RIVERSIDE COUNTY TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION

4080 Lemon St. 3rd Fl. Riverside, CA 92501
Mailing Address: P.O. Box 12008 Riverside, CA 92502-2208
951.787.7141 • rctc.org

July 2, 2026

Secretary Toks Omishakin
California State Transportation Agency
400 Capitol Mall, Suite 2340
Sacramento, CA 95814

Subject: RCTC Comments on the SB 1098 LOSSAN Rail Corridor Working Group Report

Dear Secretary Omishakin:

On behalf of the Riverside County Transportation Commission (RCTC), I write with comments on the draft Senate Bill (SB) 1098 the Los Angeles-San Diego-San Luis Obispo (LOSSAN) Rail Corridor Working Group Report for your consideration and inclusion in its transmission to the Legislature. RCTC fully supports continued coordination between LOSSAN, the California State Transportation Agency (CalSTA), and members of the Working Group to collaboratively bolster regional rail service, operations, and capital investments across the LOSSAN corridor. The success of the LOSSAN corridor is an indispensable component of RCTC's mission to improve mobility for the people of Riverside County.

RCTC's primary interests in the LOSSAN corridor manifest as follows:

1. RCTC holds exclusive passenger rail rights in the BNSF San Bernardino Subdivision within the LOSSAN corridor;
2. RCTC is a member agency of LOSSAN and the Southern California Regional Rail Authority—the operator of Metrolink service;
3. RCTC subsidizes Metrolink commuter rail service in Riverside County which runs in the LOSSAN corridor; and
4. RCTC in partnership with CalSTA and the Federal Railroad Administration is conducting planning, environmental review, and preliminary engineering of the Coachella Valley Rail Project, a proposed 144-mile intercity passenger rail service mirroring that of the Pacific Surfliner, between Los Angeles and Coachella.

With these interests in mind, RCTC offers the following comments:

- **Aligning state grant programs with the Federal Corridor Identification and development Program (CIDP) project development pipeline to strengthen the corridor's competitiveness for federal capital funding.** (Page 3) – RCTC supports efforts for the state to leverage its planning capacity and grant programs to maximize federal funding for capital improvements in the LOSSAN corridor that would benefit the Pacific Surfliner service and deliver the Coachella Valley Rail Project, which was awarded CIDP.

- **Streamlining the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) review for passenger rail projects by establishing agency comment deadlines, a conflict resolution protocol for multi-jurisdictional projects, and a pathway to make permanent the judicial review provisions introduced under Chapter 60, Statutes of 2023 SB 149 (Chapter 60, Statutes of 2023).** (Page 3) – RCTC supports all efforts to reduce project delivery timelines and provide flexibility to meet planning requirements, while maintaining important environmental protections. In particular, passenger rail projects are deserving of targeted CEQA exemptions and judicial streamlining because expanding reliable, interconnected alternatives to driving are vital for state and regional efforts to achieve greenhouse gas emissions reduction goals and air quality conformity.

- **Rather than creating a new layer of coordination by formalizing the SB 1098 Working Group, use existing avenues to formalize this coordination. Specifically, the working group recommends using the Rail Leadership Group for strategic leadership engagement and the LOSSAN Technical Advisory Committee as a staff led forum to advance priorities established by the Leadership Group.** (Page 14) – For the Rail Leadership Group to be utilized in this manner, RCTC strongly believes that its membership should include all passenger rail operators and their respective member agencies, as well as all passenger rail rights holders in the LOSSAN corridor. This inclusion will ensure that the diverse voices of the region are at the table.

- **In coordination with CalSTA and the Caltrans Division of Rail, designate a primary host railroad liaison and negotiator. This role may lead a coordinated freight railroad sub working group so that the LOSSAN corridor can speak with one voice on freight issues relevant to all member agencies, with a specific focus on Amtrak's federal statutory rights and how those rights can be more effectively leveraged across the corridor and statewide.** (Page 16) – RCTC agrees there should be greater coordination between the region, state, and host railroads. However, RCTC urges thoughtful development of the strategy for host railroad liaison and negotiators roles. Specifically, passenger rail rights holders must maintain the lead role in negotiations with a strong team approach supported by the state and regional agencies.

- **As noted in the background section of this report, the Working Group's deliberations unfolded against a backdrop of significant fiscal pressure across the corridor's three primary passenger operators. Decreases in ridership and revenues, coupled with expensive capital projects (with costs rising faster than inflation), have led to a near-term funding crisis for some systems. Without intervention, agencies risk cutting service to balance operating and capital budgets, a move that would undermine ridership, reliability, and public confidence, and lead to further budget, service and ridership reductions. Costs are rising due to a number of factors outside of typical transit agency control, from broader inflation, lack of control of underlying infrastructure, and land-use patterns. Looking ahead, broader rail and transit funding also faces risks tied to shifting economic conditions and the transition to zero-emission vehicles, underscoring the urgency of finding solutions that stabilize operations both now and in the future.** (Pages 17-18) – The financial stakes facing passenger rail operators described in the report cannot be overstated. Metrolink requires $35 million in state operating assistance to prevent substantial reductions in passenger rail service this fall and the Pacific Surfliner may face service cuts after augmentations to state operating subsidies lapse after 2028. RCTC believes that decisive state funding investments are required to stabilize the operational needs of passenger rail operators in the LOSSAN corridor to avoid service cuts and grow their respective operational and capital improvement capacity.

RCTC appreciates CalSTA and the respective members of the LOSSAN Rail Corridor Working Group for their work in developing this report, and the legislative convening role Senator Catherine Blakespear has played, and looks forward to working collaboratively with each to strengthen the responsiveness of the LOSSAN corridor to the diverse mobility needs across southern California. Should you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me or Sheldon Peterson, Rail Manager, at (951) 787-7141.

Sincerely,

Aaron Hake
Executive Director