



I think this answers your question. NB

Re: Thanks for the work of Dr. Herzog

Thanks for reminding us both of the wisdom of Dr Herzog and of how Amtrak cooks their books to make the LD trains look bankrupt. A reminder on the importance both of these topics is always welcome.
Lloyd Adalist Seattle

Re: All-Stop Surfliners useful late at night:

Regarding the new Surfliner schedules,

Only a couple of the new all-stop Surfliners are designed to be commuter trains - instead, most are late night runs that provide basic transit service where none existed before.

North County San Diego is a suburban area, and local buses run infrequently after 6pm, and generally end at 9pm. Having late night Surfliners make all stops enables riders who live in places like Carlsbad to get home. When transit in San Diego becomes robust enough that there is a local late night bus option, this policy could be reconsidered, but for now, it's important to note that these Surfliners will be the first and only form of late night mass transit many of these beachside towns have.

Alfred Twu
Berkeley, CA:

There is a reason there is little bus or rail service at night; there isn't much demand. Using 3 of 11 intercity round trips trains as a substitute for late night bus service is a poor use of rail equipment. There is now hourly bus service that connects with most of the Coaster Stations at night. One pair of trains being proposed to make these extra stops are connectors to the Coast Starlight. The last thing a person who is paying for long distance service needs is to make extra stops and have delayed service. Most train riders in San Diego County, particularly on long distance trains drive to the station and the biggest problem at most stations is lack of parking.

Lack of parking is a major constraint for ridership growth on trains until there is more development and connections at stations. NB

Re: What is wrong with Surfliner Commuter Trains

Welcome to local control and LOSSAN service integration. Lee Bullock, former Amtrak Superintendent in Los Angeles once said, “The San Diegans stop once at every tree and twice at every two trees”. You are correct that additional stops every 3 to 5 miles reduce revenues from higher revenue longer distance riders.

Analysis by Amtrak using zip code data from Surfliner on-board surveys indicated that most riders begin or end their journey within a ten-mile radius of a station. This is a function of population density and station access time. The longer the station access distance, the faster an auto only journey will be compared to the train. Many riders do travel further to the station, but most are within this ten-mile catchment area. Draw 10-mile circles, which do not overlap, Los Angeles to San Diego and that gives you station stops about every 20-miles. That is about five or six intermediate stops between Los Angeles and San Diego with local commuter trains feeding riders to the Surfliners at those stations.

Station surveys show that the majority of riders boarding at new closely spaced stations are cannibalized from existing stations. Additional station stops, while more convenient for some riders, simply redistribute existing traffic from existing stations to the new stations and add running time which negatively impacts longer distance riders. Also any new traffic gains seen at these stations do not offset the loss in longer distance riders.

This was validated by a Caltrans Surfliner Station Stop Study which forecast and compared ridership and ticket revenue results of several schedule/stop alternatives. **Analysis found that the five-stop option generated the maximum ticket revenue. The LOSSAN Strategic Assessment and LOSSAN Business Plan also recommended that limited stop Surfliner Service focus primarily on intercity traffic and that commuter service be expanded to service frequent, shorter distance trips.** Old Town is a good example of what happens. First only a few trains stop, now 9 of the 11 Surfliner frequencies stop at Old Town.

It is interesting that NCTD’s Camp Pendleton presentation lists only gross ridership generated at the stop and does not list riders who shift from Oceanside or the ticket revenue loss from longer distance riders lost because of the longer schedule. In focus groups conducted by Caltrans as part of the San Diegan equipment launch and re-branding, non-user potential riders interviewed cited long schedules and too many stops as key reasons for not taking the train between Los Angeles and San Diego.

Longer schedules, in addition to reducing longer distance rider ticket revenues, also drive cost increases. More schedule time means additional train and on-board crew wage costs and additional costs for overhead costs driven by wage amounts (i.e. Medicare taxes, railroad retirement, etc.). Longer schedule time could also negatively impact current equipment turns requiring additional equipment and all the costs associated with additional equipment.

It is ironic that the North County Transit District, which has reservations about joining the LOSSAN JPB because of the future stability of Caltrans funding for Surfliner Service, is undertaking actions that will reduce longer distance intercity ridership and ticket revenues, increase costs, and increase commuter ridership thus creating a scenario that will give California taxpayers pause about future state funding of LOSSAN service. (For emphasis some segments in bold NB.)

Steve Roberts

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