



DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY
MILITARY SURFACE DEPLOYMENT AND DISTRIBUTION COMMAND
1 SOLDIER WAY
SCOTT AIR FORCE BASE, ILLINOIS 62225-5006

22 February 2024

Mr. Omar Atayee
Acting Director of Engineering and Construction
San Diego Association of Governments
401 B Street, Suite 800
San Diego, CA 92101

Dear Mr. Atayee:

Per your request, the Military Surface Deployment and Distribution Command Transportation Engineering Agency, Railroads for National Defense Program provides the attached information paper detailing the defense equities of the LOSSAN rail corridor.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "D. Zedack", is positioned below the word "Sincerely,".

Daniel G. Zedack, P. E.
Chief, Railroads for National
Defense Program

SUBJECT: DOD Equities in the San Diego-Los Angeles-San Luis Obispo Rail Corridor

USTRANSCOM POSITION:

The Railroads for National Defense (RND) Program collaborates closely with public and private sector rail transportation partners to ensure that the railroad industry adequately meets military needs. The Strategic Rail Corridor Network (STRACNET) identifies commercial rail corridors and rail lines with military importance. As a part of STRACNET, the worsening trackbed conditions caused by seaside erosion along the Los Angeles-San Diego rail line is a concern to the DOD. The military relies on this rail line as the only connection between Marine Corps Base Camp Pendleton and the Port of San Diego, a Strategic Seaport, to the rest of the US rail network. The DOD will continue to monitor STRACNET infrastructure and will rely on infrastructure owners and regulators to fulfill their responsibility to ensure common-carrier railroad lines are well-maintained.

BACKGROUND:

- On behalf of USTRANSCOM, the Railroads for National Defense (RND) program ensures the readiness capability of the national railroad industry to support defense deployment and peacetime needs. Rail transportation is extremely important to the DOD. Heavy tracked vehicles, high volume movements of wheeled vehicles, and bulk shipments of ammunition must use rail to meet contingency deployment timelines between inland installations and seaports of embarkation.
- The DOD, in conjunction with the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA), established the Strategic Rail Corridor Network (STRACNET) to ensure DOD's minimum rail needs are specifically identified and coordinated with appropriate transportation authorities. STRACNET and the associated connectors form a continuous rail line network consisting of over 41,000 miles of railroad lines serving over 140 defense sites and both military and commercial Strategic Seaports.
- The STRACNET is assessed and updated for sufficiency on a 5-year cycle, with the most recent update published in June 2023. This update concluded that STRACNET, and the nation's rail lines overall, are in acceptable defense readiness condition and are prepared to meet military needs. Defense readiness considerations include rail network maintenance condition, clearance, and gross weight capabilities. The overall current good health of STRACNET can be attributed to the rail carriers' ability to effectively manage their network, which was enabled through previous rail industry deregulation.
- The Surface Transportation Board (STB) regulates the railroad industry, including proposed railroad abandonments and mergers. The RND Program monitors all STB rail industry filings (e.g., proposed abandonments and mergers), and, as appropriate, files comments on railroad regulatory matters with a military impact.
- It is DOD policy to integrate defense rail line needs into civil sector policy, plans, standards, programs, and regulations. RND engineers consult with the FRA in the development, planning, construction, retention, rehabilitation, maintenance, and operation of civil sector rail lines as they relate to DOD requirements.

DISCUSSION:

- The rail corridor between San Diego, Los Angeles, and San Luis Obispo, commonly referred to as the LOSSAN corridor, is identified as a defense-important corridor within the STRACNET. This rail line is owned in different sections by BNSF Railway (BNSF), Union Pacific Railroad (UP), and regional commuter rail authorities. Between San Diego and Los Angeles counties, freight service is provided wholly by BNSF via trackage rights over track owned by commuter rail authorities. It is the only functional freight rail connection between the San Diego metro area and the US rail network. There is no alternate rail route to MCB Camp Pendleton or the Port of San Diego, a Strategic Seaport. The LOSSAN rail corridor also serves the Port of Long Beach and Naval Base Ventura County (Port Hueneme), both of which are designated Strategic Seaports, as well as the Port of Los Angeles, a designated alternate commercial Strategic Seaport.
- From 2013 to 2023, this corridor carried about 278,000 tons of military cargo by rail to the Port of San Diego. In 2022, the line transported over 500 carloads of DOD equipment, totaling nearly 2,000 pieces of equipment weighing approximately 32,000 tons. The vast majority of this equipment is wheeled and tracked vehicles loaded on flatcars. As a Strategic Seaport, the port serves as a key seaport of embarkation (SPOE) for both peacetime rotations and surge deployments of large military units. The port is well equipped to efficiently load DOD cargo to Military Sealift Command (MSC) and commercial Roll-On/Roll-Off (RORO) vessels. In addition to military benefits, DOD's use of the port economically benefits the community as the DOD pays for use of port infrastructure and utilizes port labor during onload/offload operations.



*US Army soldiers offload M1 Abrams tanks and other military equipment from railcars at the Port of San Diego.
Photo Credit: SDDC TEA*

UNCLASSIFIED

- For bulk ammunition movements, the DOD largely ships containerized ammunition by rail from inland ammunition depots to designated Military Ocean Terminals or Naval Magazines not located on the LOSSAN rail corridor. These military-owned seaports are specifically designed to store and ship large quantities of bulk ammunition with reinforced holding areas, specially designed vessel docks, and standoff distances to protect surrounding communities. Due to safety requirements, the Port of San Diego has a low capacity of ammunition shipping capability, and is not ideal for shipping large quantities of ammunition.
- As part of normal duties, RND coordinates with BNSF regarding the condition of all BNSF-operated STRACNET rail lines. The Los Angeles-San Diego section of the LOSSAN corridor is consistently a topic of discussion in these forums given the erosion issues in multiple areas along the route. BNSF keeps the military adequately informed of infrastructure status. The recent erosion issues in the San Clemente area triggered several embargos of the rail line, resulting in multi-day outages. Immediate problems were expediently repaired, however, freight trains are currently directed to 'slow-order' in certain zones. While not ideal, the recent embargos did not affect military shipments and this corridor remains open for military traffic.
- DOD is supportive of actions by infrastructure owners and/or regulators to ensure the long-term viability and capacity of this rail corridor. While there is no DOD funding stream for off-installation rail projects, RND has provided information on the current defense use of the LOSSAN corridor to local, state, and federal transportation officials in support of infrastructure upgrades. Specifically, RND has provided letters verifying the defense benefit of projects eligible for federal discretionary grant funding to the North County Transit District (NCTD) and the San Diego Association of Governments (SANDAG). RND has advocated for well-maintained and reliable operation of the corridor to the California State Transportation Agency (CalSTA) and the Surface Transportation Board (STB). Additionally, RND has provided information on the defense importance of the corridor to the California State Senate Subcommittee on LOSSAN Rail Corridor Resiliency.



*BNSF train along San Clemente bluffs hauling military cargo to the Port of San Diego
Photo Credit: Mark MacDougall, used with permission*

SUMMARY/RECOMMENDATION:

Through the RND program, USTRANSCOM will continue to monitor the infrastructure condition along the San Diego-Los Angeles-San Luis Obispo rail line and advocate for the defense importance of this corridor. Infrastructure owners and regulators should continue to take action to preserve safe and reliable rail service on this rail corridor.