

SERRA SIDING EXTENSION PROJECT FAQs



GENERAL

1. What is Metrolink's SCORE Program?

The proposed project is part of Metrolink's Southern California Optimized Rail Expansion (SCORE) program, which will upgrade Metrolink's system in time for the 2028 Olympic and Paralympic Games. SCORE project improvements will include track additions and grade crossing, station, and signal improvements.

2. What is the Serra Siding Train Track Extension Project?

The Serra Siding Extension Project (Project) is proposing to extend the existing siding train track south by 1.2 miles from Victoria Boulevard to Beach Road in the City of Dana Point. The Project would build the infrastructure to enable regular and frequent passenger service every 30 minutes and increase reliability of the Metrolink system by reducing a choke point in south Orange County. This ultimately will reduce the potential for possible train delays and train idling.

The Project also proposes to:

- Maintain the existing railroad infrastructure in good repair by replacing wooden ties with concrete ties;
- Replace the more than 90-year-old single-track railroad bridge over Coast Highway with two new single-track bridges;
- Add fencing along Coast Highway; and
- Construct retaining walls.

3. What is the purpose of a siding track?

A siding track is a short, parallel track that allows for trains to pass each other. A siding track is not intended for parking or storing trains unless there is an emergency.

4. What are the Project benefits?

The Project is part of a broader, systemwide Metrolink transportation plan that offers local and regional benefits. The Project will help achieve Metrolink's mission of providing safe, efficient, and dependable services by linking riders to major employment centers in the region, while supporting economic growth and improving accessibility. Other key benefits include:

- Enhance Safety – Built in 1928, the aging Coast Highway railroad bridge would be replaced with a bridge infrastructure that utilizes updated engineering standards.
- Reduce Emissions – This Project would allow for more frequent and reliable passenger rail service, making it more advantageous for commuters to choose the train rather than personal cars. Metrolink provides an alternative to driving - 85% of weekday riders have an automobile but choose to take the train, which creates more space on the freeways and reduces vehicle emissions. This provides relief on Interstate 5 and Pacific Coast Highway, which are adjacent to the Orange County Line in Dana Point. With enhanced services, Tier 4 locomotives and zero-emission equipment, it is projected that 51.7 million metric tons of greenhouse gases would be reduced across Southern California over the next five decades.
- Support Strategic Planning Goals – Builds the infrastructure to accommodate increases in ridership due to projected growth in population and employment. Growth in these areas is cited in the [Southern California Association of Government's Connect Social Regional Transportation Plan](#) and the [LOSSAN Service Development Plan](#) and [Metrolink's Strategic Business Plan](#).

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- Creates Jobs – The Serra Siding Project, combined with other SCORE projects, will generate economic prosperity for Orange County and the region. An economic impact analysis was produced to assess the countywide impact of the investment of the SCORE Program, which projects 24,400 jobs and \$4.9 billion in gross domestic product by 2028 and 396,300 jobs and \$173 billion in gross domestic product by 2050. This is due to growth in construction employment and an increase in regional labor access, which results in labor income and strengthening of regional economic output. Access the [full report](#).

5. What assessment or other detailed studies were performed that demonstrate the need for the Project? How do we obtain copies of those documents? Metrolink ridership data indicates that prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Orange County Line grew faster than the rest of the system.

The Serra Siding Extension Project is part of Metrolink’s SCORE Program. SCORE and the Serra Siding Extension Project are referenced in the state and regional studies listed below and provide a path toward greater long-term access, mobility and sustainability.

- a. [LOSSAN Service Development Plan](#): The 2013 Los Angeles – San Diego – San Luis Obispo Rail Corridor (LOSSAN) identified the Project as a valid, long-term (projects completed between 2021-2040) rail improvement project to enhance safety and provide a more reliable, competitive, and attractive intercity travel option for the Pacific Surfliner South Corridor. On page 9-16 of the report: the Project would mitigate potential delays and allow trains to pass each other on parallel tracks in South and North Orange County, rather than holding for opposing trains.
- b. [CalSTA TIRCP Awards](#): Metrolink was awarded \$763.7 million in Transit and Intercity Rail Capital Program (TIRCP) funds in 2018 for the SCORE Program. Page 6 indicates that grant funds are committed for projects such as the Serra Siding Extension Project to deliver more frequent, more reliable rail services throughout Southern California, as well as significantly invest in improving frequency and performance of rail services to Orange County.

TIRCP was created to fund capital improvements that modernize California’s intercity rail and rail transit systems to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, expand and improve transit service to increase ridership, integrate rail service, and improve transit safety.

- c. [California State Rail Plan](#): The SCORE Program aligns with the State Rail Plan’s service goal of achieving 30-minute service frequency. The Rail Plan identifies a service goal and improvement to introduce initial integrated service, featuring half hour local service for LOSSAN South, the corridor between Los Angeles and San Diego (pages 143, 153, and 165 of the Rail Plan).

The California State Rail Plan establishes a long-range vision for prioritizing state investment in rail infrastructure. The Rail Plan was developed by Caltrans with extensive input from stakeholders, approved by the California State Transportation Agency and accepted by the Federal Railroad Administration.

- d. [SCAG’s Connect SoCal: 2020-2045 Regional Transportation Plan \(RTP\)/Sustainable Communities Strategy \(SCS\)](#): The SCORE Program aligns with the Southern California Association of Governments’ (SCAG) Connect SoCal’s goals and strategies referenced on pages 9 and 67. The



Project's purpose is to improve safety, enable more frequent service and provide increased service reliability, which are objectives that are consistent with SCAG's RTP.

6. How was the location determined for a siding track in south county?

The segment of railroad spanning from Dana Point to the Orange/San Diego County border is currently single track, which is an operational choke point for passenger trains needing to pass in opposite directions, resulting in passenger train delays and limiting opportunities to expand passenger rail service along this rail corridor. The section of railroad from Victoria Boulevard to Beach Road was identified as a prime location where both Metrolink and Amtrak trains come together in opposite directions. Thus, to keep trains moving efficiently through this segment, reduce train idling and delays and allow for future passenger rail expansion, the proposed siding extension is being analyzed.

7. Are project alternatives being considered?

Yes. Project alternatives, including alternate locations for a siding track, will be considered during the development of the Environmental Impact Report. In addition, a "No Project" alternative is an option that will study the impacts if the Project is not built. Findings will be available in the Draft Environmental Impact Report, which is expected to be released in early 2022.

8. Is the pedestrian overcrossing at Coast Highway part of this Project?

No. The Coast Highway Bikeway and Pedestrian Bridge at Capistrano Beach is a County of Orange Public Works project. For more information, contact the County of Orange at 714-667-8800.

9. How will the Project impact erosion that is happening along the coast? What is the correlation between OCTA's Climate Study and the Serra Siding Project?

Erosion is one of the areas that will be studied as part of the Environmental Impact Report. Findings will be available in the Draft Environmental Impact Report, which is expected to be released in early 2022.

The OCTA's Rail Infrastructure Study/ Defense Against Climate Change Plan, completed in January 2021, was a study assessing how future climate change affects the Orange County rail corridor. The study focused on the approximately 25-mile section of railway from Jeffrey Road in Irvine to the Orange/San Diego County border and evaluated all twelve Metrolink Stations in Orange County. The purpose of the study was to understand future climate-related risk to the rail system to identify strategies to help mitigate these risks and preserve the continuity of rail service into the future.

Pages 34–74 of the [study](#) provide information regarding erosion and flood risks along the coastal alignment in the cities of Dana Point and San Clemente, as well as mitigation recommendations. The Study does not address erosion impacts specific to the Serra Siding Extension Project. Rather, the Study states that erosion and other risk factors should be studied during a project's environmental process as noted on page 16, such as the one being proposed for Serra Siding Extension Project.

10. How will the Project impact future access or connectivity projects?

The Project will enable connectivity and active transportation projects led by Caltrans and the City of Dana Point. Should construction for the Serra Siding Extension Project and city projects occur concurrently, coordination between Metrolink and the City will be needed to ensure projects can be constructed in a safe and efficient manner while minimizing any impacts and disruptions.

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Construction impacts, methods and staging are finalized during the final design phase of a project. This will consider all elements of the project such as design, local access requirement, traffic management, construction staging, and any other potential impacts.

11. What is the Project schedule?

The Project is in the environmental and preliminary design phase. The environmental and preliminary design phase is anticipated to be completed in mid-2022, with the release of the Final Environmental Impact Report for public review and comment. If the project clears environmental, final design is expected to begin and is anticipated to be completed in mid-2023. Construction would be tentatively slated to begin in early 2025 and take approximately 24 months.

12. Who is planning the Project?

Metrolink is the lead agency overseeing the environmental, design and construction of the Project. Metrolink maintains and operates the Metrolink passenger rail system.

Orange County Transportation Authority (OCTA) is leading right of way (property acquisition) and public outreach. OCTA is a member of the joint powers authority that governs Metrolink and owns the railroad right of way in Orange County and is the management agency for the Amtrak passenger rail service that also operates on this segment of railroad.

OPERATIONS

13. How will construction affect the Quiet Zone?

A quiet zone is a designated segment of track where routine sounding of train horns while approaching public crossings is not required. The quiet zone designation will remain in effect in this area. However, there is expected to be an increase in the sounding of train horns because according to Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) guidelines, all trains are required to sound their horns when railroad workers are present, in emergency situations, or when trespassers are present on rail right of way. This federal mandate applies to construction zones. As a result, for the safety of construction workers, train crews, and passengers, train horns will sound when they pass through the area and construction is actively occurring.

14. Will a train station be considered as part of the Project?

No. A train station will not be considered as part of the Serra Siding Extension Project. As approved in OCTA's FY 2021-2022 budget, OCTA will conduct a "South County Rail Access Study" to look at the feasibility of train station locations for the rail system in South Orange County. The schedule is yet to be determined.

15. Will train speeds increase?

Passenger trains will continue to travel at 45 to 90 mph and freight at 40 to 55 mph on the *main* track, while passenger trains will travel at 45 mph and freight at 40 mph on the *siding* track.

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16. How many passenger trains run through Dana Point and Orange County daily? Is train frequency expected to increase with the new siding and what are those increases?

Pre-pandemic March 2020 data:

- 43 passenger trains run daily through Dana Point
- 70 passenger trains run daily through Orange County

The Project will build the infrastructure and enable safety enhancements to accommodate additional passenger service should the need arise.

17. Is there Metrolink ridership data available pre- and post- pandemic, as well as forecasted ridership through Orange County?

Yes. The following graph provides ridership data, particularly around the COVID-19 pandemic for Metrolink and Amtrak:

Year	Metrolink Ridership*	Amtrak Ridership*	Total	Year	Metrolink Ridership*	Amtrak Ridership*	Total
2020	1.31M	2.08M	3.39M	2013	3.5M	2.69M	6.19M
2019	4.21M	2.78M	6.99M	2012	3.32M	2.66M	5.98M
2018	3.35M	3.0M	6.35M	2011	2.99M	2.75M	5.74M
2017	3.41M	2.97M	6.38M	2010	2.82M	2.61M	5.43M
2016	3.39M	2.89M	6.28M	2009	2.95M	2.70M	5.65M
2015	3.56M	2.80M	6.36M	2008	3.27M	2.83M	6.10M
2014	3.58M	2.67M	6.25M	2007	2.96M	2.69M	5.65M

*Approximate ridership
2020: COVID-19 Pandemic

Ridership was at its peak with approximately 6.99 million annual boardings in 2019 on the OC and IEOC lines and drastically declined during the pandemic. Metrolink expects both its and Amtrak’s ridership to rebound as economic and recreational activities continue to increase throughout the state, resulting in greater ridership numbers in future years.

In February 2021, Metrolink surveyed 10,000 people across the region. Survey results show 85% of lapsed riders are likely to ride again; 75% of current riders self-identify as essential workers, 74% take Metrolink to commute to work, and 25% of current riders visit friends and family. Metrolink is beginning to see ridership recovery as people return to working in-person. Metrolink’s COVID recovery plan projects that ridership will return to pre-COVID-19 figures by 2024.

19. What is the Project cost?

The estimated Project cost is approximately \$50 million and is based on preliminary design. The cost will be refined as the design is further developed, and cost-saving opportunities will be sought throughout.

The 93-year-old railroad bridge spanning the Coast Highway is a vital access point into Dana Point and has been identified for replacement due to safety and repair needs. Approximately 70% of the estimated Project cost is related to replacement of this bridge in addition to other safety enhancements, including fencing and track rehabilitation. The railroad bridge needs to be replaced regardless of the Serra Siding Extension Project.



20. How will the Project be funded?

The Project is part of the Metrolink SCORE Program and is funded by state (SB 1) funds and Cap and Trade dollars. Metrolink was awarded \$763.7 million in Transit and Intercity Rail Capital Program (TIRCP) funds in 2018 for SCORE Programs and for projects identified to deliver more frequent, more reliable rail services throughout Southern California.

ENVIRONMENTAL

21. What is CEQA?

The California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) is a statute passed in 1970 that requires state and local agencies to inform decision makers and the public about potential environmental impacts of a proposed project and to reduce those environmental impacts to the extent feasible. If the project may cause adverse environmental impacts, the public agency must prepare a more detailed study called an Environmental Impact Report (EIR). An EIR contains in-depth studies of potential impacts, measures to reduce or avoid those impacts, and an analysis of alternatives to the project. A key feature of the CEQA process is the opportunity for the public to review and provide input on the environmental document.

22. What is a Notice of Preparation (NOP)?

An NOP informs public agencies and the public of Metrolink's intent to prepare a DEIR and hold a public scoping meeting. The NOP contains a description of the project, its location and where documents related to the project can be found. It also notifies responsible agencies and other interested parties that a DEIR will be prepared. The NOP was released on Feb. 8, 2021 and is available on Metrolink's website at www.metrolinktrains.com/score.

23. What is an Environmental Impact Report?

An Environmental Impact Report (EIR) informs the public and public agency decision-makers of significant environmental effects of a proposed project. It includes technical studies, methods to mitigate potential impacts and reasonable alternatives to the proposed project. EIRs are prepared by public agencies in accordance with CEQA and include a public review and feedback component.

24. What is the Draft Environmental Impact Report?

A Draft Environmental Impact Report (DEIR) is a technical analysis and public disclosure of potential impacts of the proposed Project. The report also recommends mitigation measures to reduce impacts, where possible. The study will evaluate the areas listed below. The DEIR is anticipated to be available to the public for review and comment in early 2022.

Aesthetics
Biological Resources
Geology, Soils and Paleontological Resources
Noise and Vibration
Population and Housing
Parks and Recreation
Utility and Service Systems
Growth-Inducing Effects

Air Quality, Greenhouse Gases and Energy
Cultural Resources
Hazards and Hazardous Materials
Hydrology, Flooding and Water Quality
Public Services
Transportation and Traffic
Cumulative Impacts



25. How do I submit comments about the Project?

The comment period for the public to submit comments on the Notice of Preparation was open from Feb. 8 to July 31, 2021 and is now closed. The public will have an opportunity to provide comments on the Draft Environmental Impact Report (DEIR) in early 2022.

26. How will my comments be used?

Comments made during the scoping period will be carefully considered as technical studies and the DEIR are developed. Once the DEIR is completed, the public will be invited to review and comment on the DEIR. Comments made on the DEIR will be reviewed and addressed by the project team in the Final EIR. A record of comments and responses will be included in the Final EIR.

PROJECT OUTREACH

27. What opportunities are available for the public to be involved in the environmental review process?

Communities within the project area and interested stakeholders are notified of milestones throughout the project, such as the start of the scoping period, release of the DEIR and release of the Final EIR. A virtual public scoping meeting was held on Feb. 24, 2021. Upon the release of the DEIR, the public will have an opportunity to review this document and participate in a public meeting to learn more about the project, as well as the proposed impacts and mitigation measures.

28. How can I stay informed?

- Visit octa.net/SerraSiding and sign up for email alerts under the “Stay Connected” tab
- Call the project hotline at 800-724-0353
- Email the project team at SerraSiding@octa.net