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OCTA Board Authorizes Emergency Rail Stabilization Work in South Orange County

Effort advances critical action to safeguard Southern California's rail connection and public safety

ORANGE – The Orange County Transportation Authority Board of Directors on Monday authorized emergency actions to stabilize sections of railroad track threatened by coastal erosion and landslides in San Clemente, moving forward with urgent work to ensure continued passenger and freight rail operations through South Orange County.

The board unanimously approved a resolution authorizing OCTA CEO Darrell E. Johnson to take all necessary steps to protect a vital stretch of track through San Clemente, where recent landslides, beach erosion and degrading riprap pose a serious threat to the rail line. The rail is a vital connection between San Diego County and Orange County – and destinations further north – for passengers and freight and the movement of military assets.

“This action enables OCTA to act quickly and decisively to protect our coastal rail line,” said OCTA Chair Doug Chaffee, also Orange County’s Fourth District Supervisor. “By advancing this emergency work, we are helping to preserve a critical transportation link for Southern California, the region and beyond.”

The stabilization effort addresses four areas of vulnerability, including the area near Mariposa Point, where debris from recent landslides is nearing the top of the 12-foot-high temporary catchment wall installed last year to prevent slope failure.

The California Coastal Commission on Thursday, April 10, reviewed OCTA’s submission for a permit and issued a partial emergency Coastal Development Permit to stabilize the coastal rail corridor.

While this action is a positive development, it does not include approval for all the elements OCTA has identified as critical to protecting the corridor. OCTA staff and legal counsel are thoroughly reviewing the permit to determine the best path forward.

“Our priority remains clear: to move quickly, make the most of the state and federal funding we’ve already secured, and deliver as much of the needed work as possible, as soon as possible,” CEO Johnson said. “We appreciate the Coastal Commission affirming what we have long recognized – that an emergency exists along this corridor.”

Construction work will require a shutdown of passenger rail so the work can be performed safely and efficiently. When work will begin and the length of a necessary closure has yet to be scheduled. OCTA, which owns the rail line, will continue to work with Metrolink and Amtrak Pacific-Surfliner to keep passengers informed as the schedule is solidified.

A Focused Approach

OCTA's emergency action reflects months of engineering analysis, environmental planning, and collaboration with regulatory agencies. Four priority areas were identified, each requiring tailored responses to protect the rail corridor from progressive and unpredictable coastal hazards.

Overall, the work will include approximately 95% sand and 5% riprap where needed to stabilize the slope and protect the track.

OCTA's effort is the largest volume of sand ever placed on San Clemente beaches in a single effort to protect the rail line and stabilize the coastline.

The complete work OCTA has proposed includes:

- **Placing up to 540,000 cubic yards of sand**—approximately 95% of total materials—to restore beaches and absorb wave energy
- **Repairing approximately 9,000 tons of riprap** only where necessary to stabilize embankments and prevent bluff failure
- **Installing a 1,400-foot catchment wall** to retain debris from active landslides and **restoring a pedestrian trail** at Mariposa Point
- **Constructing a 1,200-foot shoreline protection structure** near San Clemente State Beach

Catchment wall and shoreline protection structure work is anticipated to take up to eight months to complete.

The Coastal Commission approved the emergency Coastal Development Permit for Areas 1 and 2, portions of work in Area 3, and Coastal Commission staff has requested more information as to why an emergency exists in Area 4.



Area	Location (Mile Post)	Challenge	Solution
1	203.83-203.90	Ongoing deterioration of existing protective riprap due to erosion	Riprap repair, placement and sand nourishment
2	204.00-204.40	Ongoing deterioration of existing protective riprap due to erosion	Riprap repair, placement and sand nourishment
3	204.07-204.34	Continuing bluff failures posing imminent threat to rail infrastructure	Catchment wall with trail restoration
4	206.00-206.70	Erosion exposing areas of limited to no riprap protection	Engineered shore protection and sand nourishment

Modifications to design features may be necessary as project development process progresses and engineering is refined.



Responding to Coastal Concerns

In response to community and environmental stakeholder feedback, OCTA emphasized:

- **Minimal and strategic use of armoring:** Riprap will only be used where absolutely necessary and designed to be functional, limited in scope, and potentially temporary.
- **Environmental accountability:** While the emergency permit allows construction to begin more quickly, OCTA remains fully subject to the California Coastal Act and will comply with environmental mitigation and monitoring requirements.
- **Proactive emergency action:** While trains are still operating, the slope conditions continue to deteriorate. OCTA is acting to prevent a catastrophic failure, not waiting for one to occur.
- **Transparency and engagement:** OCTA is committed to providing timely updates, public outreach, and collaboration with community stakeholders as work progresses.

Most of the stabilization activities will occur within the rail right-of-way, minimizing impacts to adjacent coastal areas.

Funding

This emergency stabilization effort builds on more than \$313 million in secured state and federal funding, including grants from the Transit and Intercity Rail Capital Program, the SB 1 Trade Corridor Enhancement Program, and the federal CRISI program.

The OCTA Board also amended its FY 2024-25 budget to allocate an additional \$135 million to advance this work.

Sand nourishment, while starting with emergency actions, is part of a long-term coastal resilience strategy. OCTA has issued a Request for Information to identify qualified sand dredging contractors and is advancing environmental clearance for offshore sand sourcing. Construction for sand placement is anticipated to begin as early as 2026, while staff is continuing to identify ways to streamline the procurement, permitting, and environmental processes.

The Need to Act Now

Since 2021, rail closures due to bluff failures in San Clemente have severed Southern California's only coastal rail connection between San Diego and Orange counties more than once, disrupting passenger service, delaying freight shipments, and threatening more than \$1 billion in annual economic activity. The LOSSAN corridor is also part of the Strategic Rail Corridor Network, supporting the movement of military assets between installations along the West Coast.

As OCTA advances this emergency work, the agency remains committed to public safety, environmental responsibility, and long-term resilience.

The public will be informed of construction timelines, beach access changes, and rail service updates throughout the process. For the latest information, visit:

www.octa.net/RailEmergency.

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About OCTA: The Orange County Transportation Authority is the county transportation planning commission, responsible for funding and implementing transit and capital projects for a balanced and sustainable transportation system that reflects the diverse travel needs of the county's 34 cities and 3.2 million residents. With the mission of keeping Orange County moving, this includes freeways and express lanes, bus and rail transit, rideshare, commuter rail and active transportation. To sign up for more OCTA news, visit octa.net/GetConnected.