



Coast Mail

News from the San Luis Obispo
Railroad Museum

Issue Number 91 – Spring 2025 San Luis Obispo, California www.slorm.com

Open Saturdays from 10:00 to 4:00. Other times for groups by arrangement. 1940 Santa Barbara Avenue.

More signals along the Walk of History

Our volunteer crew of Brad LaRose, Gary See, concrete finishers Ken Bennett (at right) and Mike Burrell, and rebar wrangler Ted Van Klaveren have continued to prepare and install former Southern Pacific trackside signals in the Freighthouse vicinity. Below, a recently installed spring switch signal. The Summer *Coast Mail* will have more information.



Ted Van Klaveren photo



Dig the hole, run the conduit, build the reinforcing-bar cage and place it in the hole, build the formwork, locate the anchor bolts, schedule the transit-mix delivery, tamp the concrete, trowel it to a smooth finish. Voila, a base for the single-case searchlight signal.



Still a few around...

A late September 2024 derailment in the Tehachapis raised questions if freight trains would detour to the Coast Route. That used to happen occasionally, notably after the Arvin-Tehachapi (White Wolf Fault) earthquake of 1952.

There were no detours. But the issue prompted your editor finally, after passing it for at least 20 years, to snap a photo of a truck in the neighborhood with a bumper sticker that once was more common: "Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers" (out of view to the left in the image below). Note the message on the other end of the bumper: "My Other Vehicle Is A Locomotive."

These days, one obstacle to detouring freights to the coast is the lack of qualified engineers for the segment from Guadalupe to Watsonville. It's not enough simply to be a licensed locomotive engineer. One must also be formally qualified for specific routes.

Docent of the year

Our 2024 docent of the year Gary See is always willing to take on another task. He has cheerfully worked on exhibits, website development, security and web-feed cameras, wiring, and various maintenance functions. He often can be seen at special events, welcoming visitors and taking photos.



Our Mission

Promote California Central Coast railroad heritage through community participation, education, historic preservation, & equipment operation.

Contact

Telephone (message) 805 548-1894
 email: info@slorrm.com
 website: www.slorrm.com
 Mail: 1940 Santa Barbara Avenue
 San Luis Obispo, CA 93401

Board of Directors

Peter Brazil	Mike Burrell
Stephen Cake	Jim Chernoff
Alan Estes	Ken Green
Greg Jackson	Brad LaRose
Ted Van Klaveren	

Crew List

President Brad LaRose
Vice President.....Mike Burrell
Museum Manager.. vacant
Curator, Restoration .. Brad LaRose
Treasurer/Insurance Dave Rohr
Exhibits Gary See
Operations Mike Burrell
Events vacant
Model Railroad Andrew Merriam
Membership Gary See
Fundraising vacant
Digital Media Coordinator Gary See
Webmaster Jamie Foster
Secretary, Archivist/Librarian, Newsletter Editor Glen Matteson
 (newsletter@slorrm.com)

The museum is a 501(c)(3) non-profit, educational organization,

Farewell to an exceptional crew member

With great sadness we report the passing of Diane Marchetti. Diane served as museum manager since the Freighthouse opened. She ran the Museum Store, processed memberships, recruited and trained docents, and helped with events.

Her many friends on the Central Coast and in Hawaii will miss her.



At right, Diane posed with an historical tool in 2016.

Timetable

Board of Directors meetings are scheduled for April 8, May 13, and June 10, at 6:00 p.m. at the Museum. You can participate online. Contact info@slorrm.com for help with on-line participation.

Become a member

Membership provides opportunities for anyone interested in today's railroads, railroad history, train travel, artifact restoration, or model railroading. Membership benefits include free Museum admission and a 10% Museum Store discount.

Annual dues: Individual \$40; Family \$65; Sustaining \$100. Life member single payment: under 62 \$1,000, 62 and over \$600. Junior memberships (ages 12-18) for model railroaders are available; contact our Model Railroad Superintendent for details.

You can join at the Museum, by mail, or online. Download application forms from the Museum's website and mail payment. Or you can join online by clicking [Membership](#) and using PayPal.

More Coast Mail Online

Pages 5 and 6: *Starlight* reversal, holiday celebrations, Annual Report.

Museum supporters

The Museum thrives only with the support of many. Membership dues, grants, and donations of expertise, materials, artifacts and funds are all greatly appreciated.

In this edition we recognize Lauren Nagle for her donation of many of her late husband Dennis "Dan" A. Nagle's books, videos, lanterns, and other items. For many years Mr. Nagle was a conductor working the White Hills Branch, also known as the Lompoc line. He usually used bay window caboose #1886, now owned and restored by our Museum.

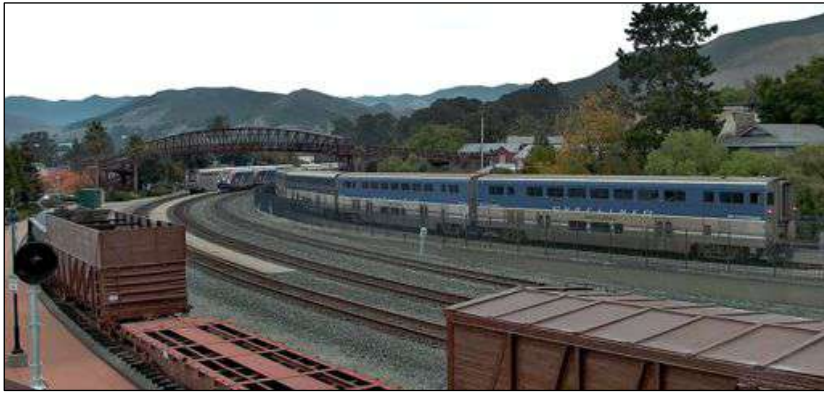
Mrs. Nagle also made a very generous financial donation to support the Museum's S.P. boxcar interior exhibit, "The Southern Pacific Theater, Featuring the People of S.P." A major goal of our Museum is to preserve memories of the people who worked for Southern Pacific on the Central Coast and who helped build our community.

On caboose #1886's last day the crew chalked a colorful S.P. ball-and-wing logo below the bay window. They also gave a name to the caboose: "Lompoc Flyer." To the side of the window they wrote "Last Caboose Run 15-Nov-95." A modeler made three HO-scale models of the caboose, one for each of the crew. Each model was custom painted with the Lompoc Flyer marking, weathered, and mounted on a wood presentation base. Behind the model (below) is a photo of the crew. Left to right are Peter Slavik (Brakeman), Dennis "Dan" A. Nagel (Conductor), and Mike Miller (Engineer).



Brad LaRose photo

Webcam at the Museum



In this November 2024 webcam screenshot we see the afternoon Pacific Surfliner waiting on the layover track, while both the southbound and northbound Starlights occupy the mains at the depot. The image has been cropped and the exposure slightly lightened compared with the full screen display. The Museum's boxcar, flatcar, and sugar-beet gondola appear in the foreground, along with a signal displayed at left. Page 5 (online) has an image from December 14, when both Starlights stopped short of their destinations due to storm damage near Salinas.

Thanks to Museum volunteers Greg Jackson and Gary See, and the folks at SouthWest RailCam.com, since November 2024 we've had a live video feed at San Luis Obispo. You can watch it on YouTube or directly through the SouthWest RailCam website.

Greg and Gary mounted the camera on the roof of the Freighthouse, using a bracket that Gary designed and fabricated. The camera can be pointed all around the Freighthouse and be zoomed in and out.

We wear many hats

Last year the Museum received a donation of many Southern Pacific items, including the baseball caps pictured at right. Three stand out as different from the usual ones associated with locomotive engineers, conductors, and track and signal workers.

In the 1980s Southern Pacific's "Construction Services" branch had a major role in installing fiber-optic cables along the tracks. "Plow trains" created trenches, inserted cables, and covered them while moving slowly and paying special attention to road crossings, bridges and culverts, and other obstructions. Much of the nation's Internet traffic follows rail lines.

Now, researchers are investigating use of existing lineside fiber-optic cables to detect landslides, rockfalls, and even trespassers. The signals carried by fiber cables respond in distinct ways to ground vibrations. Several companies, including Sensonic in the United Kingdom, are working on this means of detecting problems. A main advantage of using existing cables is that a huge number of additional trackside devices would not be required. On the other hand, such a system generates huge amounts of data.

Engineers expect machine learning to help automate the process of filtering actual signals of trouble from the noise of normal conditions. For example, the system would learn to distinguish the sound of train wheels going over a firm rail joint from one that is loose.

Recent history:

Operation Lifesaver

During the 2024 Central Coast Railroad Festival Amtrak's locomotive painted for Operation Lifesaver paused at San Luis Obispo northbound (shown below) and southbound two days later. Museum member Rex Miller, who took this photo, comes each year from Southern California, usually by train.

Operation Lifesaver ("See Tracks, Think Train") is a combined safety effort by railroads throughout the country.



*Often in nature the combination of orange and black means Watch Out ("I'm poisonous or taste bad.") Also on Amtrak's **Operation Lifesaver** locomotive, the eye-catching theme means Beware.*



Museum volunteers often take on many roles, but not this many. If you have stories to share about the roles associated with these caps, let us know. Above left, "SP Construction Services" involved fiber-optic cable installation; right, "SP Bar B Que Chairman." Below left, basic Southern Pacific; right, SP "Law Claims."



More recent history: Not gambling, rare beast, weed sprayer, and work train



Last summer Union Pacific’s “Slot Machine” train loaded with rocks paused in San Luis Obispo (left and above).

For ease of access, not gambling

Last summer Union Pacific again ran a “Slot Machine” train along the coast, empty northbound and loaded southbound at San Luis Obispo. The articulated car sets provide a continuous trough that an excavator can traverse from one end of the train to the other, often for handling large rocks to protect against erosion. These loads were headed to the railroad location of Honda (on Vandenberg Space Force Base) for use as fill. A previous visit was reported in the Summer 2021 *Coast Mail*.



Brad LaRose photo

A rare beast

Most of Amtrak’s General Electric P32-BWH locomotives have been retired, some going to other operators. This one, not the only Amtrak locomotive to carry the number 509, was built in 1991, according to an online source. In November 2024 it rested on the layover track at San Luis Obispo before resuming duties as the power for the Surfliner scheduled to arrive about 12:30 and depart 4:10 for points south.



Sneak peek

Learn about our newly arrived orange truck in the Summer edition.



Weed sprayer & MOW

Is the face above one that only a maintenance-of-way supervisor could love? Union Pacific’s train designed specifically to spray weeds visited the Coast Line in November. Brad LaRose managed to get a quick photo of it passing through Santa Margarita on a beautiful clear day in November 2024. Trackside vegetation is controlled to reduce fire hazard, maintain drainage, avoid fouling ballast, and assure signs and signals are visible.

At right, a trainload of maintenance-of-way equipment paused briefly at San Luis Obispo, on a misty late November day. It carried many Kershaw machines for profiling ballast and other track renewal tasks.



Unfortunate recent history: Coast Starlights halted

An unusually strong December 14 storm hit the Watsonville-Salinas area, severing Union Pacific's coastal route. Thanks to an effective response, through Amtrak service was restored in two days.

At least area rail fans were able to see things that don't often occur on the Central Coast: switching locomotives at San Luis Obispo, and the rare beast featured on page 4 leading a *Starlight* (right).

Union Pacific's dispatcher in Omaha aligned switches and set signals to facilitate removing the northbound *Starlight's* two locomotives, running them south to a crossover, and back to what had been the rear of their train. The southbound *Surfliner's* departure was delayed a bit by the maneuvers.



SouthWest RailCam image

On December 14, 2024, Museum visitors and those watching the live web-cam became spectators for some unusual moves at San Luis Obispo. While the southbound Coast Starlight was held in the Bay Area, the northbound train at San Luis Obispo became a southbound. Its two locomotives ran around the train and, after some work re-activating a stubborn head-end electrical power system, pulled it from the other end. The Surfliner (far right above) waited patiently on the layover track during some of the time.

Holidays at the Museum



Santa's Surfliner arrival was enjoyed again on a beautiful December day. Three photos by Gary See



2024 Annual Report

Volunteers provided about 4,700 hours in support work, such as docent services, equipment restoration, exhibit development, website maintenance and development, document preparation, and reviewing and cataloging donations. In addition, model railroad members provided 2,220 hours, about one-third as Saturday docent time.

The year ended with about 240 museum memberships, including individual, family, and life categories.

The major accomplishment in 2024 was completing removal of artifacts and materials from Emily Street Yard. Several large signals that had been stored were painted and mounted on bases as exhibits.



Removing items from Emily Street Yard required hand trucks, a tractor (narrow-gauge coupler above), and lots of crane work (concrete phone booth at left).



Before signals were installed they were cleaned and painted (above left). With the pandemic a memory, tours by school groups resumed (below).



The model railroaders made much progress on the San Luis Obispo engine facilities (below).



Financial Summary

Beginning Cash Balance		\$104,426
Income		\$116,006
Memberships	\$11,126	
Admissions	\$13,294	
Events	\$25,229	
Museum Store Sales (net)	\$ 5,163	
Miscellaneous Income	\$ 411	
Model Railroad	\$12,122	
Grants and donations		
Purpose Restricted	\$26,499	
Purpose Not restricted	\$12,076	
Expenses		\$90,912
Operating	\$81,996	
Capital	\$ 8,916	
Year-end Cash Balance		\$129,520

Cal Poly transportation engineering students helped move track materials, and great progress was made on restoring the repair-in-place office (below).

