achieve any of these goals, it simply eviscerates the statute in relation to rail construction projects involving rail facilities and auxiliary tracks and transfers decisions over San Clemente's environment and transportation to a remote federal agency.

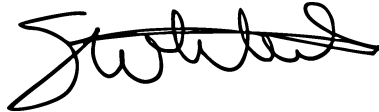
REJECT RECOMMENDATION 3

SOB-SC requests that the Legislature promptly and soundly reject Recommendation 3 of Section 4.1 of the draft recommendations of the Working Group.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Working Group's recommendations on policy areas affecting the LOSSAN corridor and the hosting communities affected by it.

Respectfully submitted on behalf of SOB-SC by

Suzanne Whitelaw, PhD
President



Gary Walsh
Chairman

Joe Wilson
Board Member

John Dow
Board Member