

# Santa Paula Branch Line Community Meeting

Prepared for Santa Paula Branch Line  
Community Meeting

August 15, 2023

Fillmore City Hall



# Agenda Review

- Santa Paula Branch Line History & Overview
- Sierra Northern Railway
- Sunburst Train
- Public Comments & Listening Session

***Objective:***

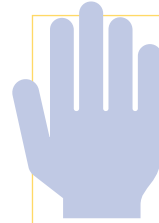
*To share information on the Santa Paula Branch Line railroad operations and plans, and to give the community an opportunity to ask questions and share feedback.*



# Ground Rules for a Successful Community Meeting



Listen to understand  
each other's points of  
view



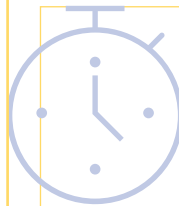
Engage fully



Assume good intent



Stay focused



Respect time limits



# Santa Paula Branch Line: History and Overview

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## History of the Santa Paula Branch Line Railroad

- SPBL right-of-way assembled in 1880s by Southern Pacific Railway
- Opened in 1887
- Shared history of railroads and agriculture





# VCTC Ownership History

- **1993:** Joint application for Transportation Enhancement Activities (TEA) funds to purchase the rail right-of-way
- **1995:** VCTC purchased SPBL and Ventura Branch Line from Southern Pacific for \$8.5M
- **2001:** VCTC executed 20-year operating lease with Fillmore & Western Railway (FWRY) for the operational ROW only (15' of centerline)
- **2001 – 2021:** FWRY operated railroad, including tourist excursion trains and movie production
- **June 30, 2021:** FWRY Lease expired





# Railroad Lease and Operations Agreement: Basic Premise

Provide for economic activity in the Heritage Valley by continuing to support rail operations and preserving the corridor for a future trail by dedicating lease, license, and permit revenues to ongoing maintenance, while avoiding the continued expense of other transportation funds on the Santa Paula Branch Line





# Railroad Lease and Operations Agreement: Opportunity Costs

Cost savings associated with Railroad Lease and Operations Agreement leverage resources for public transit and other transportation services and assets improvements





# Railroad Lease & Operations Agreement Overview

- Commission approved Agreement between VCTC and Sierra Northern Railway on December 16, 2021
- Since January 1, 2022, Sierra Northern operates and maintains the Branch Line and provides freight and film service
- Tourist & excursion service provided through sister company Mendocino Railway
- 35-year term with two 30-year extension options





## Service and Activities



- Agreement defines use of Property for “Railroad Purposes”
  - Freight and transload services
  - Installing spur lines
  - Storing / switching rail cars
  - Services related to movie, film, television, commercial, media and entertainment
  - Tourism and seasonal passenger services





## Activities & Accomplishments

- Bi-weekly coordination meetings
- Track inspections
- Track repairs and investments
- Weed abatement & vegetation management
- Encampment removal & cleanup
- Supported expanded operations by Parallel Systems
- Building freight customer base
- Film & Television Production  
[movierailroad.com](http://movierailroad.com)



**You need trains for  
your movie, TV, or  
commercial project.**

**We have them.**

**Let's talk.**

[SCHEDULE A VISIT](#)





## Agreement Benefits

- Establishes long-term operations and maintenance presence
- Aligns interests to facilitate investments in infrastructure and business development
- Reduces VCTC's financial obligations and over time eliminates need to subsidize rail operations with public transit funds
- Shifts railroad right-of-way maintenance responsibilities
- Reduces Truck Trips on SR 126 through freight service
- Trains with Trails Approach
- Brings Railbikes Service to SPBL





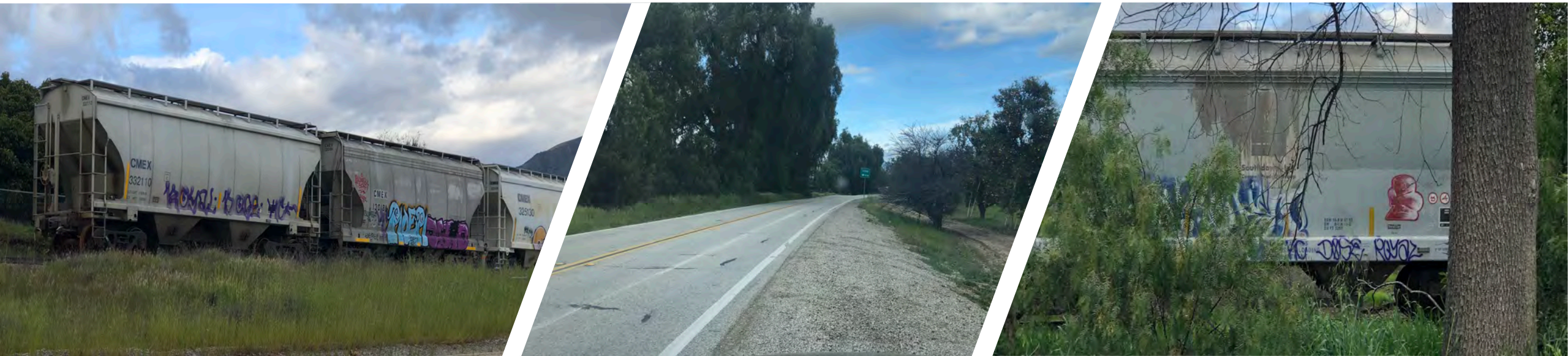
## Parallel Systems

- [How It Works on Vimeo](#)
- Operational test site on a fully protected and isolated section of the SPBL
- Testing underway of 2<sup>nd</sup> Generation vehicle for use in regulatory pilots
- Developed train control system that integrates with Positive Train Control in use with Class 1 railroads
- Parallel's SPBL facility "a great success for testing innovative green freight transportation technology"



# Rail Car Storage

- Storage of third-party rail cars
- Railroad Lease prohibits Rail Car Storage within incorporated cities and existing communities
- Prohibits storage of rail cars containing hazardous materials
- Revenue and operational benefits
- Temporary storage west of Sespe Creek / Fillmore area





# Sespe Creek Overflow Bridge

- Located at approx. Mile Post 423.44 west of Fillmore, CA
- Constructed in 1969
- Total Length: 450 feet
- Vertical Clearance: 14 feet
- 15 Spans of 29 feet 10 inches each



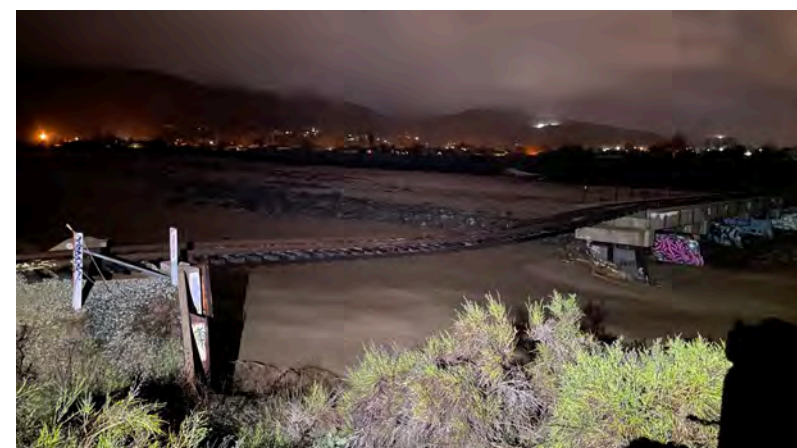
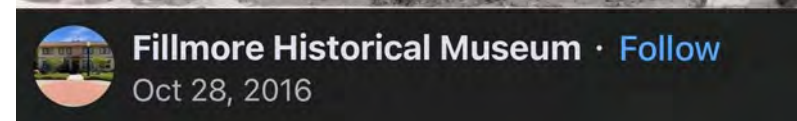
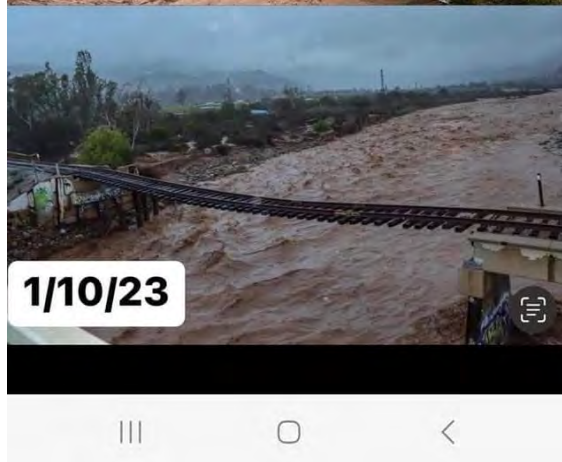
423.44 Looking East





## Storm Damage

- January 10, 2023
- Series of heavy storms washed out 3 spans (approx. 90 feet) of bridge
- Damaged spans located at western end of bridge
- Require reconstruction to pre-disaster design, capacity and function to restore rail service

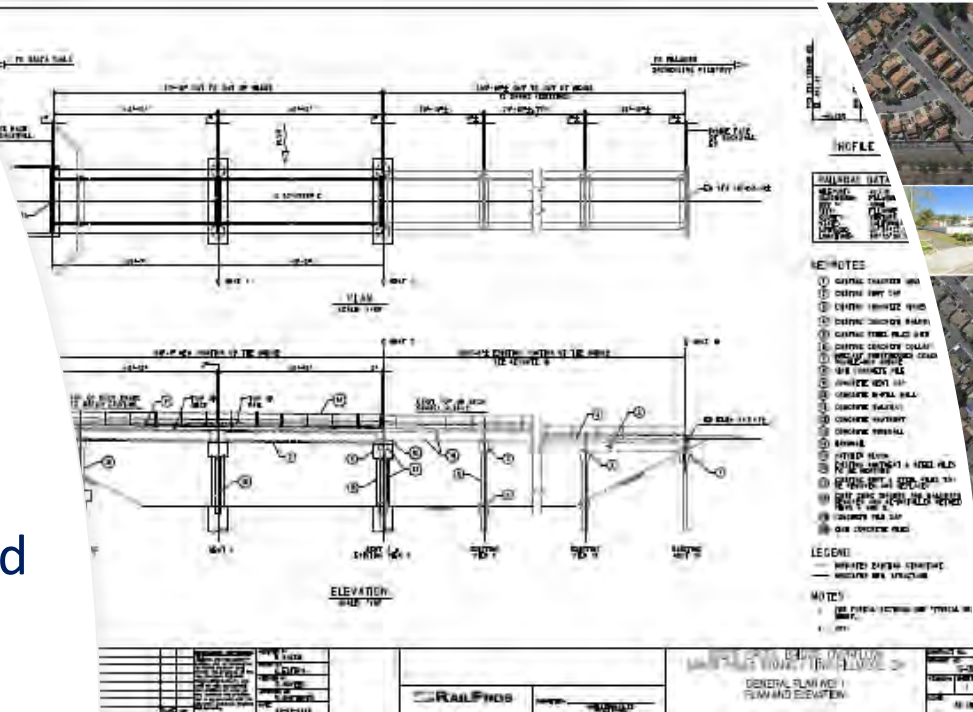






# Status of Bridge Restoration Efforts

- June 2023: Commission approved contract award to RailPros for planning, design, and permitting
- July 2023: Biological, geotechnical, and hydrology field work completed
- Engineering, design and environmental permitting underway
- Next steps: Procure Construction Management support and Construction Contractor (Fall 2023)





## SPBL Trail Planning

- April 2022: Commission adopted goal to “Reinvigorate the process to complete the Santa Paula Branch Line bike trail.”
- June 2022: City of Ventura submitted grant application to Active Transportation Program (ATP) Cycle 6 to construct 4-mile segment from Montalvo to Saticoy; Planning & Design funded through Regional ATP Allocation
- Solutions for Congested Corridors grant award to VCTC includes funding to construct 4-mile Ventura trail segment
- SCAG REAP 2.0 CTC Partnership Program Grant awarded to VCTC to update Master Plan & EIR for Saticoy to Piru

**HAVE YOUR INPUT!**

## VIRTUAL COMMUNITY FORUM



City of Ventura - Government

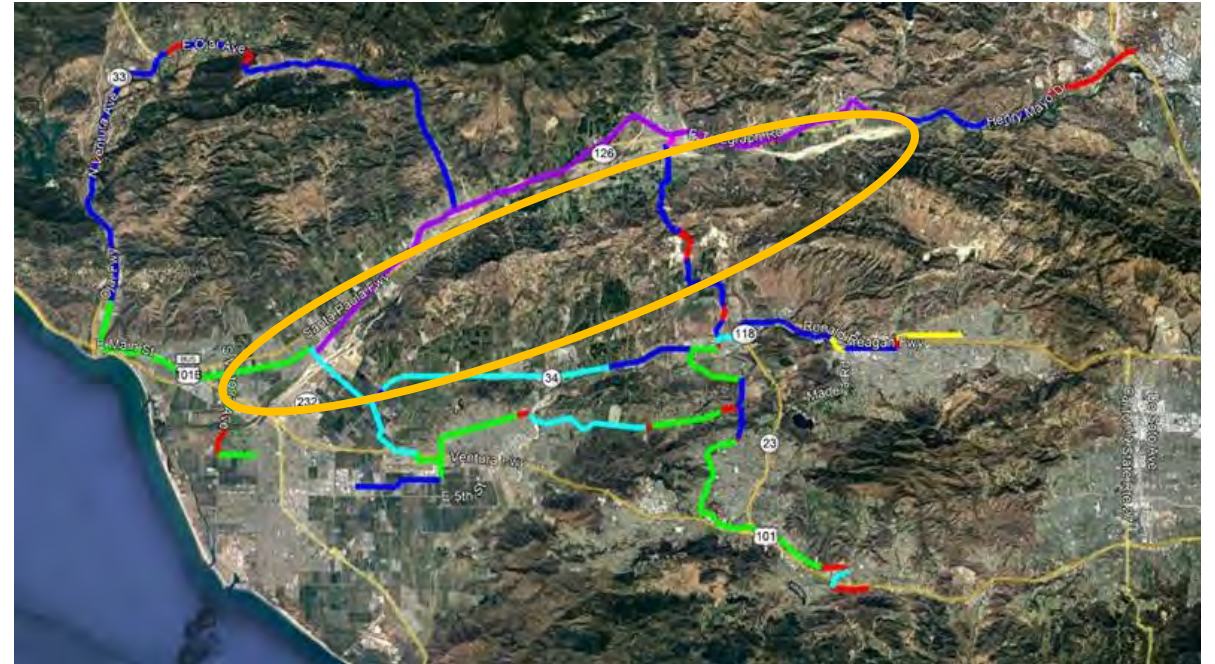
VENTURA RAIL TRAIL  
ACTIVE TRANSPORTATION PROGRAM  
GRANT APPLICATION

Jun 1 •



# Broadband Deployment

- Partnership with County of Ventura and Broadband Consortium of the Pacific Coast
- Leverage right-of-way to support deployment of middle mile broadband infrastructure to Heritage Valley
- Improve internet connectivity and service
- Cost effective methods
- Allows for interconnection of transportation facilities and assets
- Enable security, lighting, and sensors for SPBL Trail





## SPBL Web Page

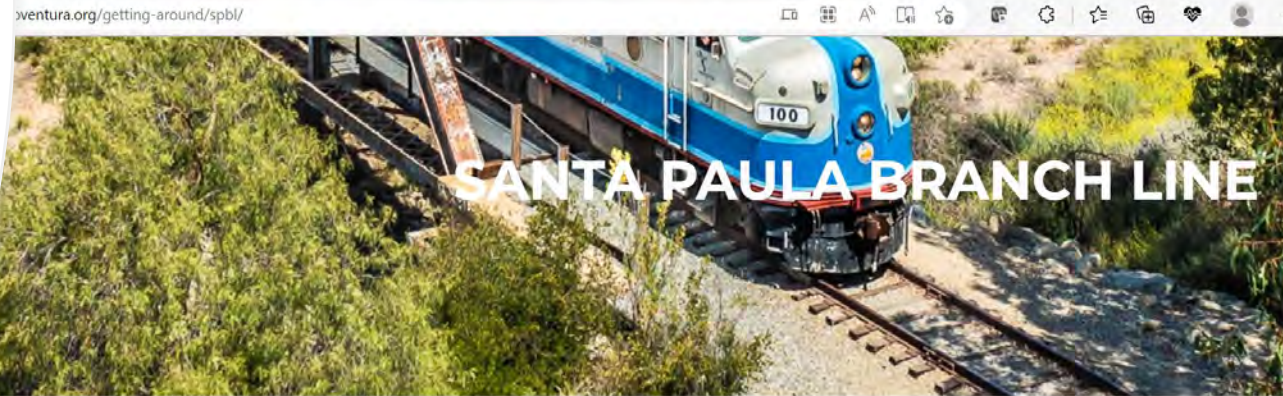
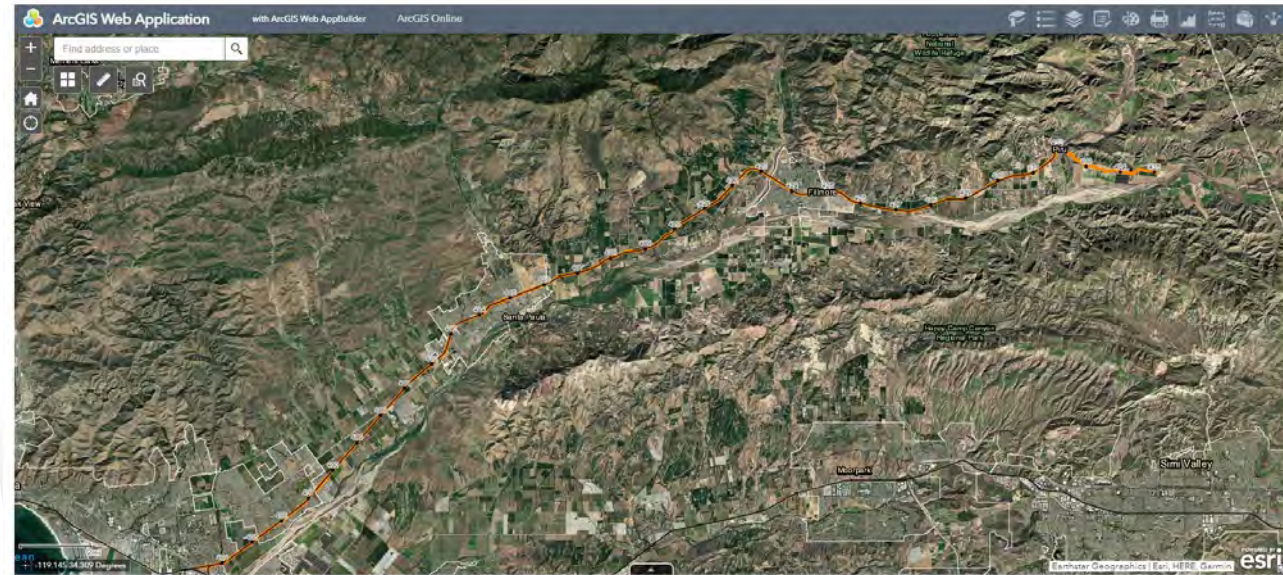
<https://www.goventura.org/spbl/>

[spbl@goventura.org](mailto:spbl@goventura.org)

### ● Key Information and Links

- SPBL History
- Railroad Safety & Access
- Rail Car Storage
- SPBL Trail
- Parcels & Mile Posts Web Map
- Online Questions & Comments Form

### PARCELS AND MILE POSTS



### SANTA PAULA BRANCH LINE RAILROAD

The Santa Paula Branch Line (SPBL) extends for 32 miles from the East Ventura / Montalvo train station, through the Cities of Ventura, Santa Paula, and Fillmore, to the incorporated community of Piru, with 29 miles of active track. Originally built in 1887 by the Southern Pacific railroad, the SPBL remains an active short line railroad with freight, commuter, tourist and excursion, film and television, and research and development rail operations.

The Ventura County Transportation Commission (VCTC) acquired the SPBL railroad in 1995 for use as a multimodal corridor, including freight rail, bicycle and hiking trail, pipelines and utilities, recreational parks, and to preserve the corridor for possible future commuter rail service.

# SIERRA NORTHERN RAILWAY

## VENTURA DIVISION

### Operating the SANTA PAULA BRANCH LINE



# INTRODUCTION

The Santa Paula line was originally built in 1887 as part of the original Southern Pacific mainline from Los Angeles to San Francisco. It was a busy line seeing an abundance of train traffic. After major flooding East of Piru in the 1970's, freight and passenger service started to dwindle.

In 1995, the Ventura County Transportation Commission, a special government district, purchased what was left of the Santa Paula Branch Line in hopes of retaining a historical asset for the county for freight, tourism, commuter, and film rail operations. Since its acquisition, a couple different railroad operations have called the Santa Paula Branch Line their home with the previous being Fillmore and Western Railway.

In December 2021, after a competitive bid process, the Ventura County Transportation Commission selected Sierra Northern Railway to operate and maintain the Santa Paula Branch Line. Sierra Northern has been in continuous operation since 1897 starting on the original Sierra Railroad in the foothills of the Sierra Nevada Mountains and has since expanded to Sacramento, West Sacramento, Concord, and now Ventura County.

# WHO WE ARE

The Ventura Division of SNR currently has 21 employees, with all but two living in Ventura County.

Our employees live in Santa Paula, Fillmore, Piru, Oxnard, Ventura, and Camarillo.



# WHAT WE'RE DOING

Sierra Northern Railway chose to bid on the Santa Paula Branch Line for its unique opportunities and possibilities. While freight rail traffic has not been seen on this corridor in quite some time, the number of industries and the population to be served continue to rise in the region. We have found there are great opportunities to work with businesses that want to move their product by rail.

While getting new customers on-line does not happen overnight, we've started our freight business with a local Santa Paula business that brings in agricultural product from the Pacific Northwest to be mixed in as a soil amendment for landscaping. We anticipate the freight traffic to grow as new rail customers are brought online.

Because the majority of the Santa Paula Branch Line is within the studio zone, Sierra Northern also provides equipment, locations, and props to production companies whenever they may want a railroad element in their TV shows, commercials, movies, and even music videos.



# WHAT WE'RE DOING

- Improvement of all 30 miles of track by laying new ties, replacing rail, and spreading ballast
- Removing trash, homeless, and abandoned vehicles in accordance with VCTC Trespass Policy
- Applied for FRA CRISI grant to improve track surface, replace more ties, and upgrade crossing warning devices
- Assisting VCTC in the rebuild of the Sespe Creek Bridge
- Working with local farmers and the community to provide a better understanding of railroad safety

# OUR IMPACT ON THE ENVIRONMENT

Moving freight by rail instead of truck lowers greenhouse gas emissions by up to 75%

Freight railroads make up just 0.6% of the U.S greenhouse gas emissions

Every railcar of freight takes 4 trucks off the road reducing emissions and congestion resulting in safer highways

Freight railroads move one ton of freight 472 miles per gallon of fuel

Sierra is leading the industry in zero emission locomotive technology

The first of its kind Hydrogen Fuel Cell/Hybrid locomotive being built by SNR forces

Plans are to bring two additional zero emission locomotives online on the Santa Paula Branch Line

# OUR IMPACT TO THE COMMUNITY

Besides hiring local people in all aspects of our operation, we also shop local for everything that isn't railroad specific, as well as treating our employees to meals at local restaurants!

Since we started operation in January 2022, we've spent over \$450,000 at local businesses in Ventura County!

## Places we do business with:

- O'Reilly Auto Parts
- AutoZone
- Frank's Paint and Hardware
- Miner's Ace Hardware
- Ventura Steel
- Daisy Tire
- Dodos Design
- Fruit Growers Supply
- Linde Welding Gas and Equipment
- Pinky's Tire Service
- Quality Ag
- Sawyer Petroleum
- Pops Auto Repair
- SC Fuels
- Sunbelt Rentals

**AND MANY OTHERS!**

# GIVING BACK

On November 26, a train carrying Santa Claus made its way through the Heritage Valley collecting donations of toys to give back to the community through various service organizations.

It was estimated that 6,000-7,000 people showed up at the various stops throughout the night.

Hundred of toys were collected and given out at events in Fillmore and Santa Paula.



# WHERE WE'RE GOING

Sierra Northern Railway continues to grow and expand its operation on the Santa Paula Branch Line. To help accomplish this, we are currently searching for a permanent home where we can build a transload facility, railcar and locomotive repair shop, and offices.

This will mean hiring more people, serving more customers, supporting more local businesses and further solidifying our part in the future of the Santa Clara River Valley



# THANK YOU

Questions or comments about operations:

Matt Blackburn, Division Manager  
[mblackburn@sierrarailroad.com](mailto:mblackburn@sierrarailroad.com)  
(530) 490-1446

Trackside Emergency (24 Hour):  
1-888-864-6995



Community  
Informational  
Meeting

August 15, 2023





What are Railbikes?





## Sunburst Stats

- Launched March 2023
- Thursday, Friday, Saturday, Sunday
- Expanding our offerings, frequency, and departures.
- 1242 bikes, representing 2484 guests.
- Purchasing Local / Partnering Local / Employing Local

# The Sunburst Crew



Nick, Erik, Robert, Jesus, Jesse



## Safety & Security

- California Public Utilities Commission
- United States Department of Transportation – Federal Railroad Administration
- United States Department of Homeland Security



# Neighbor Engagement



# The Sunburst Railbikes

**\$249.95 Per Bike (Seats Two)**

**3 Hours, 17 Miles, Family-Friendly**

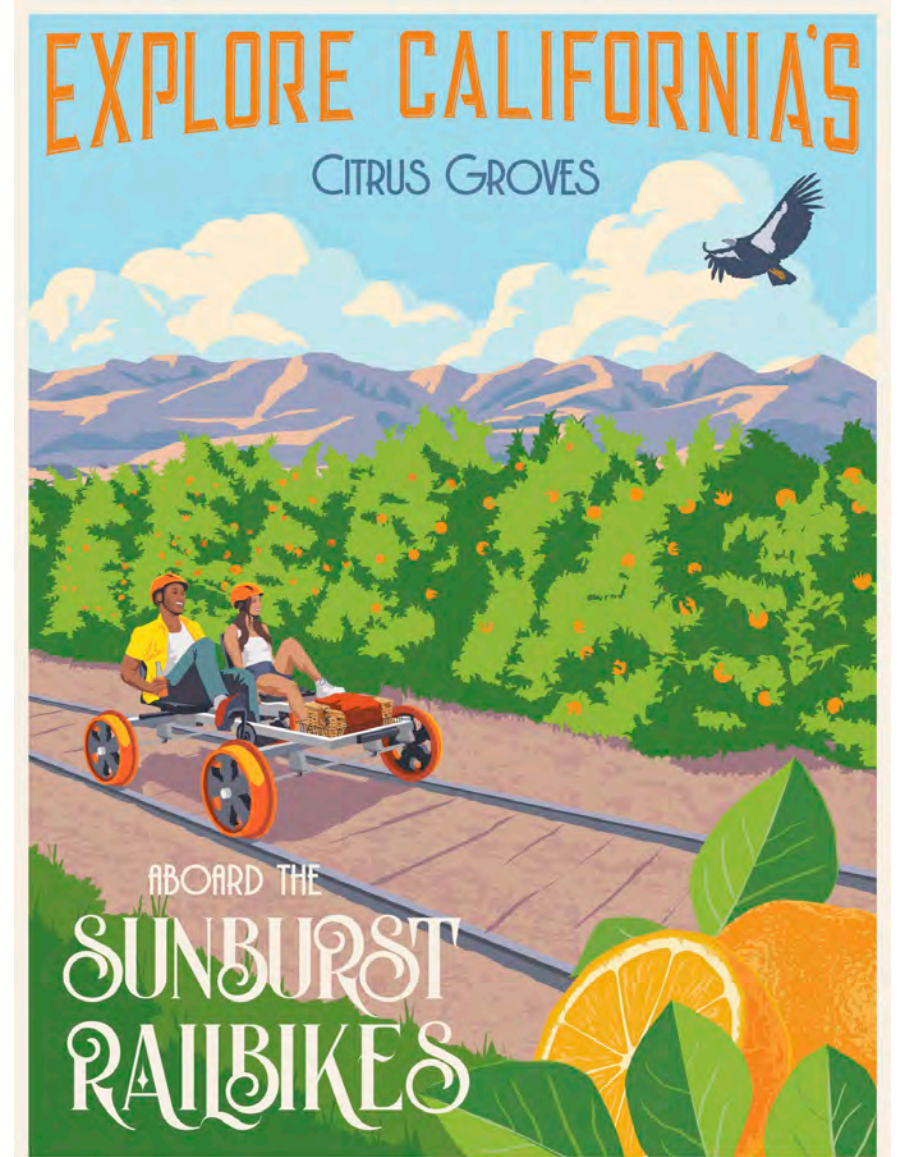
Explore the scenic beauty of Southern California like never before on the **Sunburst Railbikes**. These unique pedal-powered (and electric-assisted) two-person Railbikes sit safely on our tracks, allowing you to lean back and soak in the views.

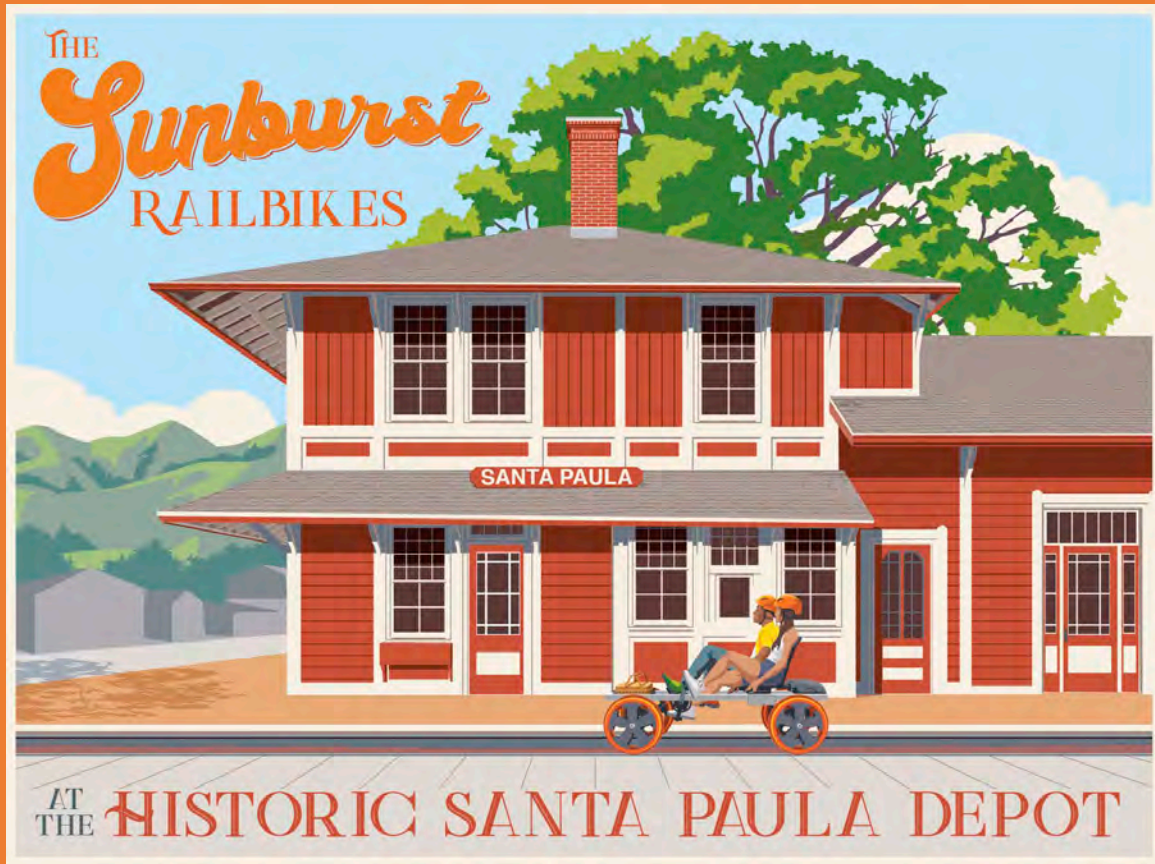
Enjoy a guided tour through the citrus and avocado groves of Ventura County, stop off at **Prancer's Farm** to pick out some fresh produce and meet friendly animals, and leisurely wend your way toward Fillmore before returning to our historic Santa Paula depot.

Picnic lunches are available for purchase, and there will be time to enjoy a beautiful picnic before we turn around.

Our Railbikes are suitable for all ages and skill levels. It's a perfect way to spend the day outdoors: active and engaging, but relaxing and casual at the same time.

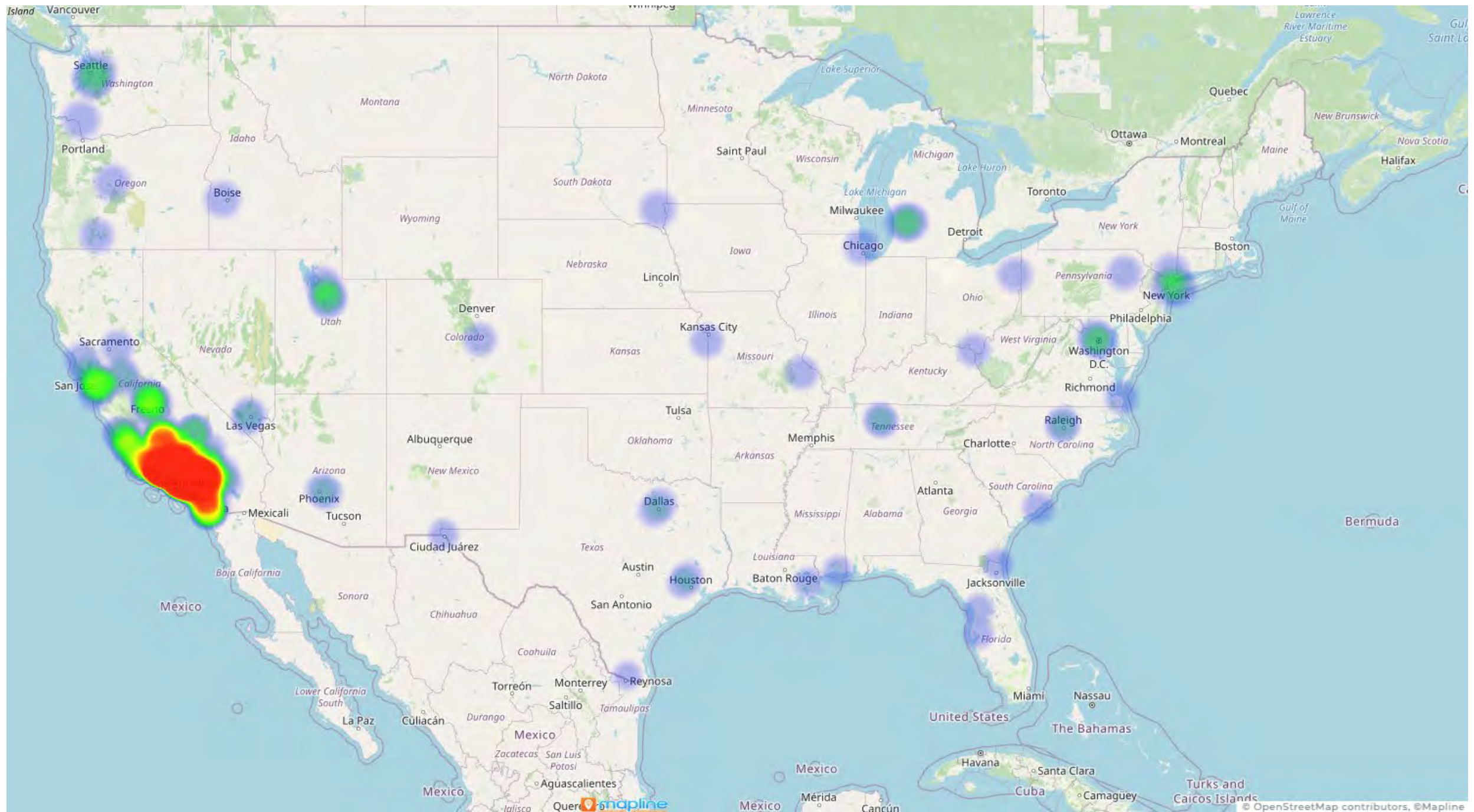
[Buy Tickets](#)





## Demographics

- 1242 bikes traveled over the line.
- 2484 guests visiting the community.
- 95% of our guests have come from outside Ventura County.







## Making Tracks for Future Excursion Services

- Building the Business Case
- Railcar Refurbishments
- Locomotive Refurbishments



