

June 6, 2024

To: Members of the Technical Advisory Committee
From: Jason Jewell, Managing Director 
Subject: Fiscal Year 2023-24 Second Quarter Los Angeles – San Diego – San Luis Obispo Rail Corridor Trends

Overview

A report on ridership, revenue, and on-time performance for passenger rail services on the Los Angeles – San Diego – San Luis Obispo Rail Corridor, including the Pacific Surfliner, Metrolink, and COASTER, covering the second quarter of state fiscal year 2023-24.

Recommendation

Receive and file as an information item.

Background

The 351-mile Los Angeles – San Diego – San Luis Obispo (LOSSAN) Rail Corridor (Corridor) travels through a six-county coastal region in Southern California and is the busiest state-supported intercity passenger rail corridor in the United States. The LOSSAN rail corridor includes 41 stations and typically hosts more than 150 daily passenger trains. Prior to the Coronavirus pandemic, 27 daily trains and 27 stations comprised the Pacific Surfliner service. The Pacific Surfliner currently serves 29 stations and normally operates 20 daily one-way trains (or ten round trips). In fiscal year (FY) 2019 (the last full fiscal year prior to the COVID-19 pandemic), there were nearly 2.8 million passenger trips on Pacific Surfliner trips alone, and an additional 5.4 million passenger trips were taken on the two commuter rail services combined (Metrolink and COASTER).

Discussion

This report provides an update on the performance trends of the passenger rail services operating on the LOSSAN corridor, focusing on three specific performance areas: usage (ridership and passenger miles), efficiency (revenue and farebox recovery), and quality (on-time performance (OTP) and customer satisfaction). The

report includes the Pacific Surfliner intercity passenger rail service, as well as commuter rail service on Metrolink's Ventura County Line (VCL) and Orange County Line (OCL), and the North County Transit District's (NCTD) COASTER system. Amtrak national data is included for comparative purposes. The reporting period is the second quarter of FY 2023-24, covering the months of October, November, and December 2023.

Coronavirus Pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic significantly impacted transit operations globally, including the LOSSAN corridor's three rail services. Following the initial declines in ridership and revenue triggered by state safety orders in March 2020, the Pacific Surfliner, COASTER, and Metrolink adjusted to reduced service schedules. These reductions began in late March 2020 as immediate responses to the pandemic.

As conditions improved, rail services on the LOSSAN corridor gradually resumed, marking a phased return to normal operations beginning Memorial Day weekend in 2021. COASTER restored full service on May 29, 2021, the same day Metrolink introduced new Saturday services on its Ventura County Line. Subsequently, the Pacific Surfliner expanded its daily operations, increasing from 12 one-way trips (six round trips) to 21 one-way trips (10 round trips) by October 24, 2021. The most substantial restoration occurred on April 4, 2022, when Metrolink added 26 trains back to its schedule, signaling a significant step towards pre-pandemic service levels.

Impacts of Temporary Track Closures in San Clemente Due to Falling Debris from an Adjacent Slope

On April 27, 2023, Pacific Surfliner service was suspended between San Juan Capistrano and Oceanside due to active debris movement on the slope adjacent to the Casa Romantica Cultural Centers and Gardens in San Clemente, located just north of the San Clemente Pier. The debris fall occurred two miles north of where the Orange County Transportation Authority (OCTA) was conducting track stabilization work near the Cyprus Shore Homeowners Association, although the events were unrelated. During the closure, service adjustments included:

- Limited train service between San Diego and Oceanside,
- Bus connections between Oceanside and Irvine,
- Modified train service between San Juan Capistrano and Irvine, and
- Regular train service from Los Angeles to San Luis Obispo.

Regular Pacific Surfliner service resumed on May 27, 2023, after emergency stabilization of the affected hillside, which had scattered debris onto the rail right-of-way. This reopening aligned with the start of Memorial Day Weekend, a peak travel time for the service. However, recurring debris falls from the same slope adjacent to the Casa Romantica Cultural Center and Gardens led to another suspension of service between San Juan Capistrano and Oceanside starting June 5, 2023. Subsequently, on June 23, 2023, the Metrolink Board of Directors contracted Condon-Johnson & Associates, Inc. to design and install a temporary barrier wall to protect the tracks. This second closure extended through the end of the fourth quarter of FY 2023 and into the first quarter of FY 2024. Service was fully restored on July 17, 2023, following the completion of the barrier wall.

Special Considerations for the Pacific Surfliner Service During Temporary Track Closures in San Clemente

Ridership Data: Under normal operations, Pacific Surfliner trains are designated by three-digit numbers: the 500's series for trains operating between San Diego and Los Angeles, and the 700's series for those extending north of Los Angeles. However, during the temporary track closures in San Clemente, trains running between San Diego and Oceanside were identified using four-digit numbers in the 1000's series. Due to Amtrak's fare collection system's structure, each segment of a journey—train and bus bridge—was recorded separately when passengers transferred between services. This method, while standard for situations involving multiple carriers or modes of transport, may lead to an apparent increase in recorded passengers during disrupted service periods. Amtrak is aware of the need for adjusted ridership figures to reflect a more accurate count and is actively working on a solution. The reporting of ridership data in the LOSSAN Agency's second quarter reflects Amtrak's consistent application of these procedures, and it is important to note that this quarter was not impacted by the track closure issues, as they had reopened in July of the previous quarter.

On-Time Performance (OTP) Data: The LOSSAN Agency sources OTP data for the Pacific Surfliner from Amtrak's On-Time Performance Monitoring and Reporting System (OTP MRS). Starting in FY 2023 Q4, it was noted that OTP data initially omitted some trains operating along the segment between San Diego and Oceanside when a temporary track closure was in effect in San Clemente. This was due to a programming issue which prevented the inclusion of these data in the OTP MRS reports. Discussions with Amtrak have addressed this omission and identified the programming error as the cause. Consequently, although the previous issue has been resolved and does not impact the data for the second quarter, the report still references OTP figures from periods affected by these omissions. Moving forward, LOSSAN will

continue to use the most accurate and comprehensive data available, ensuring that future reports reflect the actual service performance.

Usage

For the second quarter of FY 2023-24, total LOSSAN corridor **ridership for the three services combined was 1,113,709**, representing a 29.0 percent increase when compared to the same period of the previous year. A 24-month chart for the LOSSAN corridor, with the specific performance of each service, is shown in Figure 1.

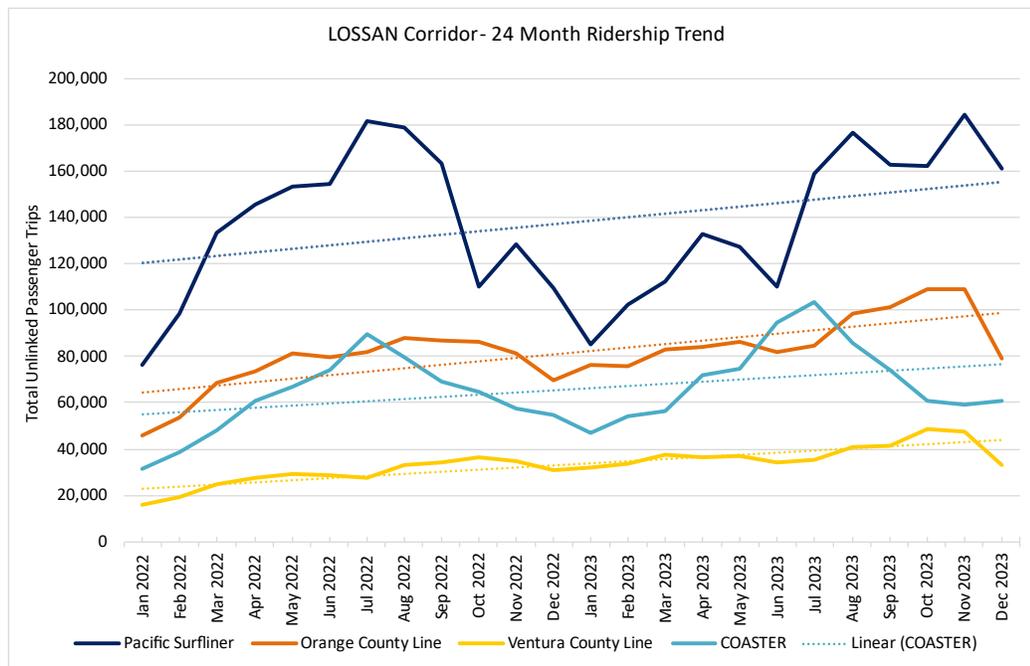
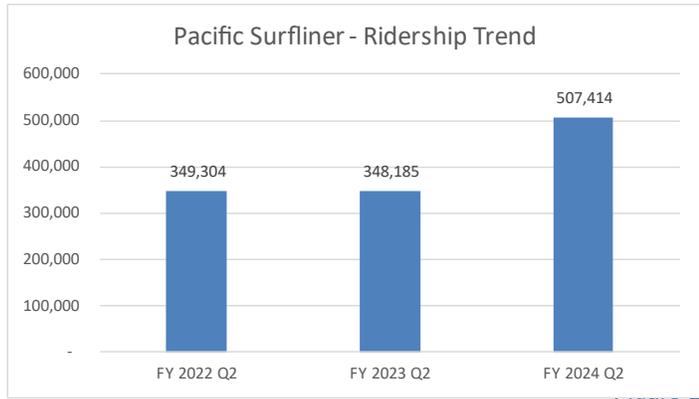


Figure 1

The 24 months of ridership data included in Figure 1 provide a more accurate indicator of the overall change in ridership along the corridor. Due to seasonal variances, a complete ridership trend is difficult to discern from a single 12-month period. Including 24 months of data accounts for seasonal variations in ridership patterns and provides sufficient information to develop a linear trendline for each service. A summary table of the ridership, revenue, and OTP for the LOSSAN corridor can be found in Attachment A. In addition to this overall corridor data, details on the performance of each service are provided below.

Pacific Surfliner

Overall LOSSAN corridor ridership includes ridership on the Pacific Surfliner intercity passenger rail service, which operates between San Diego and San Luis Obispo. Pacific Surfliner ridership during the second quarter of FY 2023-24 was 504,414, representing an increase of



45.7 percent when compared to the same period last year, as is illustrated in Figure 2. This increase in FY2024 Q2 is primarily due to the absence of service disruptions that were present in FY 2023 Q2 and Q3, related to emergency track closures in San Clemente due to bluff and track stability issues. Additionally, the reported Pacific Surfliner ridership includes Metrolink and COASTER pass holders utilizing the Rail 2 Rail (R2R) Program, which allows Metrolink monthly pass holders and COASTER passengers to ride Pacific Surfliner trains within the stations identified on their valid fare media, subject to certain restrictions.

Metrolink

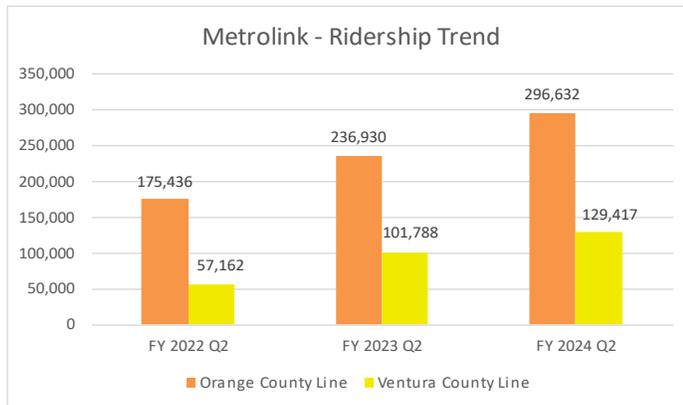


Figure 3

The VCL, which operates between East Ventura and Los Angeles, saw a ridership increase of 27.1 percent when compared to the second quarter of last year. The OCL, which operates between Los Angeles and Oceanside, saw an 25.2 percent increase in ridership over the same report period in the prior year. During the second

quarter of FY 2023-24, there were an average of 7,571 Metrolink pass holders per month who utilized the R2R Program to ride Pacific Surfliner trains¹.

¹ Metrolink R2R values are based on preliminary, unaudited data provided by Amtrak.

COASTER

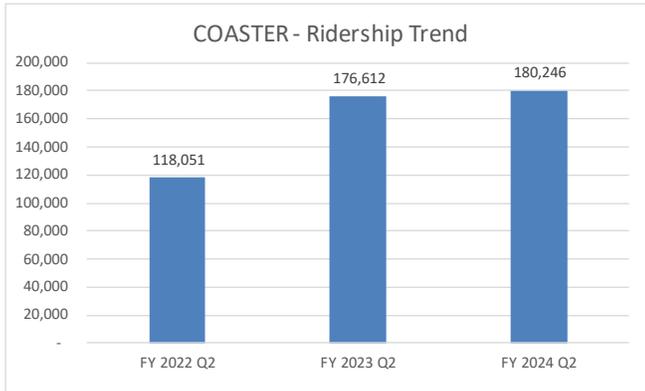


Figure 4

NCTD’s COASTER commuter rail service operating between Oceanside and San Diego saw a ridership increase of 2.1 percent during the second quarter of FY 2023-24 when compared to the same period in the prior year, as shown in Figure 4. During the second quarter of FY 2023-24, there were an average of 727 COASTER pass holders per

month utilizing the R2R Program to ride Pacific Surfliner trains².

Amtrak System

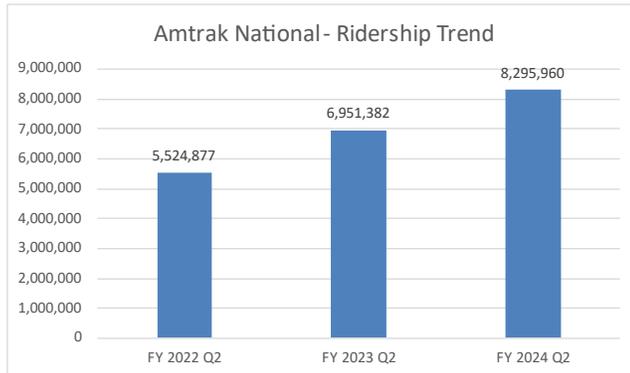


Figure 5

Amtrak service nationwide experienced a cumulative ridership increase of 19.3 percent for the second quarter of FY 2023-24 when compared to the same period in the prior year, as illustrated in Figure 5.

Amtrak’s Coast Starlight, which operates between Seattle and Los Angeles, saw ridership decrease by 6.9 percent in the second quarter compared with the same period last year. The Capitol Corridor (operating between Auburn, Sacramento, Oakland, and San Jose) and the San Joaquins Corridor (operating from both Oakland and Sacramento to Stockton and Bakersfield) are the two other California state-supported intercity passenger rail services operated by Amtrak, and provide a comparison to the Pacific Surfliner service despite serving significantly different markets. Ridership increased by 19.8 percent on the Capitol Corridor and by 7.5 percent on the San Joaquins Corridor during the second quarter when compared to the same period last year.

² COASTER R2R values are based on preliminary, unaudited data provided by Amtrak.

Passenger Miles

A passenger mile is defined as one passenger traveling one mile. For example, ten passengers who each travel 100 miles would generate 1,000 passenger miles. This metric depicts the growth in passenger usage and distance traveled.

The Pacific Surfliner generated over 51 million passenger miles during the second quarter of FY 2023-24, which is a 122.4 percent increase compared to the same period in the prior year. The increase in passenger miles aligns with the increase in ridership. Factoring in the average pounds of carbon dioxide emissions generated per passenger mile traveling in a private automobile versus on passenger rail, a reduction of about 18,465 tons of greenhouse gases was achieved, which is equivalent to avoiding burning approximately 1,884,907 gallons of gasoline.

Efficiency

Passenger Trips Per Train Mile

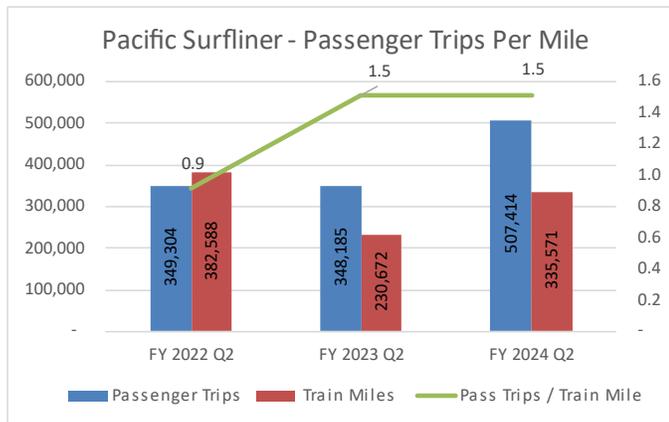


Figure 6

Passenger trips per train mile is calculated by dividing total passenger trips (ridership) by the total miles traveled by all Pacific Surfliner trains operated in revenue service³. This metric focuses on service efficiency, as it is the ratio of usage (passenger trips) over service provided (train miles). The higher the ratio value, the more efficient the service, and vice versa.

For the second quarter of FY 2023-24, the ratio of passenger trips per train mile increased by 0.2 percent when compared with the same period in the prior year, as illustrated in Figure 6.

³ Total train miles include deadhead mileage to and from rail yard facilities.

Revenue

In correlation with the Pacific Surfliner ridership increase, primarily due to the absence of service disruptions that were present in the previous fiscal year, total revenue for the Pacific Surfliner also increased. For the second quarter of FY 2023-24, total revenue increased by 73.6 percent when compared with the same period in the prior year, as shown in Figure 7.

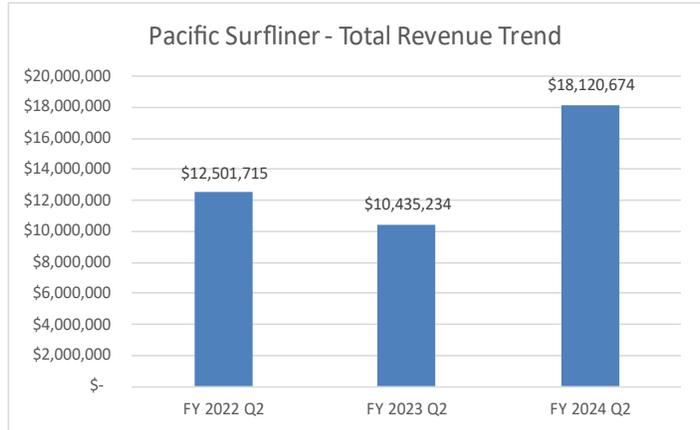


Figure 7

Farebox Recovery

The Pacific Surfliner farebox recovery ratio is calculated as total revenue divided by total operating expenses. As a performance measure, farebox recovery is normally reported on an annual basis, versus a shorter period. This is because expenses are not linear throughout the year, which can result in significant fluctuations in the farebox recovery ratio from month to month and even quarter to quarter. The Pacific Surfliner is legislatively required to achieve a minimum annual farebox recovery of 50 percent. The Pacific Surfliner farebox recovery ratio for the 12-month period ending December 31, 2023, was 52.3 percent. For comparison, including only the three months of the second quarter of FY 2023-24 results in a farebox recovery ratio of 64.6 percent.

Quality

OTP

The methodologies for calculating OTP vary significantly between intercity and commuter rail services. A commuter train is considered late if it arrives six or more minutes late to its terminal location, while a Pacific Surfliner train is considered late if it arrives more than 15 minutes after its scheduled arrival time. For the Pacific Surfliner service, endpoint OTP is calculated by dividing the total number of trains arriving on time at the end point by the total number of trains operated. The State of California intercity passenger rail Uniform Performance Standards (UPS), which were approved by the Secretary of Transportation in 2014, set an endpoint OTP goal of 90 percent for the Pacific Surfliner service.

For the three months in the second quarter of FY 2023-24, endpoint OTP for the Pacific Surfliner averaged 83.0 percent, which was a 2.1 percent decrease over the same period in the prior year. Figure 8 illustrates a monthly OTP trend for the Pacific Surfliner.

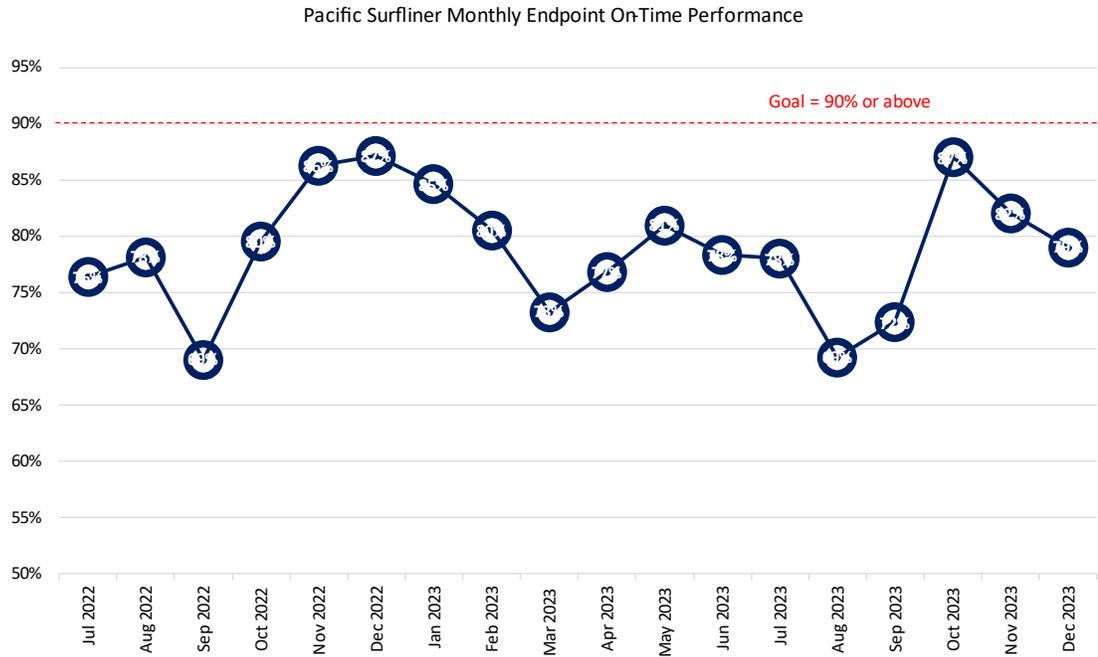


Figure 8

The LOSSAN Rail Corridor Agency (LOSSAN Agency) will continue to work collaboratively with the Corridor Improvement Team via quarterly meetings to identify and address issues negatively impacting OTP.

Customer Satisfaction

Amtrak reports a monthly Electronic Customer Satisfaction Index (eCSI) score for all routes, in which a “very satisfied” percentage is calculated per 100 passengers via electronic surveys. For the second quarter of FY 2023-24, the Pacific Surfliner scored an average eCSI of 83.2 percent, representing a 7.6 percent increase from the average eCSI of 77.3 percent achieved during the same period last year.

Additional Performance Indicators

Food and Beverage Sales

The LOSSAN Agency’s focus on improving service quality and the customer experience has prompted additional attention to the food and beverage selections offered in the Pacific Surfliner Café Car. Continual effort is made to ensure that menu items are meeting passenger expectations. As part of that effort, LOSSAN Agency staff closely monitor food and beverage sales to gauge the success of what is being offered and identify items that need to be adjusted.

<i>Sales Category</i>	<i>FY23 Q2</i> <i>(Oct-Dec 2022)</i>	<i>FY24 Q2</i> <i>(Oct-Dec 2023)</i>	<i>% Change</i>
Baked Goods	\$ 35,085	\$ 114,619	226.7%
Beer	\$ 80,852	\$ 172,064	112.8%
Beverages	\$ 136,743	\$ 348,617	154.9%
Dairy Products	\$ 768	\$ 1,070	39.3%
Fresh Prepared Foods	\$ 86,862	\$ 183,918	111.7%
Liquor	\$ 43,456	\$ 100,094	130.3%
Miscellaneous Merchandise	\$ 1,078	\$ 1,468	36.2%
Packaged Snack Foods	\$ 231,424	\$ 460,090	98.8%
Salads	\$ 438	\$ 49	-88.8%
Wine	\$ 113,017	\$ 311,655	175.8%
Total Revenue	\$ 729,722	\$ 1,693,644	132.1%

Figure 9

For the second quarter of FY 2023-24, food and beverage sales increased by 132.1 percent compared to the same quarter in the prior year, which aligns with the increase in Pacific Surfliner ridership. Details on the performance of each specific category are included in Figure 9.

Amtrak Thruway Bus Service

Pacific Surfliner rail service is supplemented by Amtrak’s network of Thruway buses that connect passengers throughout the LOSSAN corridor. The bus routes function as part of the Pacific Surfliner service and as of December 31, 2023, included:

- Route 4⁴: One daily round trip between Los Angeles and Santa Barbara.
- Route 17: Two daily round trips between Santa Barbara, San Luis Obispo, and Oakland (where it connects with Capitol Corridor); and one daily round trip between San Luis Obispo and Oakland.
- Route 39: One daily round trip between Fullerton and Indio/Coachella Valley, and one daily round trip between Fullerton and Palm Springs.

For the second quarter of FY 2023-24, combined ridership on these three routes totaled 26,345, representing an increase of 18.1 percent when compared to the ridership of 22,304 for the same period in the prior year.

⁴ Although service on Thruway Bus Route 4 operated throughout FY 2024 Q2, the service was discontinued December 2023.

Summary

This report provides an update of trends for the usage, efficiency, and quality of the passenger rail services on the Los Angeles – San Diego – San Luis Obispo Rail Corridor, including the Pacific Surfliner, Metrolink, and COASTER, for the second quarter of FY 2023-24. During the second quarter, total combined passenger rail ridership along the corridor increased by 29.0 percent when compared to the same period last year. Notably, ridership on the Pacific Surfliner alone increased by 45.7 percent, accompanied by a significant 73.6 percent increase in total revenue relative to the same period in the previous year.

Attachment

- A. Los Angeles – San Diego – San Luis Obispo Rail Corridor Performance Summary, Second Quarter Fiscal Year 2023-24

Prepared by:



Kristopher Ryan
Chief Financial Officer
(714) 560-5409