Visual Resources Technical Memorandum

Los Angeles – San Diego – San Luis Obispo
Central Coast Layover Facility Project

San Luis Obispo, California

November 2021

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Table of Contents

Figures

Acronyms

Caltrans	California Department of Transportation
CEQA	California Environmental Quality Act
FHWA	Federal Highway Administration
KOP	Key Observation Points
LOSSAN	Los Angeles – San Diego – San Luis Obispo
MOW	Maintenance of Way
Project	Central Coast Layover Facility Project
ROW	right-of-way

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1 Introduction

The Los Angeles – San Diego – San Luis Obispo (LOSSAN) Rail Corridor Agency is proposing the relocation and expansion of the existing Pacific Surfliner layover facility located at the northern end of the LOSSAN rail corridor in San Luis Obispo, California. The proposed Central Coast Layover Facility Project (Project) would increase overnight layover and storage capacity to support the service goals and objectives outlined for the Pacific Surfliner in both the 2018 California State Rail Plan (State Rail Plan) and the LOSSAN Rail Corridor Agency's Fiscal Year 2019-20 and 2020-21 Business Plan (Business Plan).

The purpose of this memorandum is to describe the potential impacts that the proposed Project would have on the exiting baseline visual and aesthetic resources.

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2 Project Description

2.1 Project Overview

Currently, one Pacific Surfliner train overnights each day in San Luis Obispo for an early morning departure the following day. Both the State Rail Plan and the LOSSAN Rail Corridor Agency Business Plan identify growth in the service levels of the Pacific Surfliner to San Luis Obispo. As currently configured, the existing single-track facility does not have the capacity to accommodate any growth in service levels beyond the current service. The proposed Central Coast Layover Facility Project will facilitate the maintenance of equipment at the northern terminus of the LOSSAN rail corridor. It will allow additional passenger trains to be maintained, serviced and stored in San Luis Obispo overnight with no impact to the operations of Union Pacific, allowing a second, more convenient, morning departure from San Luis Obispo, subject to Union Pacific approval of the proposed schedule. It will also provide for the opportunity to store and service additional train sets used for further expansion of the Service.

2.2 Project Location

The Project site is located on approximately 13 acres of relatively undeveloped land in the City of San Luis Obispo, which is situated along the Central Coast region of California, approximately 190 miles north of Los Angeles (Figure 1). The existing Pacific Surfliner layover facility is located directly across from the San Luis Obispo Amtrak Station, located at 1011 Railroad Avenue. The Project site is located approximately 0.3-mile south of the San Luis Obispo Amtrak Station. The Project site extends from south of the San Luis Obispo Railroad Museum's parking lot to east of Lawrence Drive. The Project site is between the Union Pacific Main Tracks and existing commercial and residential development to the west.

As shown on Figure 2, the Project site is located entirely within the City of San Luis Obispo's Railroad Historic District (District). The District boundary covers approximately one-half square mile and extends along the railroad right-of-way (ROW) for a distance of about 1.7 miles in roughly a north-south axis. The District includes the original railroad yard, plus residential and commercial-zoned property on the west side of the railroad ROW (City of San Luis Obispo Community Development Department 1998).

The Project site (Figure 3) includes the Roundhouse Site, which previously contained a railroad house used for maintenance and storage of steam locomotives. The last locomotives left the roundhouse in 1956 and within three years the structure was demolished with only the foundation and turntable remaining. In 1971, the depot surrounding the roundhouse was demolished, and in 1994, the turn table was removed. All that remains of the original roundhouse are the degraded concrete and stone foundations and a portion of the housing for the turntable.

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Figure 1. Regional Location

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Figure 2. Project Site

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2.3 Project Components

The proposed Project includes the construction of a new rail yard, storage and servicing tracks, operations and maintenance buildings, landscape improvements, and safety and security features. Perimeter fencing would be installed around the facility for site security and public safety.

2.3.1 Rail Yard and Tracks

The proposed Project would construct a new rail yard with up to five new tracks, with Track 1 positioned as the westernmost track and Track 5 positioned as the easternmost track.

- Track 1 – Bypass and wash track with train wash building
- Track 2 – Storage track with service and inspection (S&I) position
- Track 3 – Storage track
- Track 4 – Storage track
- Track 5 – Storage track

Trains would enter the site from the mainline switch at the north end of the site, passing through the Train Wash on Track 1. Trains would travel south, passing the train wash building onto the tail track and then reverse direction into either S&I position or to one of the other storage tracks. Upon reaching the S&I position or a storage track, the trains would park for the night, connecting to ground power to allow for the electric functions of the train to continue and connecting to a yard air compressor to keep the brake system charged. These connections allow for continuity of these functions without the locomotive engine running, minimizing engine idling within the facility.

From the S&I or storage positions, daily servicing and light maintenance can occur. Trains stored on the S&I track would also undergo additional safety, operational and reliability inspections.

Trains would exit the facility north toward the San Luis Obispo station at intervals based on the approved and published service schedules.

2.3.2 Buildings

The proposed Central Coast Layover Facility would consist of a series of single-story structures housing a variety of functions including office space, storage space, workshops, train wash, train S&I and wheel truing.

Operations/Fleet Maintenance Building. The Operations Building would be an approximately 3,000 square foot one-story building, which would house administrative offices and restrooms for operations and maintenance staff.

Fleet Maintenance Shops Building. The Fleet Maintenance Shops Building would be a one-story building and approximately 2,900 square feet, and would house a welding/fabrication shop, brake and coupler shop, and toolbox storage.

Parts Storeroom Building. The Parts Storeroom Building would be a one-story building, approximately 1,500 square feet, located adjacent to the Fleet Maintenance Shops Building and Maintenance of Way Building. This building would store components and parts that are required on a frequent basis to support maintenance activities, and would include a dedicated secure area for shipping, receiving and storage.

Maintenance of Way (MOW) Building. The MOW Building would be a one-story building, approximately 2,200 square feet, located adjacent to the Parts Storeroom Building. MOW is responsible for inspection and maintenance of track, roadbed, and buildings. MOW is also responsible for inspection and maintenance of non-revenue vehicles assigned to the Central Coast Layover Facility.

Wash Building. The Wash Building would be a 9-10,000 square foot one-story building, located at the center of the Project site on Track 1. An automatic, drive-through train wash would be enclosed in the Wash Building. As described above, trains entering the maintenance facility would pass through the Train Wash Building for cleaning prior to being placed on one of the storage tracks.

The train wash would operate 7 days per week. Each train arriving at the facility at the end of its service day will enter through the wash, requiring it to run for about 5-10 minutes for each train. The timing of the train wash operation will depend on the approved and published service schedule and would likely be during the evening hours.

Wheel Truing Building. The Wheel Truing Building would be a one-story building, approximately 1,900 square feet in size and located at the north end of the Project site adjacent to the San Luis Obispo Railroad Museum parking lot. The Wheel Truing Building would house an underfloor pit-mounted wheel truing machine. Use of this facility is anticipated to be infrequent and not part of the daily operation.

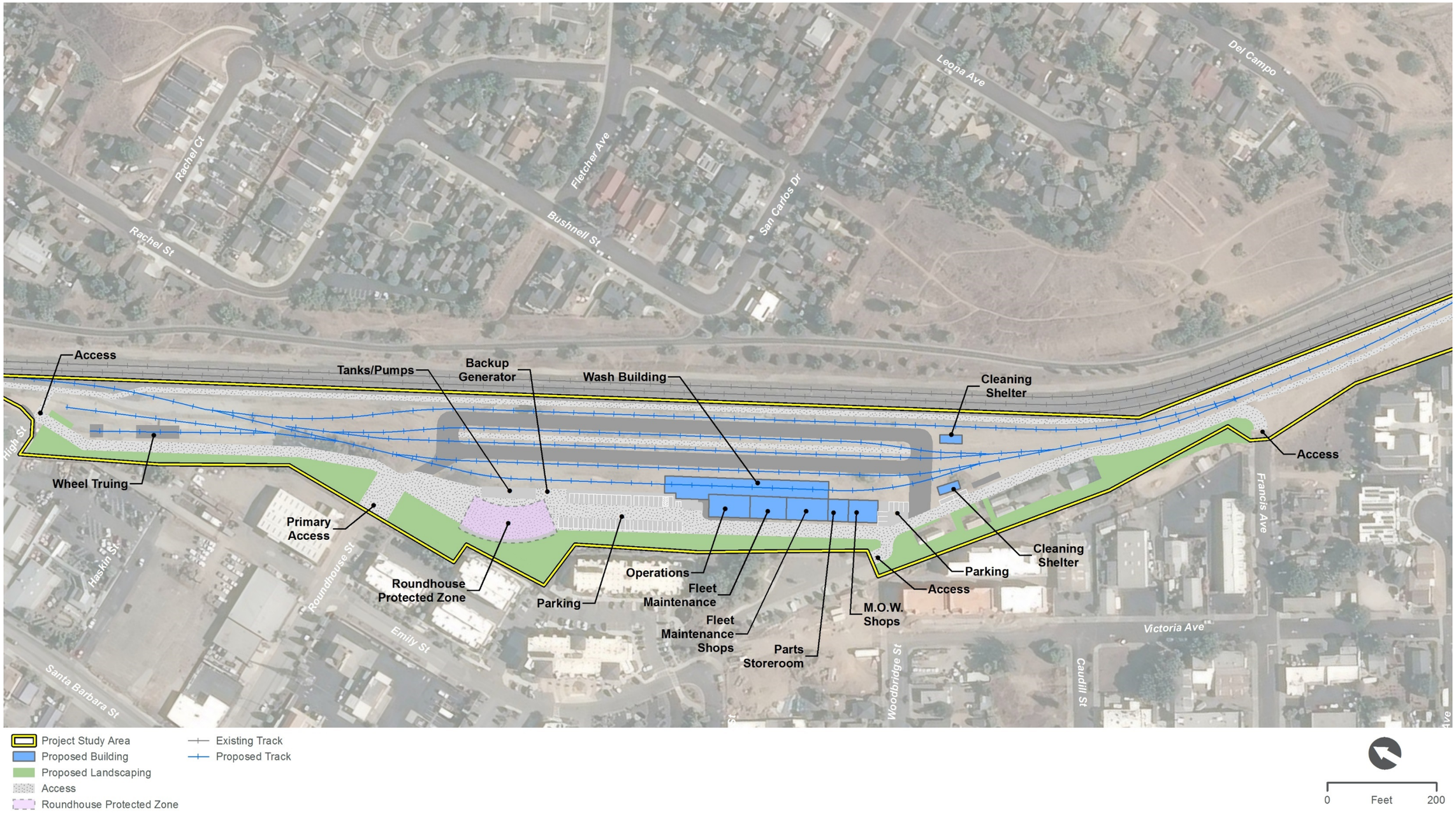
2.3.3 Service and Inspection Shelter

Track 2 would function as a storage track with an S&I position. The S&I track would be covered by a 24' high shelter. To provide access to the underside of a train for inspection and maintenance, a lower-level work area or gauge pit would be installed.

2.3.4 Cleaning Shelters

Two cleaning shelters would be provided south of the Wash Building and storage tracks.

Figure 3. Site Plan



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2.3.5 Access

Primary employee and visitor access to the site would be from Roundhouse Avenue. Additional emergency access to the site would be available from the train museum parking lot (north end of site), from the parking lot off Alphonso Street (center of site), and from Francis Avenue (south end of site).

2.3.6 Parking

The proposed Project would provide a total of 54 on-site parking spaces for employees and visitors. Most of the parking spaces would be located on the west end of the central yard in between the Roundhouse Site and Operations building. The other parking spaces would be located adjacent to the MOW Shops building.

2.3.7 Landscape Plan

The proposed Project would install landscaping to buffer maintenance and servicing operations from adjacent neighboring residential and recreational uses. The Project's plant palette will be comprised of species native or fully adapted to San Luis Obispo's climate. The list of species will draw from the San Luis Obispo County-Approved Plant List and the Calscape, or California Native Plant Society, database of plants native to the area. Species will be selected to be relatively low maintenance, have minimal leaf litter, and be non-fruiting so as not to attract vectors or birds.

East Landscape Buffer

Single-family residences overlook the east edge of the Project site, with views toward the hills of the surrounding regional open space west of the city. A Class I bike trail traverses the Historic Railroad District, connecting to regional trails and other San Luis Obispo recreation sites.

Landscape material for the east buffer will be congruent with the existing plant palette – a diverse mix of native/adaptive species consistent with the California chaparral and foothill meadow plant communities. The main objective in enhancing the landscape buffer at the east edge is to frame views over the existing rail yard toward the distant hills, screening the Project site and its enhanced maintenance operations.

West Landscape Buffer and Class I Bike Trail

Multi-family condominiums and apartments are located adjacent to the Project site's western edge. The majority of the on-site landscape buffer area is to be established between the proposed rail improvements and maintenance program elements and these adjacent residences.

Additionally, a new segment of Class I bike trail, from approximately McMillan Avenue to the Amtrak Station, is identified in the City of San Luis Obispo's Active Transportation Plan's Tier 3 Project List as a future Class I trail connecting existing Class I, II, and III segments to comprise the Railroad Safety Trail. This portion is approximately 0.84 miles of new Class I trail. Should project conditions, land use, and ROW alignments allow, the proposed project would construct a portion of the new segment of Class I bike trail, from approximately High Street to Francis Street.

The bike path would meander slightly through the landscape buffer, providing users distance from the rail yard operations and limiting the impact of trail activity noise on the adjacent residential communities. This new connection would provide largely protected bike and pedestrian trail access from the Old Town Historic District through the Railroad Historic District, from the San Luis Obispo

Railroad Museum, past the rail yard at Project site, and back into the urban fabric of housing and light commercial use.

2.3.8 Roundhouse Protected Zone

The new segment of Class I bike trail presents the opportunity to facilitate public view of the historic site of the Southern Pacific Railroad roundhouse, where the structure's remnant foundation remains visible. Hosting the last steam locomotive in 1956, the roundhouse was demolished in 1959, with the train depot following in 1971, and finally, the turntable in 1994. The unique historic relevance of the roundhouse continues the rail history narrative set by the Railroad Museum to the north and reinforces the area's designation as the Railroad Historic District.

The Project's program elements would be arranged to avoid significant impact to the roundhouse footing, preserving as much exposed surface for view as possible. The proposed Project would install a transparent perimeter fence along the southwest edge of the roundhouse, where bench seating and interpretive signage will be sited to create an informational node along the active transportation corridor.

2.3.9 Site Security

The site perimeter would be secured with an 8-foot transparent anti-climb fence. Motorized vehicular gates would be provided at all egress/ingress points. Video surveillance cameras would also be installed along the perimeter of the site.

2.3.10 Phasing

Funding is currently not available to construct the entire facility at once. Instead, a phased construction approach is intended, constructing an initial portion of the facility which includes the most immediately needed elements, and adding the remaining components as the need arises and additional funding becomes available. The following sections identify the components that would be constructed under Phase 1 and later phases of the proposed project.

Phase 1

Phase 1 intends to meet or exceed the functionality of the existing layover facility and add layover capacity for at least one additional train. This initial phase would include landscaping and trail enhancements around the Phase 1 footprint as well as water quality improvements and underground utility services to serve the ultimate facility. Phase 1 would include the following project components:

- North portions of West Landscape Buffer, 30 feet with pedestrian/bike path, 20-foot minimum setback plus 10 feet
- East Landscape Buffer, green space enhancement wrapping the existing bike path north-to-south
- Upper Yard/Lower Yard site improvements including:
    - Civil topography, grading, drainage, stormwater utilities
    - North-to-south 20-foot access drive, yard paving and service roads
    - Improvements at "Roundhouse Protected Zone"

  - Yard perimeter fencing and gates at access points - one (1) main entry at Roundhouse Street (north end of Central Yard); three (3) emergency access points (north and south end of site, south end of Central Yard); fencing only around yard body
  - All railroad maintenance roads and mainline east / west perimeter fencing; yard paving and site access roads
  - Trackside shelters and services including waste / recycling enclosure
- Temporary portable buildings for essential work functions
- 1 S&I Position, gage pit with canopy
- 2 storage tracks, including S&I track
- Yard / Exterior Area site improvements including partial build-out of parking and driveway

Later Phases

Later phases would include the remaining Master Plan components as dictated by operational needs and as allowed by available funding. Initially this would focus on all items identified as essential components of the ultimate facility, followed later by those features that would expand overall capacity of the facility, as well as enhance operations and efficiency, but which are not immediately mandatory. The following project components could be constructed on the project site based on operational needs and available funding:

- Remaining portions of West Landscape Buffer, 30 feet with pedestrian/bike path, 20-foot minimum setback plus 10 feet
- Yard/Exterior Area site improvements remaining from Phase 1 including parking, driveway, laydown and enclosed yard areas, emergency generator
- 1 wash track with Train Wash Building foundation and pit / infrastructure
- 1 south tail track and connection
- 3 locomotive storage tracks, including 1 extended-length storage track
- Facility Structures (core/shell, interior build-out, equipment installation)
  - Operations (administration)
  - Fleet Maintenance
  - Fleet Maintenance Shops
  - Parts storeroom
  - MOW Shops foundation/pad
  - Train Wash Building, structure/wash arch/canopy
  - Wheel Truing Building and Support Areas
  - Fueling structure and arch
- Wheel Truing Building trackwork and switch
- Retaining wall and grading to support wheel truing building and trackwork

2.4 Construction

As described above, funding is currently not available to construct the entire facility at once. Therefore, a phased construction approach is intended, constructing the Phase 1 project components first, and adding the remaining components as the need arises and additional funding becomes available. The following sections provide details regarding the project timeline and construction process.

2.4.1 Phase 1

Project construction for Phase 1 would begin as early as April 2024 and last for approximately 19 months. The work would begin with ground improvements to prepare the site for construction of buildings. Once the buildings are constructed the tracks would be installed. Construction may involve multiple crews working simultaneously and would include equipment such as track stabilizers, excavators, front-end loaders, rubber-tired dozers, cranes, haul trucks, and water trucks.

A summary of the construction activities associated with Phase 1 is provided below:

- Demolition and Rough Grading
- Utility Relocations
- West/East Landscape Buffer and Bike Path
- Access Drive, yard paving and service roads
- Fencing
- S&I Position, gage pit with canopy
- Storage track and 2 turnouts
- Exterior parking and driveway

2.4.2 Later Phases

Project construction for the later phases would be approximately 16 months in duration. Mobilization and demobilization time would add to the duration for later phases depending on how they end up being broken out, though breaking the remaining work into smaller phases would reduce the magnitude of impact for each smaller phase. A summary of the construction activities associated with later phases is provided below:

- West/East landscape buffer and bike path
- Exterior parking and driveway
- Track construction and 10 turnouts
- Operations building
- Fleet maintenance building
- Parts storeroom
- MOW shops foundation/pad
- Train wash building
- Wheel truing building

- Retaining wall
- Fueling structure

Construction Staging and Access

Material and equipment imports and construction personnel would access the Project study area via walking points from the nearest fence access or staging area. Most construction equipment would be brought to the project site at the beginning of the construction process during construction mobilization and would remain on-site throughout the duration of the construction activities for which they were needed.

Construction activities would be scheduled during time frames that allow for exclusive track occupancy by construction crews to minimize effects on LOSSAN operations. To the greatest extent possible, construction activities would be scheduled during the daytime. No weekend work is anticipated.

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3 Regulatory Background

3.1 Federal

No federal plans, policies, regulations, or laws related to aesthetics or light and glare are applicable to the project.

3.2 State

3.2.1 California Scenic Highway Program

California's Scenic Highway Program was created by the California Legislature in 1963 and is managed by the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans). The goal of this program is to preserve and protect scenic highway corridors from changes that would affect the aesthetic value of the land adjacent to highways. A highway may be designated "scenic" depending on how much of the natural landscape travelers can see, the scenic quality of the landscape, and the extent to which development intrudes on travelers' enjoyment of the view.

3.3 Local

Pursuant to Government Code Section 14070.7, the LOSSAN Rail Corridor Agency is deemed to be an agency of the state for all purposes related to interagency passenger rail services, including Section 5311 of Title 49 of the United States Code. Thus, the LOSSAN Rail Corridor Agency is a state agency and is therefore not subject to local government planning and land use plans, policies, or regulations. The LOSSAN Rail Corridor Agency may consider, for informational purposes, aspects of local plans and policies for the communities surrounding the Project site, when it is appropriate. The proposed Project would be subject to state and federal agency planning documents described herein but would not be bound by local planning regulations or documents such as the City's General Plan or municipal code.

3.3.1 City of San Luis Obispo General Plan

The City of San Luis Obispo General Plan Conservation and Open Space Element includes the following policies related to views and scenic resources.

- **Policy 9.1.2: Urban Development.** The City will implement the following principle and will encourage other agencies with jurisdiction to do so: urban development should reflect its architectural context. This does not necessarily prescribe a specific style, but requires deliberate design choices that acknowledge human scale, natural site features, and neighboring urban development, and that are compatible with historical and architectural resources. Plans for sub-areas of the city may require certain architectural styles.
- **9.1.5 View Protection in New Development.** The City will include in all environmental review and carefully consider effects of new development, streets and road construction on views and visual quality by applying the Community Design Guidelines, height restrictions, hillside standards, Historical Preservation Program Guidelines and the California Environmental Quality Act and Guidelines.

- **9.2.1 Views to and from Public Places, Including Scenic Roadways.** The City will preserve and improve views of important scenic resources from public places, and encourage other agencies with jurisdiction to do so. Public places include parks, plazas, the grounds of civic buildings, streets and roads, and publicly accessible open space. In particular, the route segments shown in Figure 11 [of the General Plan] are designated as scenic roadways.

  A. Development projects shall not wall off scenic roadways and block views.

  B. Utilities, traffic signals, and public and private signs and lights shall not intrude on or clutter views, consistent with safety needs.

  C. Where important vistas of distant landscape features occur along streets, street trees shall be clustered to facilitate viewing of the distant features.

  D. Development projects, including signs, in the viewshed of a scenic roadway shall be considered "sensitive" and require architectural review.

- **9.2.2 Views to and from Private Development.** Projects should incorporate as amenities views from and within private development sites. Private development designs should cause the least view blockage for neighboring property that allows project objectives to be met.

- **9.2.3 Outdoor Lighting.** Outdoor lighting shall avoid operating at unnecessary locations, levels, and times; spillage to areas not needing or wanting illumination; glare (intense line-of-site contrast); and frequencies (colors) that interfere with astronomical viewing.

3.3.2 City of San Luis Obispo Municipal Code

Section 17.70.100: Lighting and Night Sky Preservation

These outdoor lighting regulations are intended to encourage lighting practices and systems that will: permit reasonable uses of outdoor lighting for nighttime safety, utility, security, and enjoyment while preserving the ambience of night; curtail and reverse any degradation of the nighttime visual environment and the night sky; minimize glare and obtrusive light by limiting outdoor lighting that is misdirected, excessive, or unnecessary; help protect the natural environment from the damaging effects of night lighting; and meet the minimum requirements of the California Code of Regulations for Outdoor Lighting and Signs (Title 24, Chapter 6).

3.3.3 City of San Luis Obispo Community Design Guidelines

These guidelines were adopted by Council Resolution Number 9391 (2002 Series) and updated in 2004, 2007, and 2010. They establish site and architectural design standards for development projects, including projects involving historic resources and historic districts, and demolitions.

3.3.4 City of San Luis Obispo Railroad District Plan

The Project site is located entirely within the City of San Luis Obispo's Railroad Historic District. The District boundary covers approximately one-half square mile and extends along the railroad ROW for a distance of about 1.7 miles in roughly a north-south axis. The District includes the original railroad yard, plus residential and commercial-zoned property on the west side of the railroad right-of-way.

The Railroad District Plan is an area plan adopted by the City to implement the General Plan. The purposes of the Railroad District Plan are to:

1. Implement the City's General Plan with a detailed focus on the Railroad District;
2. Develop a community consensus on an overall vision for the railroad area;
3. Coordinate public and private investment in the area to realize the vision;
4. Preserve the District's historic character with architectural standards which guide new development.

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4 Existing Conditions

4.1 Scenic Vistas

A scenic vista is generally defined as a high-quality view displaying good aesthetic and compositional values that can be seen from public viewpoints. The term “vista” generally implies an expansive view, usually from an elevated point or open area.

The Project site is not designated as a scenic vista by the City of San Luis Obispo General Plan (City of San Luis Obispo 2015). The Project site is currently within an urbanized and built-up area, directly adjacent to an existing railroad corridor.

4.2 Scenic Highways

Scenic corridors are defined as corridors that possess highly scenic and natural features, as viewed from the highway. The corridor’s boundaries are determined by the topography, vegetation, viewing distance, and/or jurisdictional lines. A highway may be designated as “scenic” based on how much of the natural landscape can be seen by travelers, the scenic quality of the landscape, and the extent to which development intrudes upon the traveler's enjoyment of the view. A local governing body may apply to Caltrans for approval to “officially designate” an “eligible” state highway (Caltrans 2021).

According to the Caltrans Scenic Highway System Map, there are no designated scenic highways within the project site or immediate vicinity. The nearest eligible state scenic highway is the U.S. 101, located one mile west of the project site (Caltrans 2019).

4.3 Visual Character

The Project site is located within an urbanized and built-up area in the City of San Luis Obispo, within an existing railroad corridor. The existing visual character of the Project site primarily consists of the railroad corridor, and vacant and undeveloped land, and existing railroad tracks within the railroad corridor right-of-way.

Existing land uses in the Project vicinity include the San Luis Obispo Amtrak Station and San Luis Obispo Railroad Museum on the north; existing railroad corridor, San Luis Obispo Railroad Safety Trail, low- and medium-density residences, Sinsheimer Park, and Johnson Park on the east; service and manufacturing businesses on the south; and commercial, residential, and service and manufacturing businesses on the west.

4.4 Light and Glare

The Project site is currently undeveloped, although active railroad tracks are immediately adjacent to the east of the Project site as well as some areas of impervious surface in the form of degraded concrete and stone foundations and a portion of the housing associated with the roundhouse turntable. Existing nightlight and glare on the Project Site is minimal and is primarily cast by trains passing through the site on the existing tracks. Existing nightlight and glare in the surrounding area is cast by roadway light fixtures, vehicle headlights, and other outdoor lighting from the surrounding commercial, residential, and service and manufacturing businesses.

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5 Methodology

Visual or aesthetic resources are the natural and built features of the landscape that can be seen. The combination of landform, water, and vegetation patterns represents the natural landscape features that define an area's visual character. Built features, such as buildings, roads, utility structures, and ornamental plantings, reflect human modifications to the landscape. These natural and built landscape features, or visual resources, contribute to the public's experience and appreciation of the environment.

The process used in this visual impact assessment generally follows the guidelines outlined in the publication *Guidelines for the Visual Impact Assessment of Highway Projects* published by the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) in January 2015, which is an updated version of publication *Visual Impact Assessment for Highway Projects* also published by FHWA in March 1981. Although this guidance was developed for highway projects, it is adaptable to many types of projects and can be used as a reference for specific visual impact assessment tasks, techniques, or terms for a more thorough understanding of visual quality. The visual impact assessment uses the recommended methods as provided in the *Guidelines for the Visual Impact Assessment of Highway Projects* for the assessment of major components which include establishing the visual setting and analyzing impacts of the project on visual resources, such as nearby natural or constructed features.

The degree of aesthetic or visual impact was determined by assessing the visible changes that would be introduced by the Project. The assessment focuses on areas where changes in the visual environment would be greatest, such as areas with higher viewer sensitivity and/or where sensitive views would be affected. The assessment of potential aesthetic impacts addresses the following:

- Conflicts or complements to the existing visual character
- Changes in visual quality
- Likely impact on viewers with consideration of viewer sensitivity
- Visual intrusion and blockage of sensitive views with an emphasis placed on any views that are identified by local jurisdictions as requiring protection
- Increases in light and glare

The viewer population is a mix of major viewer groups that includes residents, transit patrons, commuters, bicyclists, and employees of the commercial, and service and manufacturing businesses in the Project area. Scenic views are defined as long-range views toward preserved natural areas or recognized visual and/or historic landmarks. A visual change would be considered significant if it introduces obstructive elements substantially out of character with existing land uses or substantially obscures a scenic view or vista available to major viewer groups near Project features. The degree of visual impact is determined by assessing visible changes that would be introduced by the Project during construction and operation, as well as viewers' exposure and sensitivity to these changes.

5.1 California Environmental Quality Act Thresholds

As defined in Appendix G of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Guidelines, project impacts to aesthetics would be considered significant if the proposed project was determined to:

- Have a substantial adverse effect on a scenic vista
- Substantially damage scenic resources, including, but not limited to, trees, rock outcroppings, and historic buildings within a state scenic highway
- In non-urbanized areas, substantially degrade the existing visual character or quality of public views of the site and its surroundings? (Public views are those that are experienced from publicly accessible vantage points). If the project is in an urbanized area, would the project conflict with applicable zoning and other regulations governing scenic quality
- Create a new source of substantial light or glare which would adversely affect day or nighttime views in the area

5.1.1 Thresholds Requiring No Further Analysis

The following thresholds were determined to result in no impact associated with the proposed Project:

- **Scenic Vistas.** There are no scenic vistas or designated scenic resources that would be obstructed by the proposed Project. No impact would occur.
- **Scenic Highways.** There are no designated scenic highways within the Project site or immediate vicinity. The nearest eligible state scenic highway is the U.S. 101, located one mile west of the Project site (Caltrans 2019). Therefore, the proposed Project would not substantially damage scenic resources, including, but not limited to, trees, rock outcroppings, and historic building within a state scenic highway and no impact would occur.

6 Environmental Impact Analysis

6.1 Visual Character

6.1.1 Construction

As discussed in Section 2.3.10, based on available funding, the Project would be constructed over two phases (Phase 1 and Later Phases). Construction of Phase 1 would be approximately 19 months in duration. Project construction for the later phases would be approximately 16 months in duration.

The Project site is currently undeveloped, although active railroad tracks are immediately adjacent to the east of the Project site as well as some areas of impervious surface in the form of degraded concrete and stone foundations and a portion of the housing for the turntable. The Project site does not contain any buildings or landscaping and the existing visual character is not memorable. During the construction phase, construction equipment, staging areas, construction trucks and vehicles, and temporary fencing would be visible to several viewer groups and would result in a contrast and change in visual character from the existing vacant area.

Transit patrons, commuters, and bicyclists would primarily experience views of construction activities while riding the Pacific Surfliner, driving along roadways adjacent to the Project site, and while traveling along the San Luis Obispo Railroad Safety Trail. The change in the visual character of the Project site during the construction phase would be noticed by these viewer groups. However, transit patrons, commuters, and bicyclists are considered to have a low sensitivity to any visual changes on the Project site as they are likely passing through the Project area to reach their destinations and do not necessarily have a personal investment in the visual character of the Project site.

The patrons and employees of the commercial, and service and manufacturing businesses in the Project area would primarily experience views of the construction activities on the Project site as they approach and leave their place of work or patronage. Therefore, their views of the construction activities would primarily take place while en route to and from these locations in the Project area. The change in the visual character of the Project site during the construction phase would be noticed by these viewer groups. However, these viewer groups are considered to have a low sensitivity to any visual changes on the Project site as they are likely passing through the Project area to reach their place of work or business and do not necessarily have a personal investment in the visual character of the Project site.

Residents who live immediately west of the Project site (Roundhouse Place Apartments and Village at Broad Street Family Apartments) and east of the Project site (single-family residences) would primarily experience views of construction activities while driving to and from their homes. The change in the visual character of the Project site during the construction phase would be noticed by these sensitive viewer groups due to their personal investment in the visual environment. However, as previously described the existing visual character of the project site primarily consists of the railroad corridor, and vacant and undeveloped land, and existing railroad tracks within a railroad corridor ROW. No significant visual features or resources would be impacted. Although the construction phase would represent a temporary change in the visual quality and character of the vacant project site for project adjacent residences, the visual impacts are temporary and would cease upon construction completion. Further, construction would be phased depending on available funding and future operation needs. The construction site would also be visibly similar to other construction projects in the City and urban

areas. Therefore, impacts during construction would not substantially degrade the existing visual character or quality of the site and surroundings or conflict with applicable zoning and other regulations governing scenic quality. Thus, short-term impacts considered less than significant, and no mitigation is required.

6.1.2 Operation

The proposed Project includes the construction of a new rail yard, storage and servicing tracks, operations and maintenance buildings, landscape improvements, and safety and security features. To assess the potential visual changes that would result from the construction and operation of the Project, Key Observation Points (KOP) were selected specifically for the Project. KOPs represent key locations where the visual character is representative and can be used for visual simulations to evaluate potential visual impacts. Visual simulations from these KOPs were prepared to provide a before and after comparison of the visual effects that would result from the Project. The location of the KOPs is shown on Figure 4. The KOP existing views and simulations are shown on Figure 5 through Figure 10.

Key Observation Point 1

Existing condition

As shown on Figure 5, KOP 1 provides a view of the central portion of the Project site looking west from a bike trail access point located in a residential neighborhood at the Bushnell Street/San Carlos Drive cul-de-sac. The foreground is dominated by paved roadway and sidewalk. The middle ground includes the San Luis Obispo Railroad Safety Trail, young to mature trees, trail signage, rail corridor, and an existing residence with white fence. The background is dominated by existing multi-story apartment buildings and the South Hills.

Proposed condition – Phase 1

As shown on Figure 6, the foreground will remain unchanged as a result of the proposed Project. The middle ground and background are substantially altered with the addition of the service and inspection pit canopy in the Phase 1 condition. The view of the rail corridor, existing multi-story apartment buildings, and a portion of the South Hills are obstructed with the addition of the service and inspection pit canopy.

Key Observation Point 2

Existing condition

As shown on Figure 7, KOP 2 provides a view of the Project site looking southwest from a residential neighborhood at the Rachel Street/Florence Avenue cul-de-sac. The foreground is dominated by paved roadway on the left side of the view and existing vegetation ranging from native ground cover to mid-size shrubs and young trees on the right side of the view. The middle ground includes paved roadway, a white gate, San Luis Obispo Railroad Safety Trail, railroad tracks, apartment buildings, tall mature trees, and the South Hills. The background includes a paved parking lot, mature trees, railroad corridor, existing commercial and residential development and the South Hills.

Proposed condition – Phase 1

As shown on Figure 8, the foreground and middle ground will remain unchanged as a result of the proposed Project. The background is moderately altered with the addition of the service and inspection pit canopy in the Phase 1 condition. Some of the existing commercial and residential development in front of the South Hills can no longer be seen. The South Hills is still visible with the addition of the service and inspection pit canopy.

Key Observation Point 3

Existing Condition

KOP 3 provides a view of the northern extent of the Project site looking south from the southern end of the San Luis Obispo Railroad Museum parking lot. As shown on Figure 9, the foreground from this vantage point is dominated by paved sidewalk, utilities infrastructure, and unpaved ground. The middle ground includes trees, railroad tracks, a power pole, unpaved ground, metal storage container, fencing and an existing one-story structure and parking lot associated with a commercial business. The background includes a small hillside with scattered trees, railroad tracks, power poles, and large trees. On the right side of the view, South Hills is visible behind existing commercial and residential development and scattered trees.

Proposed condition – Later Phases

As shown on Figure 10, the foreground, middle ground, and background would be altered by development of the proposed Project. The foreground would be moderately altered with the addition of security fencing, the proposed paved bike trail, and new landscaping ranging from low-lying bushes, grasses, and young to mature trees. The middle ground and background would be moderately altered with the addition of the one-story wheel truing building (Later Phases), security fencing, and landscaping. A portion of the South Hills and the existing commercial and residential development can no longer be seen in the background from the addition of mature trees.

Conclusion

The operation of the Project would represent a change in visual character as compared to the existing Project site. However, the Project is in an urban area that currently has a mix of vacant and undeveloped land, railroad corridor, commercial, service and manufacturing businesses, multi-story apartment buildings, single-family residences, and the San Luis Obispo Railroad Safety Trail.

Viewers include residents, transit patrons, commuters, bicyclists, and employees of the commercial, service and manufacturing businesses in the Project area. Commercial service and manufacturing businesses would have a low to moderate sensitivity to this visual change and may have less of a personal investment in the visual appearance of the Project site. Viewers including residents and trail users would likely have high sensitivity to the visual change and they are more personally invested in the details of their visual environment. However, the current visual character of the Project site is currently vacant undeveloped land with remnants of the original roundhouse's concrete and stone foundation and turn table. As discussed in the City of San Luis Obispo's Railroad District Plan (City of San Luis Obispo 1998), abandoned or poorly maintained buildings, fences or sites; unsightly storage or equipment yards are visual character issues that the City of San Luis Obispo is seeking to address.

The City of San Luis Obispo's Railroad District Plan specifically mentions the Roundhouse Site as an opportunity site for adaptive reuse. Therefore, buildings and site improvements will be designed to be

compatible with the surrounding built environment and be consistent with architectural guidance set forth in the City of San Luis Obispo's Railroad District Plan. The Railroad District's architectural guidelines which apply to new buildings, significant remodels, site improvements, and public area improvements supplement the citywide architectural guidelines and are applied in a similar manner within the Railroad District. As required by Municipal Code Chapter 2.48 – Architectural Review Procedures, property owners, developers, designers, City staff and advisory bodies, such as the Cultural Heritage Committee, Architectural Review Commission and the Planning Commission use these guidelines to review development projects (City of San Luis Obispo 1998). The operation of the Project would not substantially degrade the existing visual character or quality of public views of the site and its surroundings and would not detract from the District's historic architectural character, circulation patterns, and neighborhood compatibility. Therefore, operational impacts related to visual character would be less than significant.

Figure 4. Key Observation Points

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Figure 5. Existing Conditions – Key Observation Point 1

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Figure 6. Proposed Project View Simulation – Key Observation Point 1

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Figure 7. Existing Conditions – Key Observation Point 2

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Figure 8. Proposed Project View Simulation – Key Observation Point 2

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Figure 9. Existing Conditions – Key Observation Point 3

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Figure 10. Proposed Project View Simulation – Key Observation Point 3

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6.2 Light and Glare

6.2.1 Construction

A significant impact would occur if the Project caused a substantial increase in ambient illumination levels beyond the property line or caused new lighting to spill-over onto light-sensitive land uses such as residences, some commercial and institutional uses that require minimum illumination for proper function, and natural areas.

The Project Site is currently undeveloped and does not currently have any sources of lighting. Existing nightlight in the surrounding area is cast by roadway light fixtures, vehicle headlights, and other outdoor lighting from the surrounding commercial, residential, and service and manufacturing businesses. Construction of the Project would not include nighttime construction activities (primarily due to construction noise restrictions on work hours). Therefore, the proposed Project would not create a new source of substantial light which would adversely affect day or nighttime views in the area and no impact would occur.

6.2.2 Operation

The proposed Project would introduce new exterior lighting on the Project site. Surface mounted exterior lighting would be installed around the perimeter of the buildings to illuminate building entries and walkways. Pole mounted exterior lighting would be installed to illuminate the layover tracks, fuel tank farm, roadways and employee parking areas. An LED (light-emitting diode) light source would be utilized for all exterior locations. Exterior lighting control would be set up by time clock (scheduled on/off) and luminaire-installed occupancy sensors. Occupancy sensors would drop the lighting levels to 25 percent after not detecting any activity for 10 minutes.

Existing nightlight and glare in the surrounding area is cast by roadway light fixtures, vehicle headlights, and other outdoor lighting from the surrounding commercial, residential, and service and manufacturing businesses. The addition of new light sources from the Project is not anticipated to add a substantial amount of new light to the nighttime views. Exterior lighting control would be set up by time clock (scheduled on/off) and luminaire-installed occupancy sensors. Occupancy sensors would drop the lighting levels to 25 percent after not detecting any activity for 10 minutes. The nighttime lighting fixtures that would be installed to direct the majority of the light to within and directly adjacent to the facility, and away from sensitive areas, to the maximum extent feasible. The Project would not be considered to significantly affect the day or nighttime views in the project area.

The design for the landscape buffer proposed along the west edge of the Project site will include a pedestrian trail and bike path to help advance the City's Active Transportation Plan. The lighting on the pedestrian trail and bike path will be required to comply with the design standards in the City of San Luis Obispo's Active Transportation Plan. Vandal resistant lighting would be installed per City plans, located overhead not more than 16 feet high with direct light downward and recessed bulbs to avoid direct glare.

The introduction of new buildings and surface parking areas could cause glare from reflected sunlight off building surfaces, primarily windows, and windshields of parked automobiles. However, such reflection would not be adverse because of the relatively small amount of potential glare from the new layover facility would likely be similar to other commercial, service, and manufacturing businesses in this area, which are not known to affect motorists or other public viewers. Accordingly, the Project would have a less than significant light and glare impact.

7 Mitigation Measures

Implementation of the proposed Project would not result in significant impacts on visual resources. Therefore, no mitigation measures are required.

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