



**VENTURA COUNTY TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION
SANTA PAULA BRANCH LINE ADVISORY COMMITTEE (SPBLAC)**

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**AGENDA*
WEDNESDAY, MARCH 12, 2025
1:00 PM**

**Actions may be taken on any item listed on the agenda.*

**Ventura County Community Foundation
Board Room
4001 Mission Oaks Blvd.
Camarillo, CA 93012**

In compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act and Government Code Section 54954.2, if special assistance is needed to participate in the Commission meeting, please contact VCTC staff (805) 642- 1591 ext. 101. Notification of at least 48 hours prior to meeting time will assist staff in assuring those reason be made to provide accessibility to the meeting.

- 1. CALL TO ORDER**
- 2. ROLL CALL**

- 3. PUBLIC COMMENTS** (For items not on the agenda) – *Each individual speaker is limited to three (3) minutes or less or less as set forth below. The Committee may, either at the direction of the Chair or by majority vote of the Committee, waive this three-minute time limitation. Depending on the number of items on the agenda and the number of speakers, the Chair may, at his/her discretion, reduce the time of each speaker to two (2) minutes. In addition, the maximum time for public comment for any individual item or topic is thirty (30) minutes unless extended by the Committee. Speakers may not yield their time to others without the consent of the Chair. Any written documents to be distributed or presented to the Committee shall be submitted to the Clerk of the Board. This policy applies to Public Comments and comments on Agenda Items.*

Under the Brown Act, the Committee should not take action on or discuss matters raised during the Public Comment portion of the agenda which are not listed on the agenda. Committee members may refer such matters to staff for factual information or to be placed on the subsequent agenda for consideration.

4. **APPROVE SUMMARY FROM 03/11/2024 – SPBLAC MEETING – PG. 3**
5. **COMMITTEE MEMBERS/STAFF REPORT** – *This item provides the opportunity for the SPBLAC members and VCTC staff to report on attended meetings and any other items related to SPBLAC activities.*
6. **ADDITIONS/REVISIONS** – *The SPBLAC may add an item to the Agenda after making a finding that there is a need to take immediate action on the item and that the item came to the attention of the SPBLAC subsequent to the posting of the agenda. An action adding an item to the agenda requires 2/3 vote of the SPBLAC. If there are less than 2/3 of the SPBLAC members present, adding an item to the agenda requires a unanimous vote. Added items will be placed for discussion at the end of the agenda.*
7. **SANTA PAULA BRANCH LINE BUDGET FOR FISCAL YEAR 2025/2026 – PG. 5**
Recommended Action:
Review draft Fiscal Year 2025/2026 budget for the Santa Paula Branch Line and provide comments to staff.
8. **SANTA PAULA BRANCH LINE UPDATE FROM SIERRA NORTHERN RAILWAY – PG. 9**
Recommended Action:
Receive and file an update from Sierra Northern Railway representatives regarding operations and maintenance on the Santa Paula Branch Line.
9. **SESPE CREEK OVERFLOW RAILROAD BRIDGE UPDATE – PG. 11**
Recommended Action:
Receive and file an update on efforts to repair storm damage to the Sespe Creek Overflow railroad bridge and to seek Federal and State reimbursement of emergency repair costs.
10. **SANTA PAULA BRANCH LINE TRAIL MASTER PLAN UPDATE – PG. 13**
Recommended Action:
Receive and file a report on the Santa Paula Branch Line Trail Master Plan Update and Environmental Impact Report/Environmental Impact Statement project.
11. **ADJOURN**



**VENTURA COUNTY TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION
SANTA PAULA BRANCH LINE ADVISORY COMMITTEE (SPBLAC)**

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MEETING SUMMARY

**THURSDAY, MARCH 11, 2024
10:30 AM**

**Ventura County Transportation Commission
751 E. Daily Dr., Suite 420
Camarillo, CA 93010**

1. CALL TO ORDER

Executive Director Erickson called the meeting to order.

Attendees included Committee Members Long, Johnson, Broggie, and Crosswhite, VCTC Executive Director Erickson, VCTC Staff Fagan and Kent, and Matt Blackburn, representing Sierra Northern Railway.

2. ROLL CALL

Committee Members Johnson, Long, Broggie, and Crosswhite were in attendance. Committee Member LaVere was absent.

3. PUBLIC COMMENTS (For items not on the agenda)

None.

4. APPROVE SUMMARY FROM 03/16/2023 – SPLBAC MEETING

Commissioner Broggie made a motion to approve the minutes from 03/16/2023, seconded by Commissioner Crosswhite. The motion carried 4-0.

5. COMMITTEE MEMBERS/STAFF REPORT

Mr. Erickson noted the impact of recent weather events to the SPBL, work to address deferred maintenance on the railway, and upcoming rail grant opportunities.

6. ADDITIONS/REVISIONS

None.

7. SANTA PAULA BRANCH LINE BUDGET FOR FISCAL YEAR 2024/2025

Ms. Fagan provided an overview of the Santa Paula Branch Line draft budget for Fiscal Year 2024/2025, including railroad operations and maintenance, staff time, right-of-way maintenance, and repairs to the Sespe Creek Overflow railroad bridge. Coordination with the owners of the private property upstream of the Sespe Creek Overflow railroad bridge and pending FEMA disaster declarations was discussed.

The Committee received and filed the report on the draft budget.

8. SANTA PAULA BRANCH LINE UPDATE FROM SIERRA NORTHERN RAILWAY

Mr. Blackburn shared an update on Sierra Northern Railway operations and activities, which included removal of encampments from the railroad right-of-way in cooperation with local law enforcement, weed abatement, freight rail services, and railbike tours. Recent changes to railbikes tours were also discussed, including implementation of headlights, horns, and orange flags to improve visibility and changes to the departure times (10:00 a.m. and 2:00 p.m.) to improve compatibility with agricultural operations in the area.

9. PARALLEL SYSTEMS OVERVIEW

Ms. Fagan provided a verbal report on tenant Parallel Systems and its research, development, and testing activities on the SPBL. No Parallel Systems representative was available to attend. The Committee also discussed future transitions to zero emission rail locomotives and efforts to reduce emissions from rail.

10. ADJOURN

The meeting adjourned at 11:37 a.m.



March 12, 2025

TO: SANTA PAULA BRANCH LINE ADVISORY COMMITTEE
FROM: AMANDA FAGAN, DIRECTOR OF PLANNING AND SUSTAINABILITY
SUBJECT: DRAFT SANTA PAULA BRANCH BUDGET FOR FISCAL YEAR 2025/2026

RECOMMENDATION:

- Review draft Fiscal Year 2025/2026 budget for the Santa Paula Branch Line and provide comments to staff.

DISCUSSION:

The Draft Fiscal Year 2025/2026 Santa Paula Branch Line (SPBL) budget reflects the fourth full year of operations under the Railroad Lease and Operations Agreement (Agreement) with Sierra Northern Railway (SNR), which became effective January 1, 2022. The Draft Budget provides for operations and maintenance and associated costs for asset management, maintenance, and operational obligations along the thirty-two miles long railroad corridor. The Draft Budget also includes VCTC staff costs for lease and asset management, such as issuing new and updated leases and licenses, coordinating with SNR on right-of-entry permits, and working with City and County partners and other stakeholders to update and implement the SPBL Trail Master Plan to complete the trail.

The Draft Budget includes operations and maintenance of the full SPBL right-of-way, with reimbursement of up to \$450,000 in expenses related to deferred and regular maintenance of the rail infrastructure and right-of-way, pursuant to the Railroad Lease and Operations Agreement. The Draft Fiscal Year 2025/2026 SPBL Budget is \$2,136,470 higher than Fiscal Year 2024/2025 (as amended), due to the addition of \$5,000,000 in Priority Legislative Budget Project (PLBP) funds for the SPBL Trail Project, offset by completion of engineering and permitting for repair of the Sespe Creek overflow railroad bridge from storm damage. It is anticipated that the Final Program Budget will be updated to reflect the results of the procurement for construction services to repair the Sespe Creek Overflow railroad bridge.

Consistent with the prior three fiscal years (2022/2023, 2023/2024, and 2024/2025), the Signals Repair and Replacement and Non-Rail Maintenance expense categories have been absorbed into the Track Maintenance category in accordance with the Agreement.

Revenues for the Santa Paula Branch Line come from six primary sources: (1) Local Fees from lease revenue generated by the approximately 75 paying leases along the SPBL; (2) Local Fees from permits, filming, and rail car storage; (3) State Transit Assistance (STA); (4) STA - Federal Emergency Management Agency / California Office of Emergency Services (CalOES) reimbursement; (5) Priority Legislative Budget Project (PLBP) funds, and (6) Surface Transportation Block Grant (STBG). STA funds are used to cover the delta between Local Fee revenues and the deferred and regular maintenance reimbursement to Sierra Northern and as local match against FEMA and CalOES contributions to repair of the Sespe Creek Overflow railroad bridge. STA funds are also used for VCTC staff salaries, benefits, and indirect costs. It is anticipated that STA requirements for the SPBL Budget will be reduced over time as the Agreement with Sierra Northern matures and following completion of disaster response and bridge repair. The PLBP allocation and Surface Transportation Block Grant (STBG) funds advance the Commission's adopted goal to reinvigorate the process to complete the SPBL bike trail and Strategic Plan strategy to update the trail master plan, validate trail alignment, connections, and amenities, and update existing conditions to facilitate trail completion, with stakeholder engagement.

BUDGET TASK: SANTA PAULA BRANCH LINE

DIRECTOR: Amanda Fagan

BUDGET MANAGER: Amanda Fagan

OBJECTIVES: Manage the Santa Paula Branch Line (SPBL) corridor.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS: The Ventura County Transportation Commission purchased the 32-miles long Santa Paula Branch Line railroad and right-of-way in 1995. The purchase included leases for cultivation, utilities, crossings, and pipelines, which provide a portion of the revenue needed to support and a continual need to actively manage the SPBL. In December 2021, VCTC executed a Railroad Lease and Operations Agreement with Sierra Northern Railway (SNR) for a 35-year term. Under the Agreement, SNR is responsible to operate and maintain the full SPBL right-of-way, including weed abatement, trash removal, addressing trespass, bridge inspections, and other day-to-day management activities. During Fiscal Year 2024/2025, VCTC staff provided administrative oversight and managed responsibilities retained by VCTC, such as lease and licensing activities and coordination with corridor cities.

In April 2022, the Commission adopted a goal to reinvigorate the process to complete the SPBL bike trail, and in April 2023, adopted a Five-Year Strategic Plan strategy to update the trail master plan, validate trail alignment, connections, and amenities, and update existing conditions to facilitate trail completion, with stakeholder engagement. VCTC received Regional Early Action Planning County Transportation Commissions Partnership Program and Surface Transportation Block Grant awards to fund the master plan update project. During Fiscal Year 2024/2025, VCTC procured consultant support and initiated an update to the SPBL Trail Master Plan and supported efforts by the Cities of Ventura and Santa Paula to plan, engineer, and construct 4- and 1.5-mile trail extensions, respectively. Under AB 157, the Budget Act of 2024, the California State Legislature appropriated \$5,000,000 from the State General Fund to Caltrans, to be allocated to VCTC for the SPBL Trail Project, known as a Priority Legislative Budget Project (PLBP).

Severe winter storms in January 2023 and February 2024 damaged the Sespe Creek Overflow railroad bridge near Fillmore. With contractor support, VCTC continues efforts to design, engineer, permit and secure Federal and State emergency funding to repair the damaged bridge to reconnect the eastern section of the SPBL to the rail network. During Fiscal Year 2024/2025, VCTC completed emergency protective measures to stabilize embankment and remove suspended railroad tracks and ties. Bridge repair construction is expected to occur in Summer/Fall 2025. VCTC continues to work with the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and California Office of Emergency Services (CalOES) to secure reimbursement for the costs of emergency repairs and bridge reconstruction.

DESCRIPTION: The Fiscal Year 2025/2026 Santa Paula Branch Line Task Budget provides for administration and oversight of the Railroad Lease and Operations Agreement, lease and asset management, and coordination with Federal, State, and local partners to repair the Sespe Creek overflow bridge and respond to storm damage. The workplan also includes an update to the SPBL Trail Master Plan and administration of PLBP funds. The Fiscal Year 2025/2026 SPBL Budget is \$2,136,470 above the previous fiscal year due to addition of the PLBP funds for the SPBL Trail Project, offset by completion of engineering and permitting for repair of the Sespe Creek overflow railroad bridge from storm damage.



BUDGET TASK: SANTA PAULA BRANCH LINE (continued)

DIRECTOR: Amanda Fagan

BUDGET MANAGER: Amanda Fagan

WORK ELEMENTS:

1. Administrative oversight of the Railroad Lease and Operations Agreement.
2. Railroad operations and right-of-way maintenance.
3. Ensure compliance with policies and requirements of VCTC, California Public Utilities Commission, Federal Railroad Administration, and Surface Transportation Board.
4. Identify and address railroad right-of-way encroachment through noticing and leasing.
5. Prepare and administer leases, licenses, and right-of-entry permits for use of SPBL property. Evaluate leases and establish a new rate schedule where applicable.
6. Conduct a Railroad Right-of-Way Survey.
7. Update the SPBL Trail Master Plan.
8. Respond to storm-related damage to SPBL infrastructure.
9. Coordinate broadband deployment on SPBL right-of-way with the County of Ventura.

PRODUCT: Continued safe and cost-effective management of the SPBL corridor. Reconstructed Sespe Creek Overflow Railroad Bridge.

FUNDING:

Funding Source	Funding Dollars
STA Fund Transfer	\$342,000
STA Carry-Over	991,700
STA Fund Transfer – FEMA / CalOES	8,245,900
STBG Grant	1,450,500
PLBP Grant	5,000,000
Local Fee – Leases	420,000
Local Fee – Permits, Film and Rail Car Storage	10,000
Total Funding	\$16,460,100

EXPENDITURE COMPARISON:

	Fiscal Year 2023/2024 Actual	Fiscal Year 2024/2025 Budget*	Fiscal Year 2025/2026 Budget
Salaries	\$ 87,591	\$ 79,800	\$ 74,900
Fringe and Tax	30,036	26,800	26,800
Indirect Cost Allocation	101,053	83,600	83,300
Mileage	0	500	500
Notices	0	1,000	1,000
Office Support	136	500	500
Consultant Services	762,921	6,429,430	3,738,100
Legal Services	97,789	72,000	80,000
Bridge Reconstruction	0	7,175,000	7,000,000
Non-Rail Maintenance	257,065	5,000	5,000
Track Maintenance	450,000	450,000	450,000
PLPB – SPBL Trail Project	0	0	5,000,000
Total Expenditures	\$1,786,591	\$14,323,630	\$16,460,100

* This budget task was amended after the Commission approved the budget in June 2024.



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Item # 8

March 12, 2025

TO: SANTA PAULA BRANCH LINE ADVISORY COMMITTEE
FROM: AMANDA FAGAN, DIRECTOR OF PLANNING AND SUSTAINABILITY
SUBJECT: SANTA PAULA BRANCH LINE SIERRA NORTHERN RAILWAY UPDATE

RECOMMENDATION:

- Receive and file an update from Sierra Northern Railway representatives regarding operations and maintenance on the Santa Paula Branch Line.

BACKGROUND:

In December 2021, VCTC executed a Railroad Lease and Operations Agreement (Agreement) with Sierra Northern Railway (SNR) for a 35-year term. Under the Agreement, SNR is responsible to operate and maintain the full SPBL right-of-way as of January 1, 2022. The Agreement defines roles and responsibilities and grants Sierra Northern the exclusive rights to operate the SPBL for Railroad Purposes, including tourist and freight services, film and television production, and storage and transload services.

DISCUSSION:

Representatives of Sierra Northern Railway will provide verbal updates on the activities, operations and maintenance of the Santa Paula Branch Line railroad.

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March 12, 2025

MEMO TO: SANTA PAULA BRANCH LINE ADVISORY COMMITTEE
FROM: AMANDA FAGAN, DIRECTOR OF PLANNING & SUSTAINABILITY
SUBJECT: SESPE CREEK OVERFLOW RAILROAD BRIDGE UPDATE

RECOMMENDATION:

- *Receive and file an update on efforts to repair the Sespe Creek Overflow Railroad Bridge on the Santa Paula Branch Line.*

BACKGROUND:

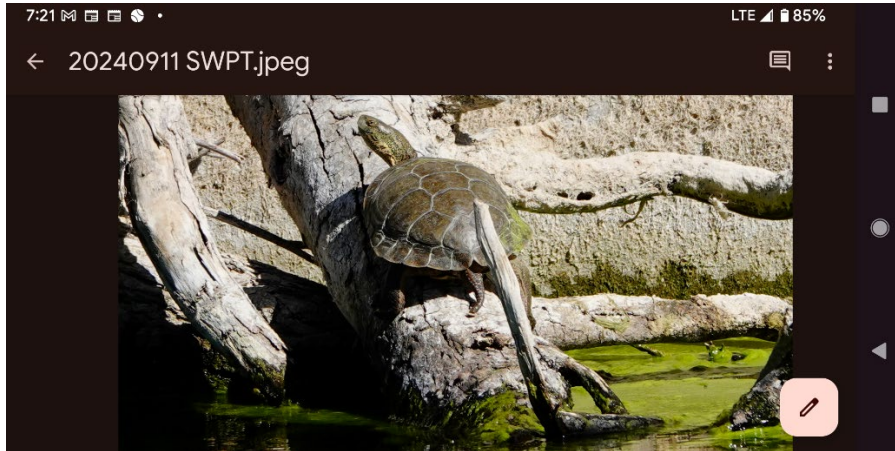
The Sespe Creek Overflow railroad bridge is located at approximately Mile Post 423.44 on the Santa Paula Branch Line (SPBL) railroad, just west of Fillmore, California. The bridge was constructed in 1969 and has a total length of 450 feet, vertical clearance of 14 feet, and 15 spans of 29 feet-10 inches each. On the early morning of January 10, 2023, heavy rain, stream flow, and debris accumulated during a series of storms and washed out three spans, or approximately 90 feet, of the railroad bridge. Three spans on the western end of the bridge were destroyed and require reconstruction to restore to pre-disaster design, capacity, and function to restore rail service on the bridge. On February 4-5, 2024, an atmospheric river storm and resulting high water flows caused further erosion behind the abutment and underneath the railroad track structure, exposing approximately 50 additional feet of track beyond the damage caused by the January 2023 storm, which required additional analysis, design, and permitting for emergency repairs to the embankment.

During Summer 2024, VCTC and the RailPros team worked to plan, permit, and procure construction contractor services to complete emergency repairs to stabilize the west embankment of the Sespe Creek Overflow railroad bridge while continuing to plan for a permanent bridge repair. Efforts were focused on addressing the additional damages to the railroad approach caused by the February 2024 storms, which resulted in a vertical cut-bank behind the bridge abutment and loss of the embankment, and to prepare a geomorphic assessment to evaluate the stability of the slope and potential impacts of future storm events. Working in collaboration, a repair option was developed that would meet the requirements of a Regional General Permit 63 (RGP 63) from the United States Army Corps of Engineers (USACE). To qualify for an RGP 63, the project must address a clear, sudden, unexpected, and imminent threat to life or property that demands immediate action, be the minimum necessary to alleviate the immediate emergency, unless complete reconstruction only results in very minor additional impact to aquatic resources and is as expedient as possible and limited to in-kind replacement or refurbishment. The emergency repairs met these criteria as they were necessary to prevent further damage to the bridge and surrounding public infrastructure in advance of the winter storm season. On August 28, USACE issued a final RGP 63. Among other things, the RGP 63 required daily onsite monitoring from a qualified biologist to monitor and ensure protection of listed species, including the Southwestern Pond Turtle, which has been observed within the project area.

DISCUSSION:

On September 6, VCTC approved a contract with Summer Construction to complete emergency repairs covered by the RGP 63. On September 11, Summer Construction began on-site construction activities and

has continued to make strong progress toward completion of the emergency work with a projected completion date of November 8. Onsite daily oversight by a construction manager and qualified biologist ensured that construction occurred in a safe and effective manner in accordance with plans and specifications and in compliance with regulatory permits. Repairs were completed ahead of schedule on October 24. Daily reports with weekly summary reports were submitted by the biological monitor, as well as final reports submitted to regulatory agencies as required. A photo of a Southwestern Pond Turtle observed near the project site is included below.



Southwestern Pond Turtle observed in the Sespe Creek Overflow



Before: Post-Storm – 02/07/2024



After: Emergency Repairs Complete – 10/24/2024

With the embankment stabilization completed, the team's focus shifted to updating plans and specifications for permanent bridge repair. As of March 3, 2025, VCTC and our consultant team have submitted permit applications to regulatory agencies (Section 401 Certification, Lake and Streambed Alteration, etc.) and are working to finalize the draft Invitation for Bids (IFB) and template contract for a construction contractor for Commission consideration at the April 4, 2025 meeting. The current timeline would seek Commission approval of a construction contractor selection at the June 2025 meeting, with construction anticipated to begin by July 2025. In-water work likely needs to be completed by September 15 (subject to regulatory agency approval). It is anticipated that track and other work would continue outside of the waterway beyond September 15, with a goal to complete remaining work by the end of the calendar year.

VCTC also continues to coordinate with the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and California Office of Emergency Services (CalOES) to facilitate project approval and cost reimbursement for the emergency repairs to stabilize the embankment (FEMA CAT B) and permanent repairs (FEMA CAT C). As of March 3, 2025, the CAT B project is pending FEMA Consolidated Resource Center (CRC) Project Development with costs fully documented. The CAT C project is also pending FEMA CRC Project Development. Staff continue to respond to requests for additional information and documentation from FEMA and CalOES. Staff also continue to monitor an anticipated release of Section 404 Hazard Mitigation Funding opportunities for a possible partnership with the County of Ventura and Ventura County Watershed Protection District on long-term protection of assets and infrastructure within the Sespe Creek Overflow area.



Item # 10

March 12, 2025

MEMO TO: SANTA PAULA BRANCH LINE ADVISORY COMMITTEE
FROM: AMANDA FAGAN, DIRECTOR OF PLANNING & SUSTAINABILITY
SUBJECT: SANTA PAULA BRANCH LINE TRAIL MASTER PLAN UPDATE

RECOMMENDATION:

- *Receive and file a report on the Santa Paula Branch Line Trail Master Plan Update and Environmental Impact Report/Environmental Impact Statement project.*

BACKGROUND:

VCTC acquired the Santa Paula Branch Line (SPBL) in 1995 for use as a multimodal corridor, which included a bicycle and hiking trail among its stated purposes. In 1996, VCTC adopted the *SPBL Master Plan*. Then in 2000, VCTC adopted the *SPBL Recreational Trail Master Plan* and certified an Environmental Impact Report (EIR). The *Trail Master Plan* provides design guidelines, preliminary engineering, a preferred alignment for the trail, and mitigations to avoid and address any impacts to agriculture and other resources. To date, three segments of the trail have been completed in the Cities of Santa Paula and Fillmore and within the Piru community. Final design and engineering for the four-mile segment from Montalvo to Saticoy is currently underway, led by the City of Ventura, with construction to be completed in 2026. Design and engineering for a 2.5-mile trail extension within the City of Santa Paula is also underway.

In April 2022, the Commission adopted a goal (Goal 13) to “Reinvigorate the process to complete the Santa Paula Branch Line bike trail,” and in April 2023, the Commission adopted the VCTC Strategic Plan FY 22/23 – FY 27/28, which includes Objective A8, “Update the Santa Paula Branch Line (SPBL) trail master plan, validate trail alignment, connections, and amenities, and update existing conditions to facilitate trail completion, with stakeholder engagement.”

Consideration of approval to authorize the Executive Director to finalize and execute an agreement with WSP USA, Inc. to update the SPBL Trail Master Plan and EIR/EIS is on the full Commission Agenda for March 7, 2025.

Staff will provide a verbal report on efforts to update the SPBL Trail Master Plan and EIR/EIS and other SPBL Trail planning, engineering, and development efforts.