

NOTICE OF EXEMPTION

To:

Office of Planning and Research
P.O. Box 3044, Room 113
Sacramento, CA 95812-3044

County Clerk
County of San Diego
1600 Pacific Highway, Suite 260
San Diego, CA 92101

From:

San Diego Association of Governments [Lead Agency]
1011 Union Street, Suite 400
San Diego, CA 92101
619-699-1900

Project Applicant: San Diego Association of Governments
1011 Union Street, Suite 400
San Diego, CA 92101
619-699-1900

Project Title: San Diego LOSSAN Rail Realignment (SDLRR) Project – Plan for Geotechnical and Geological Investigation

Project Location: Cities of San Diego and Del Mar, San Diego County

Description of Specific Location, Nature, Purpose, and Beneficiaries of Project: The San Diego Association of Governments (SANDAG) is working to improve the resiliency and reliability of the San Diego Subdivision segment of the Los Angeles–San Diego–San Luis Obispo (LOSSAN) Rail Corridor within the cities of Del Mar and San Diego where the rail line runs along a terrace on the eroding coastal bluffs. SANDAG has approved a plan for geotechnical and geological investigation to inform preliminary project engineering for purposes of the development of technical studies to inform SANDAG’s preparation of Environmental Impact Report for the SDLRR Project. SANDAG proposes to undertake geotechnical borings in approximately 34 locations and 5 geophysical survey lines within the existing rail right-of-way (ROW), in the public ROW in the cities of Del Mar and San Diego, in Caltrans ROW, and in SoCal Edison ROW (Figure 1). The initial geotechnical and geological investigations are the subject of this notice of exemption. The geotechnical investigation would be conducted to obtain soil and rock properties along the potential rail alignment alternatives where data have not been previously collected. Monitoring wells would be established at up to 15 of the borehole locations. Geotechnical boring soils samples will be stored in 55-gallon drums and rock core samples will be stored in Conex boxes at a temporary storage facility. The temporary storage facility is located in Caltrans ROW on Carmel Valley Road near the Interstate-5 and State Route 56 interchange. The facility is currently used for construction staging and SANDAG would utilize an area approximately 100 by 40 feet. The facility would be used from approximately August 2025 to February 2026. The work also includes a geological investigation to further characterize the potential of fault rupture hazard where a series of northeast trending faults transect the potential rail alignment alternatives.

Fieldwork is anticipated to take approximately six months and is planned to be performed between August 2025 and February 2026.

Geotechnical Investigation

The geotechnical borings include rotary drilling and rock coring and sampling, as well as on site field testing. The field testing would be performed in accordance with American Society for Testing Materials International standards. To inform subsurface hydrogeology, piezometers, which are wells that measure water table surface, would be installed. Vibrating wire piezometers would be utilized in boreholes equipped with continuous reading data-loggers with measurements taken at set intervals. All borings will be backfilled upon completion of the on-site testing, except for approximately 17 boreholes which would subsequently serve as monitoring wells.

Geological Investigation

The purpose of the geological investigation is to further characterize the potential for fault rupture. This includes additional subsurface investigations consisting of approximately 2 mud rotary borings, 4 diamond core borings, 30 cone penetration test (CPT) soundings, and a geophysical study consisting of 5 geophysical survey lines.

The two mud rotary borings would extend to a depth of approximately 100 feet below ground surface (bgs), unless impeded by auger refusal on gravel, cobble, or formational/bedrock materials. Additionally, the four diamond core borings would be performed to depths ranging between approximately 250 to 350 feet bgs with a truck-mounted drill rig within the Del Mar Heights area. Further, the 30 CPTs would be performed using a truck mounted CPT rig along the segment of Sorrento Valley Road that is closed to vehicular traffic to a depth of approximately 100 feet bgs, unless impeded by cone refusal on gravel, cobble, or formational/bedrock materials.

The seismic survey would record high-resolution seismic reflection and refraction tomography data to produce profiles to help evaluate the orientation of subsurface fault planes. The seismic reflection lines support the study of mapped northeast trending faults. One seismic reflection line would be positioned adjacent to the segment of Sorrento Valley Road that is closed to vehicular traffic and extend approximately 1,100 feet into the lagoon area. Two seismic reflection lines are located within Del Mar Heights and would be set up along asphalt-paved parking lanes along Mar Scenic Drive and Recuerdo Drive and extend approximately 850 feet into the dirt trail in the State Park land. Additionally, geologic mapping would be performed at various locations along mapped northeast trending faults. The remaining two seismic reflection lines are located within Los Peñasquitos Lagoon and would be positioned to run adjacent to the railroad within the railroad ROW.

The CPT soundings and two mud rotary borings are located along the segment of Sorrento Valley Road that is closed to vehicular traffic. These locations can be accessed through the asphalt pavement at the end of Sorrento Valley Road and north of the investigation area. The four diamond core borings are located at Del Mar Heights and within Hidden Pines Drive, Mar Scenic Drive, and Recuerdo Drive. These exploration locations can be accessed via public streets located south of Del Mar Heights Road.

Name of Public Agency Approving Project: San Diego Association of Governments

Name of Public Agency Carrying out Project: San Diego Association of Governments

Exempt Status:

☒ Statutory Exemptions: Public Resources Code, section 21102; California Code of Regulations, title 14 (CEQA Guidelines), section 15262

☒ Categorical Exemptions: CEQA Guidelines, sections, 15304(c), (f); 15306; 15303

CEQA does not apply to ministerial governmental approvals (Public Resources Code, section 21080(b)(1)) or feasibility and planning studies for possible future actions which the agency has not approved, adopted, or funded. Activities such as minor alterations to land, including but not limited to minor trenching and backfilling, filling of earth into excavated lands, data collection that does not result in a serious or major disturbance to an environmental resource, and the placement or construction of small structures or equipment are categorically exempt from CEQA review pursuant to CEQA Guidelines Sections 15304 (c) and (f) (Class 4), 15306 (Class 6), and 15303 (Class 3).

Reasons Why Exempt from CEQA

The activities described above involve ministerial approvals from local jurisdictions and the preparation of feasibility studies that are exempt from the CEQA statute. Additionally, the activities described above are categorically exempt from CEQA for the reasons set forth in the table below explains the reasons why the proposed activities are categorically exempt pursuant to CEQA Guidelines Sections 15304 (c) and (f), 15306, and 15303.

| CEQA Exemption | Reasons Why Proposed Project Qualifies for Exemption |
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| Public Resources Code 21102 | |
| <i>No state agency, board, or commission shall request funds, nor shall any state agency, board, or commission which authorizes expenditures of funds, other than funds appropriated in the Budget Act, authorize funds for expenditure for any project, other than a project involving only feasibility or planning studies for possible future actions which the agency, board, or commission has not approved, adopted or funded, which may have a significant effect on the environment unless such request or authorization is accompanied by an environmental impact report. Feasibility and planning studies exempted by this section from the preparation of an environmental impact report shall nevertheless include consideration of environmental factors.</i> | The activities involve feasibility studies that will not have a significant effect on the environment that are exempt from CEQA review and that are being undertaken for purposes of the development of an Environmental Impact Report that would inform a future action by the SANDAG Board of Directors with respect to the SDLRR Project. |
| CEQA Guidelines, Section 15262 | |
| <i>A project involving only feasibility or planning studies for possible future actions which the agency, board, or commission has not approved,</i> | The activities involve feasibility studies that will not have a significant effect on the environment that are exempt from CEQA review and that are being undertaken for purposes of |

| CEQA Exemption | Reasons Why Proposed Project Qualifies for Exemption |
|--|---|
| <i>adopted, or funded does not require the preparation of an EIR or Negative Declaration but does require consideration of environmental factors. This section does not apply to the adoption of a plan that will have a legally binding effect on later activities.</i> | the development of an Environmental Impact Report that would inform a future action by the SANDAG Board of Directors with respect to the SDLRR Project. |
| CEQA Guidelines, Section 15304 (c) and (f) | |
| <p><i>Class 4 consists of minor public or private alterations in the condition of land, water, and/or vegetation which do not involve removal of healthy, mature, scenic trees except for forestry or agricultural purposes. Examples include, but are not limited to:</i></p> <p><i>(c) filling of earth into previously excavated land with material compatible with the natural features of the site;</i></p> <p><i>(f) minor trenching and backfilling where the surface is restored</i></p> | <p>The activities qualify for a Class 4 Categorical Exemption from CEQA because the proposed project involves minor alterations in land where the surface would be restored and filled with material compatible with the natural features of the site and no exceptions to the use of a Class 4 exemption apply.</p> <p>The activities involve geotechnical and geological investigations, which consist of mud rotary and diamond core borings. The proposed project qualifies for this exemption because all borings would be backfilled in accordance with the County of San Diego Department of Environmental Health guidelines using a cement-bentonite slurry and the surface would be capped to match the existing ground surface.</p> |
| CEQA Guidelines, Section 15306 | |
| <i>Class 6 exemption consists of basic data collection, research, experimental management, and resource evaluation activities which do not result in a serious or major disturbance to an environmental resource. These may be strictly for information gathering purposes, or as part of a study leading an action which a public agency has not yet approved, adopted, or funded.</i> | The activities qualify for a Class 6 Categorical Exemption from CEQA because project activities include rotary drilling and rock coring, on-site field testing, and geotechnical laboratory testing which would not result in a serious or major disturbance to an environmental resource and no exceptions to the use of a Class 6 exemption apply. |
| CEQA Guidelines, 15303 | |
| <i>Class 3 consists of construction and location of limited numbers of new, small facilities or structures.</i> | To inform subsurface hydrogeology, piezometers, which are wells that measure water table surface, would be installed flush with the ground surface. The top well box would be 12 inches in diameter with a borehole diameter of 4 to 8 inches. The depth of the piezometers would be determined during drilling. This equipment qualifies for a Class 3 exemption because it would involve minor modifications to surface and subsurface conditions. and no exceptions to the use of a Class 3 exemption apply. |

Responsible Agency Contact Person: Keith Greer

Area Code/Telephone: 619-699-1900

Signature:  _____

Date: August 1, 2025 **Title:** Chief Executive Officer

☒ Signed by Lead Agency

Figure 1. Overview of Geotechnical Boring Locations

