

# **SANTA MARIA VALLEY RAILROAD COMPANY**

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## **Santa Maria Valley Railroad Now 108 Years Old**

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On July 11, 1911 an English syndicate organized the Santa Maria Valley Railway to build a rail line from Betteravia to Roadamite, at the time the world's largest asphalt plant. Citizens from the City of Santa Maria persuaded the group to lay the line in more of a northeasterly direction so the railroad could bisect and service the little city. The railroad was aligned through the city and a large yard was built between what is now McClelland and College Streets.

After years of struggle Captain G. Allan Hancock took over the railroad and renamed it the Santa Maria Valley Railroad and the rest is history. Captain Hancock developed row crop vegetables which were in turn transported by the Santa Maria Valley Railroad. Captain Hancock invested heavily in the Santa Maria Valley and the railroad prospered hauling sugar beets, crude oil, consumer products, industrial materials, and building materials. Together with the railroad, the city of Santa Maria and the Santa Maria Valley grew and prospered.

Captain Hancock passed away in 1965 and eventually fresh vegetables, consumer products, and crude oil left the railroad. But the big blow to the railroad was the closing of the Union Sugar Plant in 1993. Over 75% of the traffic was lost.

Coast Belle Rail Corp purchased the Santa Maria Valley Railroad from the descendants of Captain Hancock on October 1, 2006. It has been an uphill battle to regain customers and rebuild and improve the infrastructure over the last 13 years. It was a daunting challenge to rebuild the customer base and rebuild the infrastructure. Many ties, rail and ballast were installed and many more will be installed for the next several years. 3 years ago a new transload and rail facility was built. The Osburn Rail Yard now totals over 2,000 feet of track serving over a half a dozen transload customers.

San Luis Obispo was the first city to ban plastic straws and are very progressive with decreasing the use of plastic bottles and alternative transportation systems. While San Luis Obispo's efforts are commendable, here in Santa Maria and Santa Maria Valley we have an alternative transportation system that has a huge impact in reducing greenhouse gases and reducing traffic congestion while providing customers a lower cost method of transporting its goods.

By converting long haul freight from trucking to rail the positive impact is not only felt here in Santa Maria and Central Coast, but across many communities across the nation. The Santa

Maria Valley Railroad is a private enterprise operating for the good of the public. As a short line railroad, freight rail transportation is accessible to all customers, not just in Santa Maria, but with our new transload facility rail transportation is accessible to customers in the entire Central Coast. The Santa Maria Valley Railroad plans to significantly grow its business to enable to continue to improve and expand its infrastructure. This will allow the railroad to take more trucks off the road which will alleviate traffic congestion and reduce greenhouse gases, improving our communities' quality of life.

Future plans include the possibility of running commuter passenger trains to and from Santa Maria to Guadalupe, Grover Beach, San Luis Obispo and Paso Robles. Our railroad system can be a solution to alleviate the growing traffic congestion on our roads and highways by taking cars off of our roads.

Dinner excursions are being considered in the near future. Dinner excursions were a big tourist draw when the railroad last ran 12 years ago. It is another facet of economic development a short line railroad can bring to the table

The Santa Maria Valley Railroad did not realize when taking over the railroad almost 13 years ago that city and county staffers were hoping that the railroad would go away, wanting to make the entire right of way into a bike path. After the sugar plant closed in 1992 the city and county planners systematically changed zoning next to the railroad tracks that is not appropriate to railroad operations. Here is a transportation system that hauls an equivalent of 10,000 truckloads per year of freight and projections are to quadruple that number in five years. The Board of the Santa Maria Valley Railroad would have thought they would embrace a transportation system that would improve our quality of life. Unfortunately, the railroad was left out of long-term plans and long-term solutions.

We need to change the mindset and embrace a transportation system with a rich history that has the keys to future economic growth, environmental prosperity and a better quality of life for city of Santa Maria, the Central Coast, and the rest of the nation.

The Santa Maria Valley Railroad is a 14-mile short line railroad interchanging with the Union Pacific Railroad at Guadalupe and serves the Santa Maria Valley. Transload facilities are also located at the Osburn Rail Yard enabling Santa Maria Valley Railroad to serve customers in all of Santa Barbara and San Luis Obispo Counties. Santa Maria Valley Railroad customers can ship or receive shipments anywhere in North America that is served by our national railroad system. For freight shipping inquiries contact Rob Himoto at (805) 922-7941 or visit our website at [www.smvrr.com](http://www.smvrr.com).

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