




**October 3, 2024**

**To:** Members of the Technical Advisory Committee  
**From:** Jason Jewell, Managing Director   
**Subject:** Fiscal Year 2023-24 Fourth 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 fourth 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 fourth quarter of FY 2023-24, covering the months of April, May, and June 2024.

#### Impact of COVID-19 Pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic significantly impacted transit operations globally, including the LOSSAN corridor's three rail services. Following Governor Newsom's March 15, 2020, safer-at-home order, the Pacific Surfliner, COASTER, and Metrolink experienced notable declines in ridership and revenue, leading to temporary service reductions starting late March 2020. As conditions improved, rail services gradually resumed. COASTER was the first to return to full service on May 29, 2021, coinciding with Metrolink's new Saturday service on its Ventura County Line. The Pacific Surfliner service restoration began on June 28, 2021, increasing from 12 to 18 daily one-way trips, and further expanded on October 24, 2021, to 21 daily one-way trips. Metrolink's significant service expansion occurred on April 4, 2022, with the addition of 26 trains, marking a pivotal recovery milestone since the pandemic onset.

#### Impacts of Temporary Track Closures in San Clemente Due to Falling Debris

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, 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 this 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.

Recurring debris movement from the same slope led to another suspension of service starting June 5, 2023. On June 23, 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, with service fully restored on July 17, 2023, following the completion of the barrier wall.

In a subsequent development, another landslide on January 24, 2024, from private property above the city-owned Mariposa Trail Pedestrian Bridge once again scattered debris onto the track. OCTA, along with its partners, quickly responded by removing debris and the damaged bridge spans. A 200-foot-long catchment wall at Mariposa Point was constructed to safeguard the rail right-of-way. Despite the ongoing construction, limited Pacific Surfliner passenger service was able to resume in early March. Specific morning and evening trains operated through San Clemente to maintain connectivity while allowing construction to continue during mid-day. Full passenger service was restored on March 25, 2024, ahead of schedule, thanks to expedited work and robust cooperation among transportation agencies.

Usage

For the fourth quarter of FY 2023-24, total LOSSAN corridor **ridership for the three services combined was 1,240,761**, representing a 27.7 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.

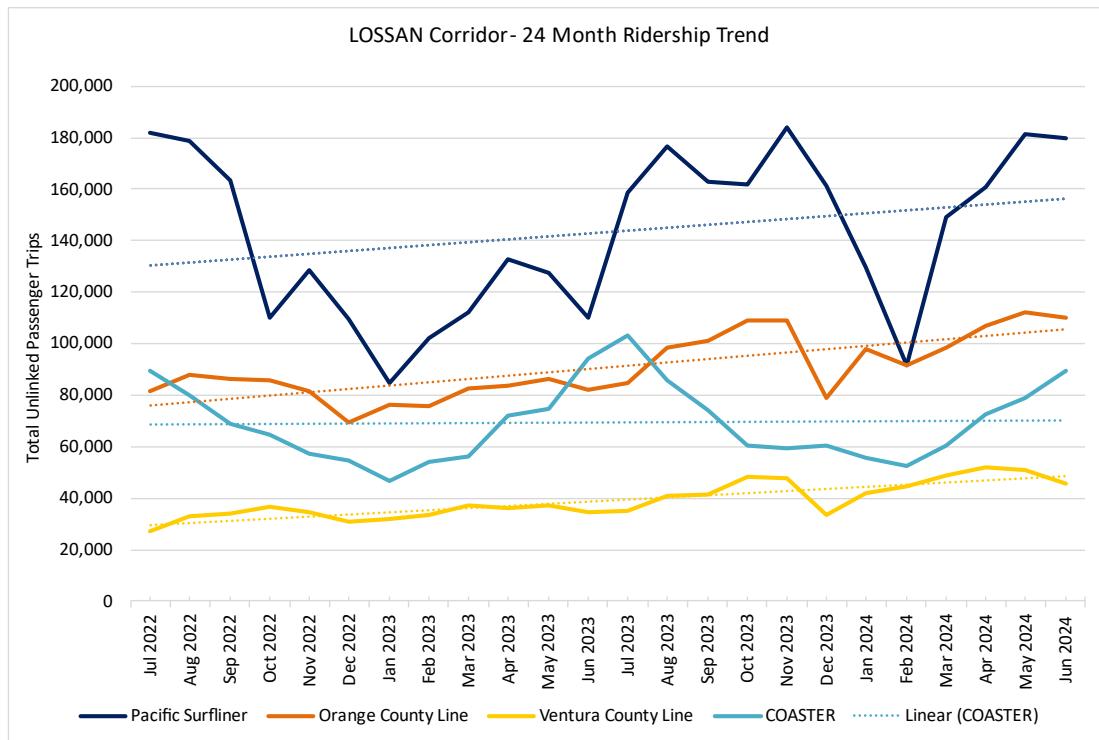


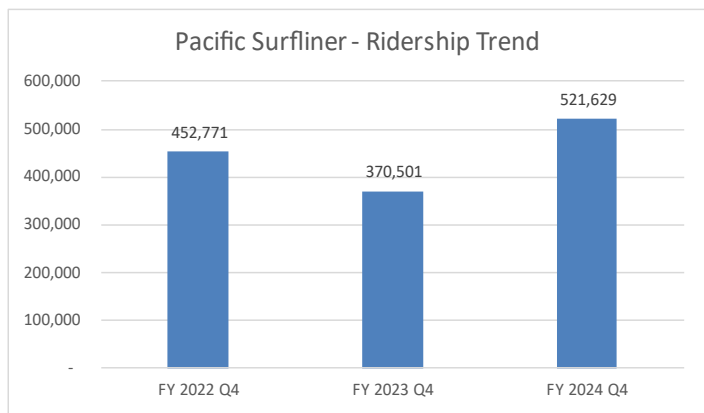
Figure 1

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**

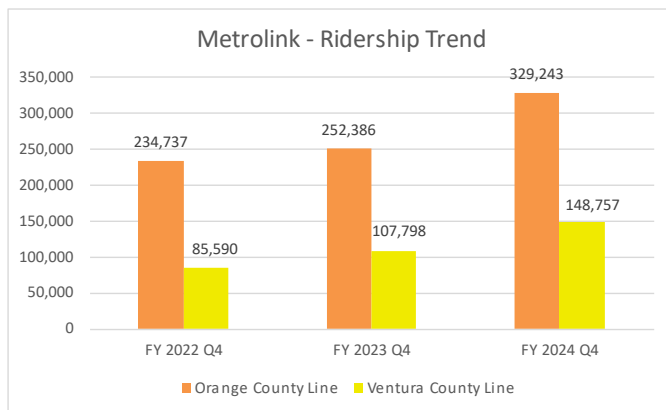
Overall LOSSAN corridor ridership includes ridership on the Pacific Surfliner intercity passenger rail service, which operates between San Diego and San Luis Obispo. Pacific Surfliner ridership during the fourth quarter of FY 2023-24 was 521,629, representing an increase of 40.8 percent when



*Figure 2*

compared to the same period last year, as is illustrated in Figure 2. The increase in ridership can be attributed to a combination of growing demand and the absence of service disruptions during FY2024 Q4. In contrast, FY2023 Q4 experienced significant service disruptions due to emergency track closures in San Clemente. 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 38.0 percent when compared to the fourth quarter of last year. The OCL, which operates between Los Angeles and Oceanside, saw a 30.5 percent increase in ridership over the same report period in the prior year. During

the fourth quarter of FY 2023-24, there were an average of 10,763 Metrolink pass holders per month who utilized the R2R Program to ride Pacific Surfliner trains<sup>1</sup>.

**COASTER**

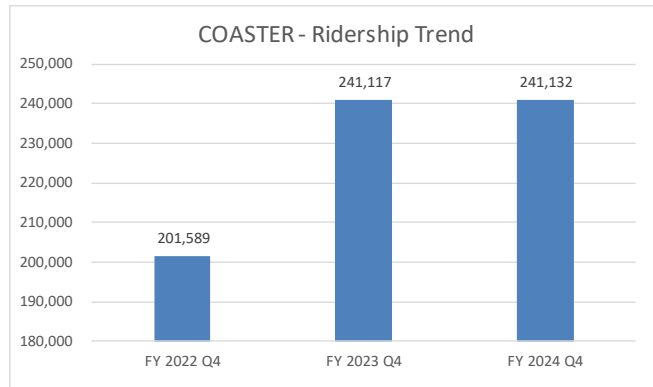


Figure 4

NCTD’s COASTER commuter rail service operating between Oceanside and San Diego experienced no change in ridership during the fourth quarter of FY 2023-24 when compared to the same period in the prior year, as shown in Figure 4. During the fourth quarter of FY 2023-24, there were an average of 605

COASTER pass holders per month utilizing the R2R Program to ride Pacific Surfliner trains<sup>2</sup>.

**Amtrak System**

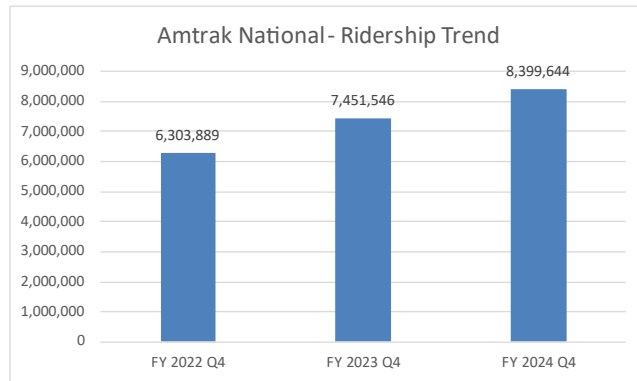


Figure 5

Amtrak service nationwide experienced a cumulative ridership increase of 12.7 percent for the fourth 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 increase by 11.7 percent in the

fourth 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 decreased by 0.3 percent on the Capitol Corridor and increased by 4.2 percent

<sup>1</sup> Metrolink R2R values are based on preliminary, unaudited data provided by Amtrak.

<sup>2</sup> COASTER R2R values are based on preliminary, unaudited data provided by Amtrak.

on the San Joaquins Corridor during the fourth quarter when compared to the same period last year.

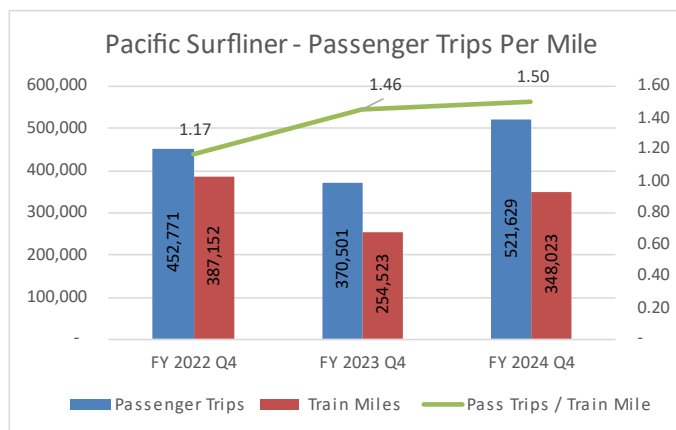
**Passenger Miles**

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 50 million passenger miles during the fourth quarter of FY 2023-24, which is a 76.0 percent increase compared to the same period in the prior year. This increase in passenger miles corresponds with the significant growth in ridership and the absence of service disruptions. 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 18,261 tons of greenhouse gases was achieved, which is equivalent to avoiding burning approximately 1,864,082 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 service<sup>3</sup>. 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 fourth quarter of FY 2023-24, the ratio of passenger trips per train mile increased slightly by 3.0 percent when compared with the same period in the prior year, as illustrated in Figure 6.

<sup>3</sup> 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 fourth quarter of FY 2023-24, total revenue increased by 46.0 percent when compared with the same period in the prior year, as shown in Figure 7.

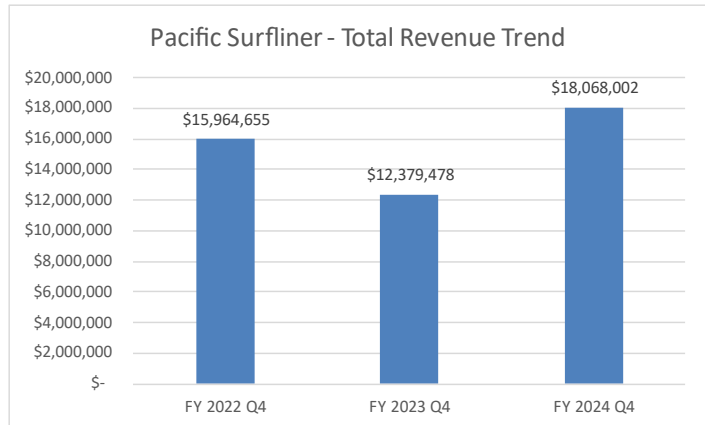


Figure 7

### Farebox Recovery

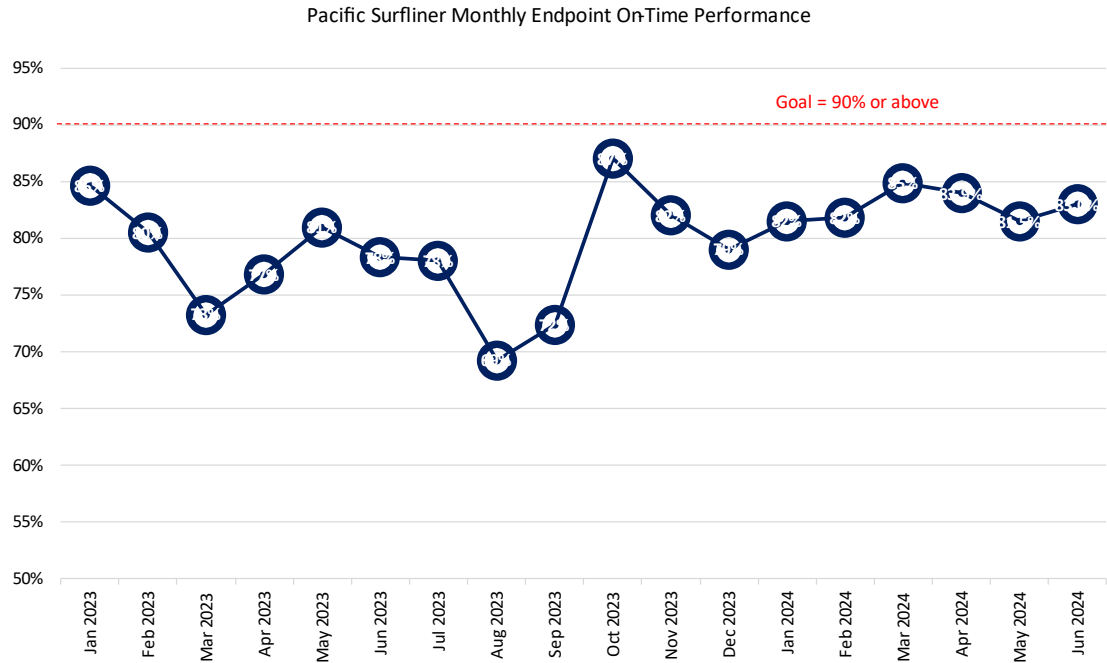
The Pacific Surfliner farebox recovery ratio is calculated as total revenue divided by total operating expenses. As a performance measure, farebox recovery is normally reported on an annual basis, versus a shorter period. This is because expenses are not linear throughout the year, which can result in 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 June 30, 2024, was 58.3 percent. For comparison, including only the three months of the fourth quarter of FY 2023-24 results in a farebox recovery ratio of 61.6 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 fourth quarter of FY 2023-24, endpoint OTP for the Pacific Surfliner averaged 82.8 percent, which was a 5.4 percent increase 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 fourth quarter of FY 2023-24, the Pacific Surfliner scored an average eCSI of 83.7 percent, representing a 8.2 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.

<b>Sales Category</b>	<b>FY23 Q4</b> <i>(Apr–June 2023)</i>	<b>FY24 Q4</b> <i>(Apr–Jun 2024)</i>	<b>% Change</b>
Baked Goods	\$ 32,547	\$ 76,410	134.8%
Beer	\$ 92,279	\$ 201,426	118.3%
Beverages	\$ 138,291	\$ 280,608	102.9%
Dairy Products	\$ 653	\$ 1,255	92.3%
Fresh Prepared Foods	\$ 94,927	\$ 178,878	88.4%
Liquor	\$ 58,269	\$ 115,718	98.6%
Miscellaneous Merchandise	\$ 1,999	\$ 174	-91.3%
Packaged Snack Foods	\$ 266,053	\$ 403,062	51.5%
Salads	\$ 868	\$ -	-100.0%
Wine	\$ 121,872	\$ 239,201	96.3%
<b>Total Revenue</b>	<b>\$ 807,756</b>	<b>\$ 1,496,730</b>	<b>85.3%</b>

*Figure 9*

For the fourth quarter of FY 2023-24, food and beverage sales increased by 85.3 percent compared to the same quarter in the prior year, a result of both increased ridership and the absence of service disruptions. This growth also reflects the successful collaboration between LOSSAN and Amtrak in evaluating food and beverage offerings, making adjustments based on customer survey feedback, and optimizing pricing. 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 June 30, 2024, included:

- 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 fourth quarter of FY 2023-24, combined ridership on these two routes totaled 22,179, representing an increase of 2.5 percent when compared to the ridership of 21,629 for the same period in the prior year. This increase can be

attributed to higher overall ridership, supported by the absence of service disruptions and growing passenger demand.

***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 fourth quarter of FY 2023-24. During the fourth quarter, total combined passenger rail ridership along the corridor increased by 27.7 percent when compared to the same period last year. Notably, ridership on the Pacific Surfliner alone increased by 40.8 percent, accompanied by a significant 46.0 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, Fourth Quarter Fiscal Year 2023-24

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