




March 17, 2025

To: Members of the Board of Directors

From: Jason Jewell, Managing Director 

Subject: Amendment to Agreement for Public Relations Services

Overview

On August 15, 2022, the Los Angeles – San Diego – San Luis Obispo Rail Corridor Agency Board of Directors approved an agreement with The ACE Agency, Inc., to provide public relations services for the Los Angeles – San Diego – San Luis Obispo Rail Corridor Agency for a one-year initial term and two, one-year option terms. In order to continue these services, Board of Directors’ approval is requested to increase the maximum obligation of the agreement for additional costs associated with increased efforts to promote the Pacific Surfliner brand through partnerships and targeted outreach initiatives.

Recommendation

Authorize the Managing Director to negotiate and execute Amendment No. 5 to Agreement L-2-0002 between the Los Angeles – San Diego – San Luis Obispo Rail Corridor Agency and The ACE Agency, Inc., to increase the maximum obligation by \$30,000, to a total contract value of \$176,250, for continued public relations services for the Pacific Surfliner marketing program.

Discussion

On July 15, 2024, the Los Angeles – San Diego – San Luis Obispo (LOSSAN) Rail Corridor Agency (Agency) Board of Directors (Board) authorized the Managing Director to negotiate and execute Amendment No. 3 to Agreement No. L-2-0002 (Agreement) with The ACE Agency, Inc., (The ACE Agency) to exercise the second and final option term, effective September 1, 2024, through August 31, 2025, in the amount of \$60,000, to provide continued public relations services for the Pacific Surfliner marketing program. This amendment increased the maximum obligation of the Agreement to a total contract value of \$146,250.

In addition to distributing press releases to print, online, and broadcast media, The ACE Agency supports the LOSSAN Agency with pitching stories and developing media contacts across industries such as transportation and tourism. Efforts also include working with bloggers and online influencers to promote visibility and awareness of the Pacific Surfliner. The scope of the agreement outlines the responsibilities of The ACE Agency, which include the following:

- Develop and implement targeted public relations campaigns to generate featured articles and related publicity.
- Work with bloggers and online influencers to promote visibility and awareness of the Pacific Surfliner brand.
- Utilize public relations syndication and media monitoring tools to track coverage, provide reporting, and identify opportunities to protect and enhance the Pacific Surfliner brand. Provide consultation for crisis management as needed.
- Build and maintain relationships with the press on behalf of the LOSSAN Agency. Maintain and update the Pacific Surfliner Media Room and editorial calendar.
- Manage lists including updating contacts and building targeted distribution lists with print, digital, and broadcast sources from local, regional, and national media outlets.
- Plan and execute media events that build positive visibility in key markets. Coordinate group and independent media familiarization trips including handling travel arrangements and correspondence with business and tourism partners. Follow up with press to ensure coverage following events.

The budget for Amendment No. 3 in the amount of \$60,000, was originally based on current and historical commitments at the time of preparation. However, as ridership levels on the Pacific Surfliner continue to recover following the coronavirus pandemic and several long-term track closures in the City of San Clement, e new opportunities have emerged to promote travel and increase awareness of the service. As a result, the LOSSAN Agency's public relations efforts have increased to allow for more direct engagement with target audiences to promote travel and increase awareness of the service.

For example, in August 2024, The ACE Agency coordinated a paid partnership on behalf of the LOSSAN Agency to feature the Pacific Surfliner service on the Armchair Explorer Podcast. The Armchair Explorer Podcast is an award-winning documentary podcast which features interviews with adventurers recounting their most notable journeys and combines these personal narratives with music and sound effects to create an immersive listening experience. The paid partnership consisted of two components, which were a custom episode produced about the Pacific Surfliner service and advertisements read by the host during other episodes of the Armchair Explorer Podcast. In the 49-minute custom episode titled "Pacific Surfliner: Taking the Slow Track Down the So-Cal Coast,"

which was released on August 19, 2024, host Aaron Millar, along with producers Jason Paton and Ally Nisbet, recorded on location while visiting several destinations along both the northern and southern segments of the route. As of November 2024, there were over 5,200 downloads of the custom episode produced about the Pacific Surfliner service.

During the remainder of the current and final option term of the Agreement with The ACE Agency, several service developments will warrant additional engagement with target audiences through partnerships and targeted outreach campaigns. First, two additional round trips along the southern segment of the Pacific Surfliner route between Los Angeles and San Diego are anticipated to be restored, as the result of the LOSSAN Agency receiving grant funding through the Federal Railroad Administration's Restoration and Enhancement Grant Program.

In addition, promotion of the service as a viable and convenient alternative to driving will be warranted for several upcoming peak travel periods, including the Memorial Day and Independence Day holidays, Comic-Con San Diego, the opening weekend of the Del Mar Racetrack racing season, and overall higher travel demand during the summer months.

In consideration of the budgetary resources required to leverage past opportunities such as the paid partnership with the Armchair Explorer Podcast, additional resources are required to sustain and expand public relations initiatives effectively for anticipated service developments in the coming months.

An increase in the maximum cumulative obligation of the Agreement will support The ACE Agency in executing high-impact strategy, covering costs for materials, travel, and partnerships, and ensuring the LOSSAN Agency can capitalize on emerging opportunities to connect with potential riders. Without this investment, the LOSSAN Agency risks losing momentum in its efforts to rebuild ridership and maximize the visibility of the Pacific Surfliner brand. Therefore, staff recommends that the Board authorize an amendment to increase the maximum cumulative obligation of the Agreement by \$30,000. This increase is based on current and anticipated efforts for public relations services through the end of the current and final option term on August 31, 2025.

Procurement Approach

The procurement was handled in accordance with LOSSAN Agency's Board-approved policies and procedures for professional services. The original Agreement was awarded on a competitive basis and included a one-year initial term in the amount of \$75,000 with two, one-year option terms to provide public relations services. This Agreement has been previously amended as shown in Attachment A.

The proposed Amendment No. 5 is to increase the maximum cumulative payment obligation by \$30,000, bringing the total contract value to \$176,250, which will allow the LOSSAN Agency to continue engaging with target audiences as several service developments occur. The budget for this amendment is based on current and anticipated levels of efforts for public relations services.

Fiscal Impact

The funds for this contract were initially included in the Fiscal Year 2024-25 approved budget. While this amendment increases the contract's maximum obligation, the LOSSAN marketing budget has sufficient capacity to accommodate the adjustment. No additional funding is required beyond the existing approved budget, and no changes to the overall LOSSAN budget are necessary.

Summary

Staff recommend the Board of Directors authorize the Managing Director to negotiate and execute Amendment No. 5 to Agreement No. L-2-0002 with The ACE Agency, Inc., to increase the maximum obligation of the agreement by \$30,000, to a total contract value of \$176,250, for continued public relations services for the Pacific Surfliner marketing program.

Attachment

- A. The ACE Agency, Inc., Agreement No. L-2-0002 Fact Sheet

Prepared by:



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