



June 28, 2026

Senator Catherine Blakespear (North Coast San Diego County; South Coast Orange County)
(SB 1098 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.Limom@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 on the Southern California Rail Revitalization Act (SB 1098) Working Group Public Comment Draft (June 10, 2026)

Capo Cares is a community-based 501(c)(4) organization dedicated to preserving and enhancing the Capistrano Beach community and its namesake beach. Since its founding in 2014 our organization has advocated for science-based coastal management and the protection of California's public beaches. Capistrano Beach has become an unfortunate example of the

devastating effects that climate change, coastal erosion, and shoreline armoring can have on California's irreplaceable coastal resources.

I fully support the comments submitted by the Coalition for Safer Trains and Save Our Beaches SC in their June 22, 2026 letters and respectfully offer the following additional comments.

The recommendation to exempt railroad infrastructure projects from the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) raises concerns that extend well beyond environmental permitting. It implicates California's longstanding obligation to protect coastal resources held in trust for the benefit of all Californians and future generations.

I strongly oppose the LOSSAN Working Group's recommendation to create a new statutory exemption from CEQA for railroad-related activities and infrastructure projects (Recommendation 4.1(3)). CEQA review is one of California's most important safeguards for ensuring that public agencies fully evaluate environmental impacts, consider reasonable alternatives, disclose potential environmental consequences, and provide meaningful opportunities for public participation before undertaking projects that may permanently alter sensitive natural resources.

More importantly, this recommendation appears inconsistent with the stated objectives of SB 1098 itself. The Legislature established this Working Group to develop thoughtful, balanced recommendations that improve rail reliability while addressing environmental impacts, enhancing coastal resilience, and engaging affected communities. **Eliminating environmental review for projects affecting California's coastline undermines those very objectives by reducing transparency, limiting public participation, and removing the careful environmental analysis that informed decision-making requires.**

This is not a choice between rail transportation and environmental protection. California depends on both. The question before the Working Group is whether maintaining rail service should come at the unnecessary expense of irreplaceable public beaches and coastal resources when less damaging alternatives deserve careful consideration. CEQA exists to ensure those alternatives are fully evaluated before irreversible decisions are made.

The 351-mile LOSSAN Corridor traverses some of California's most environmentally significant coastal areas. These beaches belong to all Californians, and, I would argue, to all humankind. **Exempting railroad infrastructure projects from CEQA would remove an essential layer of public accountability at precisely the time when our coastline faces unprecedented threats from erosion, sea level rise, and increasingly severe storms.**

In Orange County, railroad protection efforts have relied heavily on shoreline armoring through the placement of massive riprap boulders and increasingly extensive retaining structures. The cumulative effect has been the steady loss and narrowing of public beaches. The California Coastal Commission, coastal engineers, and numerous scientific studies have documented that shoreline armoring can accelerate beach erosion by preventing the natural movement of sand, disrupting coastal processes, and reducing the beach's ability to migrate inland as sea levels rise. As a result, local coastal expert [Dr. Brett Sanders has repeatedly warned that continued reliance](#)

on shoreline armoring has been proven to worsen the very coastal hazards these projects seek to address.

Rather than prioritizing comprehensive, long-term resilience strategies—including beach nourishment, bluff stabilization, sediment management, and other science-based approaches—the Orange County Transportation Authority (OCTA) has repeatedly relied on emergency permits to install additional shoreline armoring. While emergency actions are sometimes necessary, emergency permitting should not become the default mechanism for implementing permanent infrastructure projects without full environmental review. CEQA exists precisely to ensure that long-term projects receive careful environmental analysis, and that less damaging alternatives are fully considered.

Recent history also calls into question the assertion that these projects require expedited approvals or extraordinary exemptions from existing law. The San Clemente rail corridor has experienced extended closures in recent years without catastrophic consequences to regional transportation. Passenger service was successfully accommodated through alternative transportation, freight traffic remained at the same limited level it has maintained for decades, and the regional transportation system continued to function. Meanwhile, discussions regarding long-term alternatives—including rerouting portions of the corridor—have existed for decades without meaningful progress. These realities underscore the importance of evaluating durable, long-term solutions rather than continuing to expand shoreline armoring under successive emergency authorizations. The Agency continues to state that it “plans” to study relocation, but such studies are not funded and no progress has been made to date.

It is difficult to reconcile a recommendation eliminating CEQA review with California's longstanding commitment to environmental stewardship or with SB 1098's own directive that environmental impacts and coastal resilience be carefully considered. A blanket statutory exemption would encourage more of the very practices that have already contributed to the degradation of Southern California's coastline while limiting scientific review, public transparency, and meaningful community participation.

Infrastructure can be repaired, relocated, or redesigned. Public beaches, once permanently lost, cannot simply be rebuilt. That reality makes careful environmental review not an obstacle to progress, but an essential safeguard for future generations.

California should not be forced to choose between reliable rail service and healthy beaches. Both are vital public resources, and both can be protected through thoughtful planning, sound engineering, rigorous environmental review, and science-based coastal resilience strategies. The State's goal should not be to preserve rail infrastructure at any cost, but to preserve both transportation and the natural coastal resources that define California. Weakening CEQA is not modernization—it simply removes one of California's most effective safeguards for achieving that balance.

Accordingly, I respectfully urge the Working Group to reject Recommendation 4.1(3) and preserve CEQA review for railroad-related projects.

I also urge the Working Group to expand its membership to include promised representation of environmental organizations, including Save Our Beaches SC. **Any recommendations affecting California's coastline should include the perspectives of organizations dedicated to protecting the public trust resources that belong to every Californian.**

Thank you for your thoughtful consideration of these comments.

Respectfully,

Toni Nelson

Founder and President

capocares@gmail.com/714-654-2345