

SamTrans Sea Level Rise Protection Study

Frequently Asked Questions

Q: What is North Base and why is it crucial to SamTrans operations?

A: As the primary hub for vehicle maintenance, operations, and dispatch, North Base plays a vital role in SamTrans' ability to provide transit services. The 27-acre property is home to two-thirds of the SamTrans fleet, including buses and paratransit vehicles, operates as the SamTrans dispatch center, and is the primary location for operations, vehicle maintenance, and refueling.

North Base also houses an operator training facility and rest areas for bus operators and staff. Without access to North Base, SamTrans would be unable to operate its transit services and meet the needs of San Mateo County riders.

Q: Is North Base used exclusively for SamTrans operations?

A: North Base is also the location of the San Mateo County Samaritan House's Safe Harbor Shelter, which provides emergency and short-term housing, and the popular San Francisco Bay Trail, used recreationally by the community. Protecting North Base from sea level rise and erosion ensures it will remain safe and accessible for all.

Q: How is San Mateo County affected by sea level rise?

A: Sea level rise, which is the increase in the average height of the ocean's surface over time, impacts many coastal communities. San Mateo County faces a greater threat from sea level rise than any other county in California.* Over 40 percent of its land, which includes bayside communities, critical infrastructure, and large parts of the population, is at risk.

Q: Why is North Base at risk?

A: North Base is highly vulnerable to sea level rise and severe storms due to its location on an island in the San Francisco Bay, where Colma and San Bruno Creeks flow into the bay.

Flooding and erosion driven by increasingly intense storm surges and rainfall as well as rising sea levels have the potential to cause significant damage, cutting off access to SamTrans facilities. Parts of the property are already impacted by shoreline erosion and sinking, which will only increase with future sea level rise.

**Information from OneShoreline, a San Mateo County agency that addresses flooding, sea level rise, and coastal erosion.*

Q: What will happen if nothing is done to protect North Base?

A: North Base only has one access road, meaning floods and erosion would cut off access to the facility completely. This could result in widespread delays and cancellations across the SamTrans service area, potentially halting service altogether. Many SamTrans riders, including frontline workers, service providers, and students of all ages, would be impacted. This disruption would negatively impact local economic, workforce, and education systems as community members who rely on public transit would be unable to move throughout the region. San Mateo County roads would be impacted by increased traffic and congestion as more people would need to rely on personal vehicles.

Q: How does SamTrans plan to mitigate the impacts of sea level rise and protect North Base?

A: SamTrans is conducting a feasibility study to consider the construction of flood protection solutions at North Base. The study examines a Regional Protection solution and a Perimeter Protection solution. Both options offer protection along the shoreline, including levees, seawalls, or solutions that, once installed, enhance and support the local ecosystem. The Regional Protection considers tide gates across Colma and San Bruno creeks for controlling water flow into or out of the region, which helps prevent future flooding.

Q: What is SamTrans analyzing in the feasibility study?

A: SamTrans is evaluating the potential benefits, environmental impacts, costs, and implementation timelines for flood protection options. It is also analyzing the current environmental conditions and potential flood risks and considering long-term maintenance requirements for each alternative. The agency is also analyzing other flood mitigation projects in the surrounding area to understand how SamTrans' efforts will interact with those projects.

Q: What is the timeline for this project?

A: The study started in March 2024 when SamTrans began collecting data and determining criteria for engineering, environmental impact, and permitting. Conceptual designs were developed, and from December 2024 to March 2025, SamTrans engaged with permitting agencies and potential beneficiaries.

In mid-2025, the SamTrans Board of Directors will review the study results and provide feedback on the protection solution that offers the most benefits in terms of land protection, cost, and impact. From there, SamTrans will consider funding and implementation strategies.

Q: How is SamTrans engaging with other stakeholders on this project?

A: SamTrans is holding regular coordination meetings with key stakeholders to review feasibility study findings and explore opportunities for collaboration.

Q: What agencies are anticipated to be involved in the permitting and approval process for implementing flood protection solutions?

A: The United States Army Corps of Engineers (USACE), San Francisco Bay Conservation and Development Commission (BCDC), and the San Francisco Regional Water Quality Control Board (RWQCB) will likely be involved in the permitting process. Approvals from other federal and state agencies may be needed.

Q: How will this project be funded?

A: Given the importance of SamTrans services, efforts to protect North Base from sea level rise will likely be funded using a combination of federal, state, and local partnerships and funding opportunities.

Q: Without a protection solution, how often will flooding impact North Base?

A: SamTrans modeling and predictions show that North Base will likely experience regular flooding from storms by 2040. The North Base causeway, which provides access to the facility, would also be impacted and is currently vulnerable to flooding.

Q: Why can't SamTrans find another location for its fleet and operations?

A: Relocating SamTrans' facilities to another location may not be feasible, due to cost, relocation timelines, and the additional operational logistics, which is why SamTrans must act now to protect North Base from flooding and erosion.

Q: Who relies on SamTrans for transportation?

A: SamTrans has almost 9 million riders annually, which has been steadily growing since the pandemic-caused downturn. Seventy-five percent of these riders do not have access to a car, meaning reliable, efficient public transit is crucial for allowing them to access work, school, and local businesses and services. Failure to protect North Base and the SamTrans fleet would be detrimental to the future of a local transit system and the health of the regional economy.