



# Coast Mail

News from the San Luis Obispo  
Railroad Museum

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

## Narlon bridge replaced

Not all the major construction work along the Coast Route occurred 100 or more years ago. For two weeks in August Union Pacific's Coast Route between San Luis Obispo and Goleta was closed while the entire bridge at Narlon was replaced (photos at right). The open-deck, steel trestle was built in 1896 and likely strengthened in the 1920s. Now, the concrete piers, the towers, and the spans are new. The project had been in the planning, design, and environmental review stages for several years. Located within Vandenberg Space Force Base, the site is accessible mainly by rail.

Just a week before, Union Pacific had rushed to complete a similar, unplanned project, after its Dry Canyon bridge was heavily damaged by one of the wildland fires in Northern California. That effort actually used carefully applied heat to straighten some structural elements that had been warped by the heat of the fire. There, Amtrak service was suspended and most freight detoured via BNSF Railway's "Inside Gateway," which itself closed due to another fire a few weeks later.

On the Coast, Amtrak was also suspended. Freight cars for delivery to and pickup at Guadalupe traveled via the San Francisco Bay Area and San Luis Obispo (photo below), rather than by way of the Los Angeles area. From Guadalupe, service to the Nipomo Mesa refinery and the Santa Maria Valley Railroad continued. See also page 5 (online) about an unusual load that used this route.

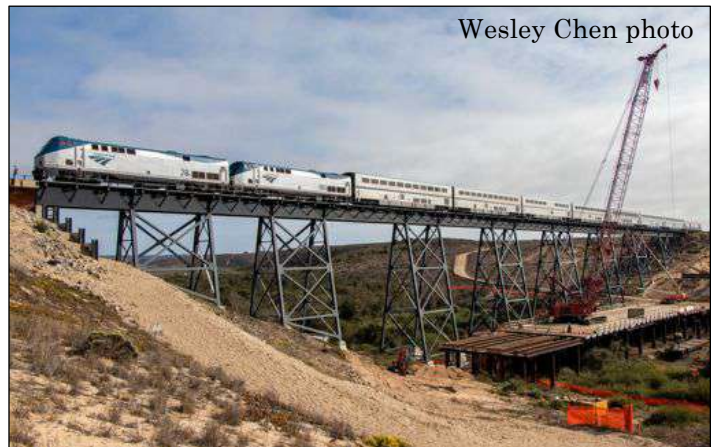


On July 8, a freight train bound for Guadalupe paused in the San Luis Obispo yard. The many rails in the Museum's display track at left are stored in anticipation of a possible extension. Speaking of extensions, the Draft Environmental Impact Report for the proposed Central Coast Layover Facility [Cost Mail Summer 2021] is available for a public comment period that closes December 20. The report is available via the link below. It's a **big** file.  
[LOSSAN CCLF Draft Environment Impact Report](#)



UPRR photo

The bridge at Narlon, before replacement (above). The two middle rails are guard rails. Below, the Coast Starlight crosses the new bridge during site cleanup.



Wesley Chen photo

## Santa on the Surfliner returns

On Saturday, December 4, Santa will arrive about 12:30 p.m. on Amtrak's *Pacific Surfliner*. Visitors may walk with him to the Museum, then talk with him at vintage passenger car La Cuesta. This is a free event.

## Many thanks to our supporters

The Museum could not continue, let alone add and improve exhibits, without the generous support of many. Contributions of time, effort, expertise, artifacts, and funds all make possible what we do. We thank the following in particular for their financial help during these difficult times.

Howard Amborn; Bank of America; Steven Cake in memory of Karin Cake; Brad LaRose; Ludwick Family Foundation; John Miramon; Thomas Sparks; Bill Walthers.

**Our Mission**

Promote California Central Coast railroad heritage through community participation, education, and historic preservation.

**Contact**

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                                  ([newsletter@slorrm.com](mailto:newsletter@slorrm.com))

*The museum is a 501(c)(3) non-profit, educational organization, staffed entirely by volunteers.*

**Documents Available**

Anyone may access the Museum's *Bylaws, Collections Policy, Development & Operations Plan, Code of Conduct*, and other documents at [slorrm.com](http://slorrm.com). Or request a paper copy via the contact information above.

**Museum Store**

To raise funds, the Museum offers several items for sale on-site and online: T-shirts, hats, belt buckles, mugs, enameled pins, embroidered patches, and engineer hats.

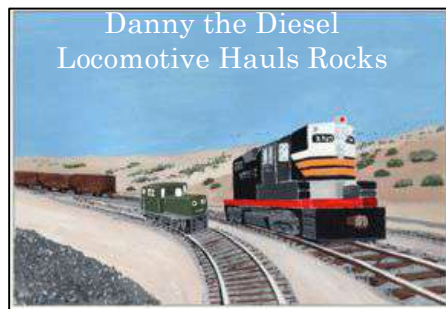
At [www.slorrm.com](http://www.slorrm.com) click on Company Store.

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**Board of Directors meetings** are scheduled for December 14, January 11, and Feb. 8, at 6:00 p.m. In-person meetings will be at 1940 Santa Barbara Ave., S.L.O. Masks and distancing may be required. Online participation can be arranged. Contact [info@slorrm.com](mailto:info@slorrm.com) for help with online participation.

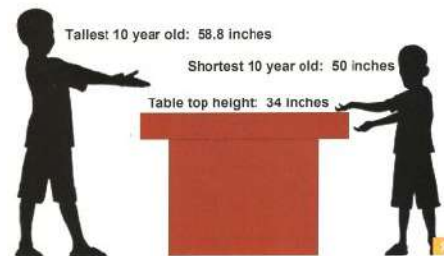


**More Online:**  
 Tractor quiz; county that never was.



**The further adventures of Danny the Diesel Locomotive**

Young readers now can find out what happens next in the life of the Museum's little green locomotive: [slorrm.com/Danny-Hauls-Rocks.html](http://slorrm.com/Danny-Hauls-Rocks.html)



**Museum train table gets national attention**

The August/September issue of *O Gauge Railroad* magazine has an article by Museum volunteer Charles Kinzer on the train table he designed and built for visitors in the late elementary school age range. The article documents Charles' usual attention to detail and craftsmanship. Charles produced the graphic above, which is used in the article to show one of the many design considerations.

**Become a member**

Membership provides opportunities for anyone interested in today's railroads, railroad history, train travel, or model railroading.

Individual members pay \$36 per year, a family \$60, and a sustaining member \$100. Junior memberships (ages 12-18) for the model railroaders are available (see our Model Railroad Superintendent for details).

Application forms can be downloaded from the Museum's website and mailed with payment, or you can join online by clicking [Membership](#) and using PayPal. (Mailing and web addresses are in left-hand column.)

Membership benefits include free admission to the Museum.



**Divided loyalties?**

Museum Curator and Chair of the Restoration & Equipment Committee Brad LaRose is a busy man these days, working on a sugar beet gondola, a boxcar, and a flatcar. He was also involved with the Morro Bay Maritime Museum. As shown in the photo above, would he paint the Railroad Museum's gondola navy-ship gray, like the anchor on display in Morro Bay? No, it's a primer coat.



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## From L.A. to S.F. in 90 Seconds!



### Superdooperhyperlooper?

The dramatic headline at the top of the page is from the May 1965 Southern Pacific *Bulletin*, an employee newsletter. "Some years ago," it says, "if a man in San Francisco wanted someone in Los Angeles to see a certain document, he traveled nearly 500 miles to show it to him—or sent it south by mail."

But "This wondrous document transmission system, with facilities in Los Angeles and San Francisco (installation in other cities is being studied) speedily transmits facsimile copies of any picture, map, drawing, or document up to 8 1/2" wide, over microwave..." The article goes on to explain optical scanning, conversion to electrical impulses, deposition of metal on chemically treated moist paper, and heat drying to set the image. "The paper [output] is automatically cut to size and stacked... there are no manual controls to set or change."

"So important to railroad operations on the West Coast are these machines that someone is attending to them twenty-four hours a day." They're shown in the two photos at left above.

The photo above right is the Teletype machine on display at the Museum, also sometimes called a teleprinter. It represents an earlier means of electrical communication that could transmit a string of text but not an image. Its advantage was that the user did not need to know the dots and dashes of the even earlier telegraphic (Morse) code, and could simply use a keyboard like a typewriter or computer. This machine was obtained from the Seattle Connections Museum.

We don't know if this one was used by a railroad, but Southern Pacific used similar ones. If you have memories of either of these devices, let us know.

### Jamie takes a diverging route

For our retiring webmaster Jamie Foster, three paths converged: trains, computers, and photography. Trains came first in the form of his dad's Lionel train set. Jamie then moved on to HO scale. Computers came next. He was the only student in a high school of 2,000 who chose to use the single terminal available to students after school. He was an early explorer of the Internet, going online with Compuserve in the late 1980s and eventually having his own website in the 1990s. Then the photography bug bit hard in the 2000s. It was a perfect storm for building railroad-related websites.

His first railroad website was for his own G-scale setup, followed by 7.5-inch-gauge operations on the Pacific Bill and Jamie Railroad (PBJRR). In 2002, Jamie documented via website the Alvin All-Star Railroad, a 3rd-grade railroad modeling and history unit he did with his wife, Lynn, and his Dad, Bill. By 2003, he was handling photography and the website for the Bitter Creek Western Railroad. From there he came to webmaster for the Santa Maria Valley Railroad, Friends of the SMVRR, the SLO Railroad Museum, Motorcar Operators West ("speeder" group), the California Short Line Railroad Association, the Central Coast Railroad Festival, the Rocky Mountain Railroad Heritage Society, and the International Fellowship of Railroading Rotarians. His most recent project was the Parlor Car Chats program for this museum, providing live, on-line, railroading talks during the pandemic shutdown. The pinnacle of Jamie's railroading activities was working for the Santa Maria Valley Railroad, culminating with working full-time at the railroad in the office, as conductor, and as trainmaster.

Jamie welcomes you to explore these activities via the various websites that supported and documented them, all available at JF2.com.

*Below left, Jamie pilots a Museum webcast. At right, he helps a Santa Maria Valley RR crew tie up at the end of the day (Rob Himoto photo).*





*When you're two or three years old, the steps are big and the caboose is big. It seems like everything is big. It was a big, well attended festival.*



*On a beautiful fall day, Museum member Tom Mitchell and wife Teri watch Amtrak's northbound Coast Starlight roll through Paso Robles. Brad LaRose photo*

## Watch trains, support local businesses

Museum neighbors Miner's Hardware and Café Roma are well situated for customers to check out passing trains. So are California Coast Beer Company and Iron Oaks Winery, which share use of the outdoor seating shown above. Located at 1346 Railroad Street in Paso Robles, the venue is pet friendly and hosts live music and comedy.

If you have a favorite park or business in our area that provides a safe train-watching location, contact [newsletter@slorrm.com](mailto:newsletter@slorrm.com) so it can be featured in a future edition.

## Grant flexibility helped Museum

Thanks to the efforts of Andrew Merriam and consideration by Trista Campbell of the Ludwick Family Foundation, grant funds allocated but not needed for ventilation upgrades [Fall 2021 *Coast Mail*] could be used for drinking fountain replacements compliant with Covid-19 requirements and for painting and lettering the beet gondola. Museum projects would stall without such help.

## Railroad Festival returned

Central Coast Railroad Festival returned October 2, our annual fall event that had been suspended due to the pandemic [photos at left, below, and next page (online)].



All CRRF photos by Gary See

*Intense work by Brad LaRose (above, in orange hardhat) and Greg Jackson (below, in white hardhat) had our former Southern Pacific sugar beet gondola gleaming in mineral red. That color was standard for most freight cars on most U.S. railroads from about 1900 to the 1960s. Peter Brazil (below, green hat) got a workout showing how the drop-bottom doors are opened and closed.*



# Railroad Festival returned



Children's art was entered into a drawing to win tickets to Santa Barbara on Amtrak's Pacific Surfliner.



A new exhibit takes riders on a virtual trip along the Coast Route (above), while another lets visitors be virtual locomotive engineers (below). Museum member Gary See has been the main designer and builder of these interactive features.



The Freighthouse platform accommodated safety information, live music, a swap meet, the trip art drawing, and children's book sales (above).



Operating model railroads gave young guests hands-on experiences (right and below), while the historically accurate display on the upper level was for eyes only.



## One of these is not like the others

Toy and model makers American Flyer, Athearn, Atlas, Lionel, LGB, Micro-trains, MTH, Walthers, and others all have offered flatcars with tractor loads, in sizes ranging from 1/220th to 1/28th the real thing. The images on this page show some of them. But one is not a toy or model.

Replacement of Union Pacific Railroad’s bridge near Narlon in August (page 1) required detours through San Luis Obispo to reach Guadalupe and the connection with the Santa Maria Valley Railroad. Among the consignments coming from the north was a shipment of tractors.

Can you spot the full size load?

A – American Flyer, S scale (1/64).

B – Athearn, from the “blue box” era, H-O scale (1/87); this is the scale of the Museum’s exhibit layout.

C – Atlas, could be H-O or O scale (1/48)

D – LGB, G gauge (1/28 or 1/32, depending on the maker)

E – John Deere tractors, model 8RT 370, made in Waterloo, Iowa, actual size (1/1), on a flatcar managed by Trailer Train (TTX Corporation), at Union Pacific’s Watsonville yard on August 21, as the train destined Guadalupe via San Luis Obispo was put together. Brian Bergtold photo.

F – Home-built, “large scale” (in this case, 7.5-inch gauge, so about 1/8), as reported by DiscoverLiveSteam.com; craftsman and author not identified.

G – Walthers (flatcar) and Athearn (tractors), H-O.

Waterloo, Iowa, is served by the Iowa Northern Railroad, a privately owned shortline with about 163 miles of track. It is part of the Watco shortline family. Waterloo is also served by Canadian National Railway and Union Pacific Railroad. It’s a safe bet that the real tractors rode UP all the way to Guadalupe, where the Santa Maria Valley Railroad picked up the car for final delivery. SMVRR is a 14-mile, privately owned, independent shortline.

Some shortline tracks, like SMVRR’s, have always been owned by separate companies. Others were sold by the major, publicly traded railroads. They range from a few miles to hundreds of miles, though they often describe themselves as providing “first mile and last mile service.” They can generally offer more frequent, personalized service at lower cost than the major railroads, which they rely on for nationwide connections.

For more information on the SMVRR, which features a photo of three tractors on a flatcar in their brochure, visit the Museum or <http://www.smvrr.com/misc/smvrr-system-map.pdf>.



# The county that never was

Previous editions of *Coast Mail* have covered railroads that never were, despite enthusiastic promotion and glowing praise for their potential. Here's an opportunity that would have been a good long-term investment, despite the location no longer being served by a railroad.

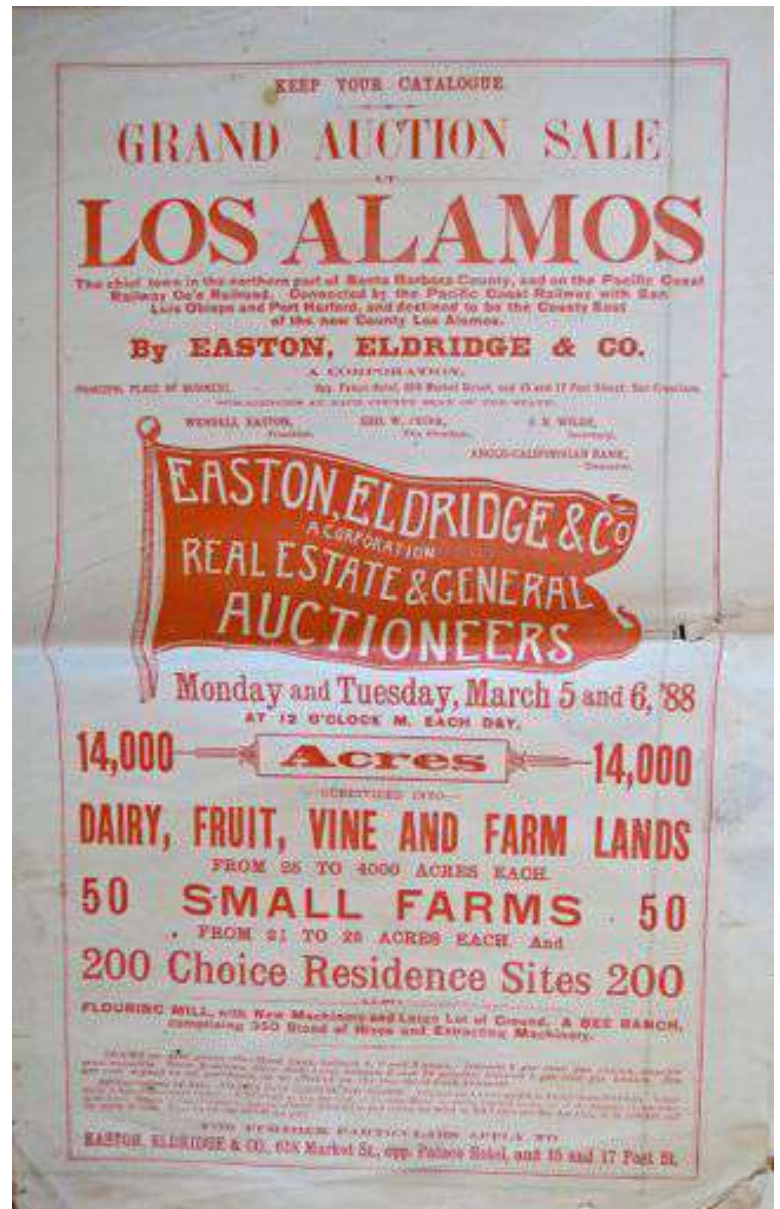
In March 1888, Easton, Eldridge & Co. of San Francisco offered parcels ranging from two to 4,000 acres in the Rancho de los Alamos. The ranch encompassed a flour mill with new machinery and a bee ranch with 350 hives. And to move the forthcoming cornucopia to markets, there was the Pacific Coast Railway.

In fact, they were so excited about railroads that they also called the Pacific Coast Railway the "Pacific Railroad," mentioning that it ran from Port Harford (now named Port San Luis) "through the county for about eighty miles" (meaning Santa Barbara County).

In further flights of confusion and optimism, "The South Pacific Railroad will soon complete its connection from Templeton to Santa Barbara, which will be the Great Trunk Line between the Great East and the West via the California Coast Route." They meant Southern Pacific. And SP would complete the Coast Route not "certainly within a few months," but in 1901. And, the route would head to the coast via Casmalia and what is now the Vandenberg base, not the Santa Ynez Valley. Maybe we should be forgiving, because in 1888 the standard gauge Southern Pacific Railroad apparently considered acquiring the narrow-gauge Pacific Coast Railway for its right-of-way.

Then again, maybe we should take a hard line. They said Los Alamos was "destined to be the County Seat of the new County of Los Alamos."

*The promotional flyer unfolded to 19 by 24 inches, red-ink text on one side and black-ink map on the other. Round-trip travel by train and ocean sail-assisted steamer cost \$7 from San Francisco, \$13 from San Diego.* SLORRM Archives No. 10,100.6



*The survey map shows the land as owned by D. W. Grover (founder of the town now named Grover Beach) and Samuel Rosener. California Governor Alvarado had granted the nearly 49,000-acre rancho to Jose de la Guerra y Carillo in 1839.*

