

Old Freight Building to be Railroad Museum

Isn't this a headline that you would like to see on the front page of the San Luis Obispo County Telegram-Tribune, on the New Times, or as the lead story on KSBY-TV news? It can happen. Read on.

The City of San Luis Obispo is purchasing the property at the Railroad Station which includes the 1893 Southern Pacific Railroad freight warehouse. The warehouse will be included in the master plan for the Railroad District. The passenger station has been rehabilitated and is being used by Amtrak; the old steam locomotive water tank is being refurbished and the Railway Express Agency building is still standing. All of these form a base for a great railroad theme area and museum.

Sounds great doesn't it? It won't happen unless you get involved! The City of San Luis Obispo will not include any area to be set aside for historic displays like railroad cars, locomotives or any other railroad paraphernalia unless you ask them to.

City officials, including Mayor Allen Settle and Community Development Director Arnold Jonas are receptive to the idea of including areas for historic displays. The City Promotional Coordinating Committee, responsible for tourism promotion, has endorsed the idea. We will ask the Cultural Heritage Commission for their endorsement also. But it must be requested by a group of people willing to follow through with the establishment of a museum to preserve San Luis Obispo's railroad history.

Years ago a steam locomotive was offered to the City and the City declined to take it. What a mistake! Don't let this happen again. The freight warehouse is waiting to be restored and a caboose is already in town waiting to be moved to this location.



1893 Southern Pacific Freight Warehouse viewed from the Jennifer Street Bridge.

Preserving History in the Railroad District

The San Luis Obispo Railroad Museum is an educational organization composed of people interested in preserving history. Its goal is to preserve the railroad history of San Luis Obispo and the Central Coast through preservation, restoration and operation of historic railroad equipment.

The San Luis Obispo Railroad Museum (SLORRM) is currently a division of the non-profit [501(c)3] Avila Valley Railway Museum. Because of this legal non-profit status, SLORRM can accept tax deductible donations of money or historic artifacts. All members of the museum are volunteers.

The City of San Luis Obispo has shown its appreciation for the history of railroading by the preservation of the Southern Pacific passenger station and the old water tank. The City Council will soon decide on the adoption of a Railroad District Master Plan. The proposed plan includes the railroad yard and a Multi-modal Transportation Facility to be built on adjoining land to be purchased by the city. The Multi-modal Facility will have bus and taxi loading areas and a large parking area for Amtrak passengers. SLORRM asks to be included in this plan.

Sitting on the parcel to be purchased by the City is an historic Southern Pacific freight warehouse. It is the goal of SLORRM to restore this freight warehouse for use as a Railroad Museum and to construct railroad track on non-vital portions of the facility for the purpose of displaying and operating historic railroad locomotives and cars. This can be accomplished without disruption to the transportation facility as it would be located in areas not used by cars or busses

and would be operated on weekends when the facility has minimal traffic.

The track will start at a location near the north end of the freight warehouse parallel to Santa Barbara Street. It will proceed south onto Union Pacific Railroad property and follow an abandoned railroad right-of-way into the Emily Street area. Several spur tracks can be laid for displaying railroad cars and equipment and as work areas for restoration purposes. Located on this street is approximately 150 feet of railroad track owned by the City.

Phase 1 of the project will include restoration of the freight warehouse and the laying of track at the warehouse and Emily Street areas.

Phase 2 will include extension of the track onto Union Pacific property to connect with their team track. This will facilitate the movement of arriving museum equipment onto museum tracks. Another display track will be constructed south along the railroad right-of-way, parallel to Emily Street.

Phase 3 continues with an extension of this track southward to the site where the railroad roundhouse stood. Here numerous rail cars and locomotives can be displayed on the actual tracks that were inside the roundhouse. When the roundhouse was demolished, many of the tracks were left in place along with inspection pits and the concrete and brick foundation.

This museum will educate and entertain local citizens and tourists, benefitting our local economy by making it a destination for the large group of tourists known as Railfans.



Railroad Museum will bring tourists

The addition of The San Luis Obispo Railroad Museum will greatly enhance the City's attraction as a tourist destination. There are approximately a quarter of a million people in the United States known as *railfans*, who travel around the country visiting railroad museums and tourist railways. Many of these are retirees who travel during the week in the off season, not just in summer. There are three major magazines; *Trains*, *Railfan* and *Rail Classics* that cater to this group. According to a source at *Railfan*, these people spend on average, \$40 per day just at the museums, gift shops and tourist railways. This does not include what they spend at

motels, restaurants, gas stations and local stores. The State of California already has many railroad museums and tourist railways that bring Railfans into the state. There is the State Railroad Museum, in Old Town Sacramento; a state owned Railroad park and tourist train at Jamestown, in Gold Rush Country; The Portola Railroad Museum, northeast of Sacramento; and the Dunsmuir Railroad Park, near Mount Shasta, to name a few. All of these attractions are doing a booming business. Adding a museum in San Luis Obispo would provide another reason for these tourists to come to California and stop in our city.



Iron Road Pioneers

City to Fund Sculpture for Railroad Square

The City of San Luis Obispo has committed \$50,000 in matching funds to create a sculpture that illustrates the importance of railroads to local history, recognizing the workers, and recognizing the efforts of the Chinese community in making the "iron roads" a reality.

The sculpture, created by Elizabeth MacQueen, internationally renowned artist, who resides in San Luis Obispo, will be placed in the traffic circle where Osos Street enters Railroad Square.

Although the City has allocated \$50,000, another \$75,000 must be raised to complete the project. Anyone wishing to make a donation may do so by sending it to; Iron Road Pioneers, P.O. Box 13455, San Luis Obispo, CA 93406. For more information, telephone 805-543-4493, Fax 543-8154 or E-mail: macqsculpt@aol.com.

Footbridge Over Tracks opens



Jennifer Street footbridge

The long anticipated footbridge over the railroad tracks connecting Osos Street and the downtown area with Jennifer Street and the Terrace Hill neighborhoods was officially opened Friday, March 6th. The \$1.3 million span now provides a way for

pedestrians and bicyclists to safely cross the railroad tracks. An added benefit, probably of envisioned by the planners, is that the bridge is an excellent place for Railfans to view and photograph trains.

For more information regarding the San Luis Obispo Railroad Museum contact:

Brad LaRose(messages) 461-3456
 Karl Hovanitz(daytime) 544-7658 FAX 544-7675
 Bill Pyper(days) 543-2259 or FAX (24 hrs.) 543-9262

For more information regarding the Railroad District Master Plan contact the City of San Luis Obispo County Development Department at 781-7170.

Timetable

March 25, 7:00 pm
 Planning Commission Meeting
 City Hall
 990 Palm Street, SLO

April 9, 7:00 pm
 SLORRM Meeting
 Amtrak Station, SLO

April 21, 7:00 pm
 City Council Meeting
 City Hall
 990 Palm Street, SLO