

**FILE NUMBER: 2025-051**

**DATE:** Tuesday, February 11, 2025

**SUBJECT: Update on the Airport Transit Connection**

**DESCRIPTION: Informational Update on the Airport Transit Connection by San Diego Association of Governments Staff**

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:**

San Diego Association of Governments (SANDAG) staff will present an update on the advanced planning and outreach for the Airport Transit Connection (ATC) project, which would create a direct link between the San Diego International Airport (“airport”) and the regional transit system.

**RECOMMENDATION:**

This is an informational update, and no action will be taken.

**FISCAL IMPACT:**

There is no fiscal impact.

**COMPASS STRATEGIC GOALS:**

This agenda item supports the following Strategic Goal.

- A Port with a comprehensive vision for Port land and water uses integrated to regional plans.

**DISCUSSION:**

SANDAG staff will present information on the advanced planning work currently underway to evaluate which Airport Transit Connection (ATC) concepts are the most feasible and the best fit for the San Diego region prior to commencing environmental analysis.

The informational presentation, which is provided as Attachment A to this agenda sheet, will discuss SANDAG ongoing and upcoming work efforts on the ATC concepts, as follows:

- An airport travel survey was launched in fall 2024 to collect post-pandemic data on travel habits to and from the airport from San Diego County residents, tourists, and airport employees. The survey is key to updating the transportation model and informing the ATC planning process.
- Staff are updating ATC Trolley concept features in coordination with local partner agencies. This includes determining if frequency better than 15 minutes can be

achieved while reducing the time the Trolley operates at-grade in one of the most congested parts of Downtown San Diego between the airport and Santa Fe Depot.

- SANDAG staff have also developed an approach to significantly pare down the number of ATC concepts before commencing environmental analysis. A mix of metrics, including transit connectivity, access, infrastructure requirements, and updated costs, will be evaluated along with stakeholder input as part of this process.
- A public engagement strategy will be carried out next year to seek input on the ATC planning pare down process.
- Additionally, near-term strategies for enhancing bus and shuttle connections are being developed. These could include more frequent service from Downtown San Diego and Old Town to the airport. Transit priority treatments for these services could also be implemented so that Metropolitan Transit System (MTS) Route 992 (runs between Santa Fe Depot and the airport), the San Diego Flyer (runs between Old Town Transit Center and the airport), and other shuttle services could benefit. This would ensure better transit options to the airport are available sooner, while supporting the airport's Terminal 1 expansion.

SANDAG staff will consider input received throughout the ATC planning process to identify which ATC concepts advance to environmental review. Environmental review for the selected ATC concepts is anticipated to commence in fall 2025. SANDAG staff will continue to collaborate with stakeholders, including the District, and state and federal funding partners to ensure the proposed ATC best meets the needs of the San Diego region and is highly competitive for state and federal funding.

### **General Counsel's Comments:**

The Office of the General Counsel has reviewed this staff report as presented and approves it as to form and legality.

### **Environmental Review:**

This presentation from SANDAG staff regarding the ATC, does not constitute a project under the definition set forth in California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Guidelines Section 15378 because no direct or indirect changes to the physical environment would occur. CEQA requires that the District adequately assess the environmental impacts of projects and reasonably foreseeable activities that may result from projects prior to the approval of the same. Any project that is developed related to this presentation requiring the District or the Board's discretionary approval resulting in a physical change to the environment would be analyzed in accordance with CEQA prior to such approval. CEQA review may result in the District, in its sole and absolute discretion, requiring implementation of mitigation measures, adopting an alternative, including without limitation, a "no project alternative" or adopting a Statement of Overriding Consideration,

if required. The exercise of this discretion is in no way limited by any Board direction from this informational presentation. Therefore, no further CEQA review is required.

In addition, this presentation complies with Section 35 of the Port Act which allows the Board to do all acts necessary and convenient for the exercise of its powers. The Port Act was enacted by the California Legislature and is consistent with the Public Trust Doctrine. Consequently, any Board direction related to this presentation is consistent with the Public Trust Doctrine.

Finally, this presentation does not allow for development, as defined in Section 3010 of the California Coastal Act, or new development, pursuant to Section 1.a. of the District's Coastal Development Permit (CDP) Regulations because there will not be, without limitation, a physical change, change in use or increase in intensity of uses. Therefore, issuance of a CDP or an exclusion is not required. However, development within the District requires processing under the District's CDP Regulations. Future development would remain subject to its own independent review pursuant to the District's certified CDP Regulations, Port Master Plan (PMP), and the relevant chapter(s) of the Coastal Act. The exercise of the District's discretion under the District's CDP Regulations is in no way limited by any Board direction related to this presentation.

#### **Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Program:**

This agenda sheet has no direct DEI impact on District workforce or contract reporting at this time.

#### **PREPARED BY:**

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Attachment:

Attachment A: Draft Presentation from SANDAG regarding Airport Transit Connection