

RIVERSIDE COUNTY TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION	
DATE:	October 25, 2021
TO:	Budget and Implementation Committee
FROM:	Sheldon Peterson, Rail Manager
THROUGH:	Lorelle Moe-Luna, Multimodal Services Director
SUBJECT:	Coachella Valley-San Gorgonio Pass Rail Corridor Planning Study Update and Amendment to HDR Engineering Agreement

STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

This item is for the Committee to:

- 1) Approve Agreement No. 14-25-072-07, Amendment No. 7 to Agreement No. 14-25-072-00, with HDR Engineering (HDR) related to the Coachella Valley-San Gorgonio Pass Rail Corridor Service Planning Study for an additional amount of \$259,000, and a total amount not to exceed \$7,175,748;
- 2) Authorize the Executive Director, pursuant to legal counsel review, to finalize and execute the agreement on behalf of the Commission;
- 3) Approve the allocation of \$259,000 in State Transit Assistance (STA) Funds from Western Riverside County’s Commuter Rail Program for the Coachella Valley Rail Program (Program);
- 4) Approve adjustments to the Fiscal Year 2021/22 budget in the amounts of \$259,000 each to increase STA Fund–Western County Rail transfers out and Coachella Valley Rail Fund transfers in and professional services expenditures;
- 5) Amend the Commission’s FY 2021/22 Coachella Valley Rail Short-Range Transit Plan (SRTP);
- 6) Adopt Resolution No. 21-018, *“Resolution of the Riverside County Transportation Commission Approving the Allocation of State Transportation Improvement Program/Interregional Transportation Improvement Program Funding to Support the Coachella Valley San Gorgonio Pass Rail Corridor”*; and
- 7) Forward to the Commission for final action.

COACHELLA VALLEY – SAN GORGONIO PASS RAIL CORRIDOR SERVICE BACKGROUND

In October 2013, the Commission approved Resolution No. 13-042, *“Resolution of Support to Establish Daily Intercity Rail Service from Los Angeles to the Coachella Valley Via the Pass Area,”* in which the Commission committed to overseeing preparation of a Service Development Plan (SDP) in coordination with the Caltrans Division of Rail and Mass Transit and the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) as the next step toward establishing daily rail service between Los Angeles and the Coachella Valley.

In May 2014, following a competitive procurement process, the Commission awarded a contract to HDR to prepare a full SDP starting with an Alternatives Analysis (AA), followed by a SDP and program-level Environmental Impact Statement (EIS)/Environmental Impact Report (EIR).

In July 2016, the AA was completed and accepted by the Commission and FRA with the recommendation of a preferred route to be carried forward for analysis in a SDP and Tier 1 EIS/EIR. The preferred route, as shown in Figure 1 below, would run from Los Angeles Union Station, through Fullerton, Riverside, and the San Gorgonio Pass, to Indio or Coachella (Corridor), operating primarily over tracks owned by the BNSF Railway (BNSF) from Los Angeles to Colton, and tracks owned by the Union Pacific Railroad (UP) between Colton and Indio or Coachella. Included in the AA was a market analysis that identified a projected 47 percent increase in travel over the next 20 years between Los Angeles and Coachella Valley and a projected 23 percent population increase by 2035 for the four counties comprising the Corridor (Los Angeles, Orange, Riverside, and San Bernardino). Additionally, the analysis found that Coachella Valley is expected to double its population and the San Gorgonio Pass Area is projected to increase 134 percent by 2035.

Since the commencement of the EIS/EIR and SDP, public project scoping has been completed, a comprehensive operational model of the rail corridor has been developed, conceptual engineering and service operations plan have been completed, technical studies have been prepared to evaluate the impacts of implementing the service, the Draft Tier 1/Program EIS/EIR has been prepared and circulated for public review and comment, and the Draft SDP has been prepared. To date, the Commission has authorized a total of about \$6.9 million to conduct the study.

Figure 1: Proposed Coachella Valley – San Gorgonio Pass Rail Corridor



Project Status

Since the last project update to the Commission in May 2021, the Tier 1/Program Draft EIS/EIR was circulated for public review and comment from May 19, 2021 through July 6, 2021, and an extensive outreach program was undertaken to solicit input on the environmental document. The outreach effort included:

- Development of a 4-minute video which described how the Program could make it easier to travel through the congested traffic conditions in the Corridor;
- Development of a media toolkit that included resources for media outlets and other organizations to share information about the Program on their social media or websites; the toolkit included the Program video, Program Fact Sheets (in English and Spanish), Program Frequently Asked Questions (in English and Spanish), and the Program Logo;
- A press release on May 19 that provided background information on the Program, information about the methods for submitting comments, and a link to the media toolkit;
- Social media and website posts by stakeholder organizations and the news media included 25 social media posts and 14 newspaper articles and TV segments;
- Twelve display advertisements placed in print and online publications, featuring announcements about the availability of the Program EIS/EIR along with information about when the public hearings would be held;
- Email notifications were sent to an extensive database of project stakeholders, interested agencies and organizations;
- Social media postings that were developed and shared by the project outreach team from early May through July 6 to provide information about the EIS/EIR release and review, the project video, the public hearings, and the available methods for providing comments;
- Geographically focused digital advertising campaigns that were implemented to notify the public about the public comment period and the public hearings; these digital advertisements were viewed online 999,994 times on electronic devices;
- Briefings and presentations about the EIS/EIR and public comment opportunity that were made to the Program’s Technical Advisory Committee, elected officials, and nine stakeholder groups and agencies; and
- Virtual public meetings held on June 22 (Tuesday) and June 26 (Saturday).

A total of 294 comment letters were received during the 45-day public comment period, of which nine letters were received from public agencies, 15 letters were received from organizations, and 273 letters were received from individuals. Additionally, ten comment letters were received from individuals after the close of the Draft Tier 1/Program EIS/EIR public comment period (i.e., after July 6, 2021) for a grand total of 304, as shown in Table 1 below. Although FRA, Caltrans, and RCTC are not obligated to respond to comment letters received after the close of the formal comment review period, responses were developed for these late arriving comment letters as a courtesy. The number of comments received from agencies, organizations, and individuals indicates significant public interest and effective outreach efforts.

Table 1. Summary of Commenters and Affiliations on the Draft Tier 1/Program EIS/EIR

	Agencies	Organizations	Individuals	Total
Number of Comment Letters	9	15	280	304
Number of Comments Contained within Comment Letters	62	42	~400	~504

Percentage of Comment Letters that Expressed General Support for the Program	78%	73%	82%	82%
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Notes: Some comment letters received did not state a preference associated with support or opposition towards the Program.

According to the National Environmental Policy Act, federal agencies are required to identify and formally respond to all substantive public comments. A substantive comment does one or more of the following:

- Questions, with a reasonable basis, the accuracy of the information and/or analysis in the Draft Tier 1/Program EIS/EIR;
- Questions, with a reasonable basis, the adequacy of the information and/or analysis in the Draft Tier 1/Program EIS/EIR;
- Presents reasonable alternatives other than those presented in the Draft Tier 1/Program EIS/EIR that meet the purpose and need of the proposed action and addresses significant issues;
- Questions, with a reasonable basis, the merits of an alternative or alternatives;
- Causes changes in or revisions to the proposed action; and
- Questions, with a reasonable basis, the adequacy of the planning process itself.

Many of the comment letters included multiple comments, thus, within the 304 comment letters, a total of 504 comments were tallied requiring written responses. Many of the comments received were on the same topic or expressed similar concerns. Rather than repeat the same response to each of those comments, twelve “Master Responses” were prepared, each of which addresses broad topic areas and/or comment themes, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Summary of Master Responses

Master Response Number	Topic
1	Proposed Station Locations
2	Conceptual Nature of Build Alternative Option Components
3	Freight Train Volume Assumptions
4	Noise Quiet Zones
5	Wildlife Corridors
6	Train Trip Frequency
7	Train Trip Duration
8	Program Funding
9	Program Timing
10	Transit Connections
11	Locomotive Technology
12	Environmental Justice

The comments and responses have reached 315 pages are currently being reviewed by FRA and Caltrans. Upon completion of this review, the final environmental documents will be updated to include any necessary changes based on public comments. These final documents will then be provided to FRA and Caltrans for additional review and comments prior to the ultimate Record of Decision. The SDP draft has also been completed and is currently being reviewed by the FRA and Caltrans prior to being finalized.

To prepare for the Program's next steps, staff is actively pursuing several state and federal grant opportunities to secure funding for the Tier 2 environmental phase.

DISCUSSION

In order to complete this phase of the Program, an additional contract amendment with HDR is needed. The significant number of comments required a substantially greater amount of time and effort by the HDR team to prepare responses than is expected for a typical Tier 1/Program environmental document of this sort, and the process required several weeks to prepare responses and to review and refine the responses with RCTC and its legal team. In addition, the sheer volume of comments and responses is expected to require the HDR team to expend additional time and effort to respond to FRA comments and questions after it completes its review of the draft responses to comments.

Therefore, staff recommends the Commission approve Agreement No. 14-25-072-07 with HDR (Attachment 1) for additional services in the amount of \$259,000, which increases the total agreement authorization to \$7,175,748. Staff also recommends the Commission authorize the Executive Director, pursuant to legal counsel review, to finalize and execute the agreement on behalf of the Commission.

FISCAL IMPACT:

To fund the additional work to provide final responses to comments in the Tier 1 environmental document, staff recommends an allocation of \$259,000 in STA Funds from Western Riverside County's Commuter Rail Program as part of its contribution to the Program. With proposed stops in Riverside and the San Gorgonio Pass area, it is appropriate for Western Riverside County to contribute to the Program. In connection with this allocation, staff also recommends an amendment to the Commission's FY 2021/22 Coachella Valley Rail SRTP.

This additional work was not anticipated in the FY 2021/22 budget; therefore, staff recommends the Commission approve FY 2021/22 budget adjustments of \$259,000 each to increase State Transit Assistance Fund—Western County Rail transfers out and Coachella Valley Rail Fund transfers in and professional services expenditures.

In addition, it is requested that the Commission adopt Resolution No. 21-018 approving the allocation of State Transportation Improvement Program/Interregional Transportation Improvement Program funding to support the Coachella Valley San Gorgonio Pass Corridor. This

resolution is required to secure funding needed for the next phase of the Program moving into the Tier 2 environmental effort.

Financial Information					
In Fiscal Year Budget:	No	Year:	FY 2021/22	Amount:	\$259,000
Source of Funds:	State Transit Assistance			Budget Adjustment:	Yes
GL/Project Accounting No.:	<u>State Transit Assistance Fund–Western County Rail</u>				
	002204 97001 00000 0000 241 62 97001			\$259,000 (Transfers out)	
	<u>Coachella Valley Rail Fund</u>				
	004202 XXX 59001 0000 245 25 59001			\$259,000 (Transfers in)	
	004202 65520 00000 0000 245 25 65520			\$259,000 (Expenditures)	
Fiscal Procedures Approved:	<i>Sherida Trevino</i>			Date:	10/15/2021

Attachments:

- 1) Draft Amendment 14-25-072-07
- 2) FY 2021/22 SRTP Table 4 Amendment
- 3) Resolution No. 21-018