



Vera C. Rubin Observatory
Rubin Observatory Operations

Criteria to start the Legacy Survey of Space and Time

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Abstract

This document concisely captures the criteria that must be satisfied to begin regular survey operations for the Legacy Survey of Space and Time (i.e. to begin execution of the planned 10 year survey strategy currently documented in PSTN-056). It is expected that the survey will start in late 2025 1-2 months after the beginning of the formal Operations phase at the completion of construction. The survey can start based on quantitative criteria described herein. The system contribution to the delivered image quality must reliably be better than $0.45''$ and the effective survey speed must be 1.0 or better. Both of these are attainable given our experience and knowledge of the current on sky system.

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Criteria to start the Legacy Survey of Space and Time

1 Introduction

By the end of October 2025 the Rubin Observatory will be substantially completed having passed its Construction Completeness Review #3 (CCR3) and Operations Readiness Review #2 (ORR2). This will signify the formal handover of activities from the construction project to Rubin Operations. In practice, this means the Operations team (see Blum, RDO-018) will assume day-to-day responsibility of the Observatory and its regular operations: running the facility on Cerro Pachón each night, transferring data over the long haul network to the US Data Facility (USDF), processing and archiving the data, and delivering data products to the user community via realtime alerts and scheduled data releases.

At the time of handover the construction team will have demonstrated the overall Rubin Observatory system is *capable* of meeting its required science driven technical performance as articulated in the Science Requirements Document Ivezić & The LSST Science Collaboration (LPM-17), LSST System Requirements Claver & The LSST Systems Engineering Integrated Project Team (LSE-29) and Observatory System Specifications Claver & The LSST Systems Engineering Integrated Project Team (LSE-30) documents. It is expected that improvements to processes, sub-system reliability and performance consistency will be necessary in advance of formally beginning the execution of the the 10-year Legacy Survey of Space and Time (LSST). The survey strategy and it's associated cadence in the 10-year period (currently allowing for modest assumed degradation in year 1) are detailed by the Survey Cadence Optimization Committee (SCOC, Rubin's Survey Cadence Optimization Committee et al., PSTN-056).

In this technote, we define the set of key performance criteria that the Operations team, in consultation with operations partners SLAC and NOIRLab, the post-handover Construction team, the Rubin Management Board, funding agencies, and the science advisory committee will use to guide the decision to begin the LSST.

The formal handover from construction to operations is scheduled to occur on October 25th, 2025. The primary science program for the Rubin Observatory – the Legacy Survey of Space and Time – will begin after the handover to Operations and when the key "start" criteria have been met. It is expected that the LSST will begin in earnest prior to the close of calendar year 2025.

Formal transition of construction staff into the Rubin Operations organization (derived jointly from NSF's NOIRLab under AURA and DOE's SLAC Rubin Operations) will be on October 1, 2025. See section 5 below for the current schedule.

2 System Performance

Handover means that the system will have passed the NSF and DOE Construction Completeness Review #3 (CCR3). Noting the formal close out of the MREFC grant and AURA cooperative agreement occurs with CCR4. The as delivered system will be *capable* of delivering images that satisfy the construction design requirements derived from the Science Requirements Document (SRD: Ivezić & The LSST Science Collaboration (LPM-17)). These requirements are defined in the LSST System Requirements (LSR: Claver & The LSST Systems Engineering Integrated Project Team (LSE-29)) and Observatory System Specifications (OSS: Claver & The LSST Systems Engineering Integrated Project Team (LSE-30)) documents. Following the final phase of commissioning which includes science validation (SV) observations, the state of the system will be assessed and the readiness assessment of the system and team to begin the survey will be made. Further optimization by the Operations team will be planned to ensure the system operates *reliably* at the needed level of performance capabilities.

Rubin has developed a high level set of metrics summarizing the system performance with respect to overall survey efficiency. We need to simultaneously ensure that both 1) the system is producing viable science quality images and data products and 2) that the observing and acquisition of this data is efficient. To this end, we gauge the overall system survey capabilities in a 2-parameter space shown in Figure 1, marking the system + atmospheric contribution to delivered image quality versus the dimensionless survey efficiency or speed, fE – integrated Normalized Étendue. The combined summary Normalized Étendue metric (fE) is the product of 4 unitless f -metrics that gauge system contributions to the "survey speed", these are: 1) fS – *System Sensitivity* captures overall efficiency of recording photons from the sky and is driven by optical transmission, sensor quantum efficiency, sky brightness and image quality; 2) fA – *Fill Factor* captures the recorded area of the focal plane array relative to the area delivered by the optical system; 3) fO – *Observing Efficiency* captures the efficiency with which available observing time is scheduled and utilized for survey observations and 4) SA – *System Availability* a final factor that captures overall operational efficiency that takes into account weather and observatory downtime. If the system is producing appropriate image quality and the system and team are acquiring data efficiently, we can confidently start the LSST. The "start" criteria

quantify the threshold in the 2-parameter performance space that is needed to achieve this goal.

Effective survey speed is product of instantaneous etendue (ability to capture photons = effective area x field of view), observing efficiency, and system availability

normalized etendue: $fE = fA * fS * fO * \text{System Availability}$

fA: FOV area factor – total solid angle of all live science pixels

fS: sensitivity factor – defined for fiducial observing conditions and based on knowledge of throughput (optics) and sensor properties (QE, read-out noise)

fO: observing efficiency factor – rate of visits within scheduled observing time, including time intervals between visits for a nominal survey strategy (exposure time, slew time, readout time, filter exchange time)

System availability – accounts for weather losses as well as scheduled and unscheduled system downtime

All factors normalized by their nominal (design) value

FIGURE 1: Dimensionless survey efficiency factor, fE . System Availability is the most uncertain at this time. The current state of each factor is discussed below and the quantitative criteria for starting the LSST with respect to each factor is assessed.

These *f-factors* are defined to be dimensionless and normalized by the corresponding SRD derived design values. They can be traded against each other as time gained or lost. For example, deterioration in the mirror reflectivity can be easily translated to factor fS , and traded against time (e.g. time lost to recoating, the system efficiency), or against loss of sensor area (fA). The key point is that it is possible to define a simple measurable quantity (fE) that is an excellent numerical approximation for LSST science goals. Thus, we can think of the effective speed of executing the LSST (in units of the nominal speed) in terms of recognizable elements: $fE = \text{effective area} \times \text{effective FOV} \times \text{cadence} \times 1\text{-downtime}$.

In Figure 2, we show the state of our understanding of the image quality and survey speed before we went on sky with LSSTCam. The white circle is a forecast based on expectations before we went on sky with some as built elements of the system accounted for. We believe there is nothing limiting us reaching that circle, but the current performance is not there yet.

There are three regions defined in the diagram, green, light grey and dark grey, representing broad levels of operational performance towards meeting the 10-year LSST objectives. Clearly we want to be in the green shaded region and to the lower right in that space. The boundaries of the green box are defined by the minimum design specification from the SRD (upper) and stretch goals (lower) for the system image quality contribution. The light gray space is unacceptable for science and the dark gray space covers the area where SRD minimum specifications are met for depth, area of LSST, and visits, but fails to meet the specification for system contribution to the DIQ (0.4'').

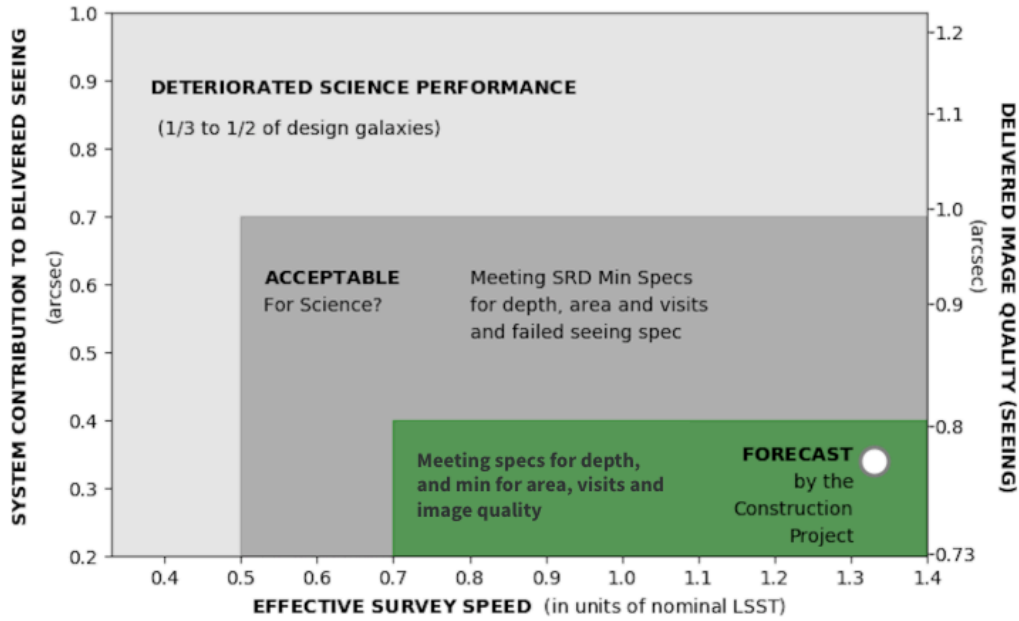


FIGURE 2: Image quality versus effective survey speed, f_E . The system contribution to the delivered image quality (sDIQ) is shown on the left vertical axis and the delivered image quality including the atmosphere (added in quadrature) is on the right. The LSST specifications are accomplished with nominal speed $f_E = 1.0$ and $sDIQ = 0.4''$ in this diagram. Current performance is assessed below. The white circle is representative of where we want to drive the performance, but we have not reached it yet.

As of CCR2/ORR1, the current values for the f factors are given in Table 1. For f_A , the value is set by the number of science pixels available (each with $0.2 \times 0.2 \text{ arcsec}^2$ on the sky). Accounting for the active pixels meeting specifications, the factor is fully 99%. The f_S factor includes read noise, QE, vignetting, optical throughput (filter, lens transmission, mirror reflectance) and DIQ (so DIQ affects both axes in our diagram). The observing efficiency factor, f_O , is a function of how many visits of the right exposure time can be observed given telescope performance (how fast we move and settle). Finally, system availability is defined as the open shutter science time compared to the total elapsed time working on the on-sky programs. Presently, if we consider only times when we are in the science data taking mode (doing LSST like observations) we have sustained 85% availability over a week long period. If we consider other system tuning in the denominator mixed with the science SV observations, the availability is about 75%.

The range of performance between what has been achieved over periods of SV and the best performance is shown in Figure 3. The goal of further optimization is to use the available technical “knobs” to tune the performance and make it more reliable. Some of the knobs are to be deployed in the September – October 2025 shutdown. The knobs are, at a high level, a laser

TABLE 1: Current f factor status

factor	Description	Sustained Performance in SV	Needed to Start LSST
sDIQ	System Contribution to the PSF FWHM	0.6''	0.45''
fA	FoV area factor	0.99	0.99
fS	Sensitivity factor	0.94	1.30
fO	Observing Efficiency	0.97	1.05
SA	System Availability (up and taking data)	0.75	0.75
fE	Normalized Étendue	0.68	1.01

alignment system, the active optics system (AOS) and associated wavefront sensing/analysis, thermal control of the M1M3 cell, thermal control of the top end assembly (volume around M2), and the dome ventilation (active control of louvers and installation of the air distribution ducting, both not yet deployed). Deployed or not, all of these are under active work and progress has been made on a number of fronts not yet reflected in Figure 3. Mainly, but not entirely, because the time available on sky has been limited since CCR2/ORR1.

The current capability and reliability of the system as described in Table 1 and Figure 3 form the basis of optimization criteria described in the next section that the Operations team will use to gate starting the LSST.

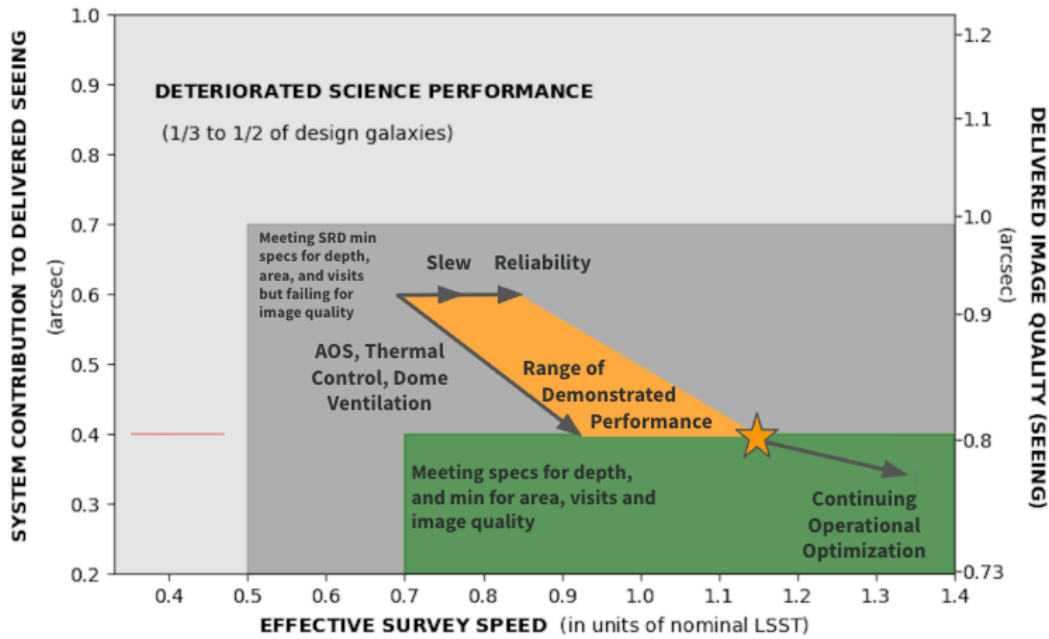


FIGURE 3: Image quality versus effective survey speed, fE with performance presented at CCR2-ORR1. Upper left of the orange performance region is sustained over week long periods in SV. The best performance (capability) is represented by the lower right vertex of the region. We are focused on getting reliable performance there and beyond as indicated. The minimum performance needed to begin the LSST is discussed below.

3 Criteria to begin the LSST

Armed with an understanding of the *as-built* system performance as outlined above and the Operations team readiness, we will use a set of objective criteria to gate the start of the LSST. These criteria will be concise and easily understandable so that the community of scientists, Rubin staff and other stakeholders counting on Rubin and the survey can have confidence the Observatory is on track.

The criteria articulated below are meant only to provide gating guidance signifying the survey start. There will be key processes within the overall system, including data management and processing where further work for improvements are required or desired after handover (beyond the construction project requirements). Unless these would prevent the acquisition and saving of science quality data, thereby delaying the survey start, they are not discussed or enumerated here. These and other criteria (TBD) will be used to gauge and monitor the overall performance of the Observatory and progress towards the 10-year survey objectives going forward, with nominal T_0 defined by when start criteria described herein are met.

TABLE 2: Survey Start Criteria

Item	Criterion	Description	Status
1	LSSTCam Maintenance	Before the completion of SV, it is understood whether or not off TMA Camera maintenance will be needed within the first year of Operations.	No off TMA maintenance required.
2	SRD	All science requirements that can be verified with SV data are verified or expected to be verified within 3 months of completion of SV.	Check status at CCR3
3	Dome	The dome environment is not limiting typical performance.	Not controlled until after Handover
4	Calibration	All necessary calibration data products are available at the time any LSST data are obtained or can be obtained after the fact without invalidating the observed data for inclusion in the LSST.	Check status at CCR3
5	sDIQ	The “System” contribution to the measured Delivered Image Quality is better than or equal to 0.45’’	Currently 0.6’’ system contribution
6	sDIQ Uniformity	The “System” contribution to the measured Delivered Image Quality can vary over the field of view such that 10% or less of the FOV has a system contribution of up to 0.52’’ (see LSST system specifications LSR-REQ-0008.	Currently not meeting for typical images
7	Ellipticity	Ellipticity for a single image will typically be as specified in the LSST system requirements as LSR-REQ-0092. This is ≤ 0.04 with 5% or fewer outliers beyond 0.07. See below; we will gate the survey start with respect to the residuals between the measured ellipticity and the calculated value from the WFS.	In SV, typically not meeting
8	Normalized Étendue (eF)	Survey Speed is > 0.7 .	Currently 0.68

The initial set of criteria developed by Operations team were discussed with the Science Advisory Committee and community at the 2024 Rubin Community Workshop. These criteria have evolved since that meeting and are presented here in Table 2.

TABLE 4: *
Survey Start Criteria Continued

Item	Criterion	Description	Status
10	LHN ready	The Long Haul Network will be working reliably and not be a limiting factor in Alert Production	LHN is ready and not limiting Alert Production
11	DM ready	The data management system is ready	DM is ready
12	Early Science	DP2 observations are completed as planned (Guy et al., RTN-011).	SV is complete; a report will be delivered by October.

The initial boundary conditions for determining the start criteria are that the construction project has successfully accomplished its own Construction Completeness Criteria (Claver et al. (SITCOMTN-005)) and has passed the third Construction Completeness Review (CCR3). Successful completion of CCR3 means NSF and DOE have accepted the system as the one that was intended to be built and will operate to conduct the 10-year LSST science program.

The survey start criteria cover a range of contexts. The criteria are not meant to be comprehensive with respect to gauging and monitoring LSST's scientific progress and success. They are intended to serve as a guide for the confident commencement of the survey – effectively establishing what will be referred to as LSST T_0 . Most of the defined criteria look to be well in hand based on what we know about commissioning progress and system performance as reported at CCR2/ORR1. Of the 8 criteria enumerated we have identified what we call “The Big 3,” : the “system” contribution to the Delivered Image Quality (sDIQ) with two primary contributors – (1) the interior dome environment plus (2) the hardware system (optics, tracking etc.), and (3) the effective survey speed or Normalized Étendue.

Looking at the criteria in Table 2, Item 1 is already met. We do not expect to have to remove the camera for maintenance before we begin the survey. Item 2 is needed to ensure some key aspects of the system don't need verification before we embark on the LSST. Some long term SRD requirements need a significant amount of data to finally validate. But we can be assured data being taken are going to be valid for the LSST if the requirements that can be validated

with SV data have been validated. This will be confirmed at CCR3. The calibration system (item 4) is in the advanced stages of validation. By CCR3, we can be assured no outstanding calibration needs will limit the taking of images for the LSST.

For item 9, the Survey Cadence Optimization Committee has delivered to the Operations Directorate one (or more) proposed survey cadence algorithms to be implemented using the Feature Based Scheduler. The scientific merits and technical feasibility of the proposed algorithm(s) will have been reviewed (If more than one proposal is provided a selection is made). This selection will be the core algorithm adopted through LSST observations leading to the first data release DR1. Remaining minor adjustments to the adopted algorithms are expected to be made as needed. The adopted cadence algorithm has been verified with simulations using as-built performance, by on-sky operations using the Feature Based Scheduler. SV data taking is complete, so we know the content of DP2 from SV (item 12) and only now need to decide whether or not any significant augmentations are critical for community preparation prior to data release 1 (DR1; see Guy et al., RTN-011).

For items 10 and 11, our SV experience shows these are ready, or in any case, sufficient for starting the survey. The Long Haul Network (LHN) has been working reliably and will not limit alert production. DM has produced, from end to end, Data Preview 1 (DP1; see Vera C. Rubin Observatory Team, RTN-095). There is continuous development to be done, but nothing to stop the start of the survey.

This leaves “The Big 3” – the system contribution to the Delivered Image Quality (optics + dome environment) and Normalized Étendue.

3.1 Delivered Image Quality (DIQ)

The single most important gain needed to get to the LSST start is clearly the typical DIQ. We will not start the LSST until the sustained performance of the system contribution to DIQ is $\leq 0.45''$. This criteria is the combination of both the telescope + LSSTCam optics and the degradations caused from any thermal non-equilibrium. Currently the very least the active optics contributes to the system has been measured at $0.33''$. The target for the active optics contribution is $0.25''$ indicating there is room for improvement. In addition to the active optics contribution, much of the remaining improvement needed to meet the system DIQ start criterion will come from system thermal control (mostly the dome environment).

Improving the system contribution to the DIQ requires continued effort on the control of optics and the dome environment. Putting this together with the criteria above results in the region of the performance diagram we can use to gate starting the LSST as depicted in Figure 4. The survey can begin once the system contribution to DIQ is $0.45''$ or less and the effective survey speed is 1.01 or better (see Table 1 and assume System Availability is 75%).

Equally important for the scientific value of the images is that the typical LSST images meet the requirements for uniformity across the field of view and ellipticity for bright isolated stars. These are given in Table 2. For uniformity to start the survey, we identify the value of the allowed contribution in the worst quartile of the overall seeing profile given in the SRD. This is $0.52''$.

We intend to meet the ellipticity requirement, however it is likely we will start the LSST when the residuals for ellipticity from the system component are well understood, even if the formal requirement is not yet met. This is because a calculation of the ellipticity (from the WFS) can result in residuals from the measured ellipticity which would allow us to detect the astrophysical weak lensing signal. This is described in the (Ivezić & The LSST Science Collaboration, LPM-17, Section 3.3.3.3), "This specification does not by itself address weak lensing systematics, because there are schemes for removing the influence of an anisotropic PSF on the observed shapes of galaxies. However, it is known that these schemes leave smaller residuals if initially given isotropic PSFs to begin with, hence the specification that the telescope+camera not greatly degrade the natural limit." Here, "the natural limit" refers to "the ellipticity induced by atmospheric turbulence in a 10-second exposure in 0.69 arcsec will be in the range 0.01-0.02" (also Section 3.3.3.3 of the SRD). Finally, as noted in the SRD, Section 3.4.0.4, it is the correlation of ellipticity fit residuals that matters, and not their size.

3.2 Dome Environmental Control

The dome will be the last major subsystem to be completed. Indeed it will not be done until mid 2026. The critical aspects that are needed are: to install, provide control for, and optimize the actuators for the dome louvers and the installation of the HVAC ductwork used for daytime thermal conditioning of the dome interior. There are 40 louvers, and some large fraction need to be operable (open at fractions consistent with telemetry in real time for temperatures and wind). The first actuators are installed now and one louver has been opened at night. Still more will need to be brought on line after the handover to meeting the system image quality criterion (we currently expect 12 will be operable after handover). If the louvers limit us to

worse than typical system DIQ performance, we won't be able to start the LSST until they are largely deployed and in routine operation.

There are large ducts that will provide conditioned air distribution supplied by the main air handlers inside the facility. This system is designed to pre-condition the internal dome environment during daytime hours to minimize thermal discontinuities at the start of each night caused by diurnal heating. This system is designed improve our ability to maintain the enclosure at closer to the anticipated mean nighttime temperature during the (earlier) day time. Maintaining thermal equilibrium in the environment in and around the telescope is critical to optimum DIQ during the night. The ducts are necessary but not sufficient. We will also need to gain experience in forecasting the coming night's temperature to be able to use the air conditioning effectively (i.e. to set the system to hit the right target).

Further use of available temperature sensors on the telescope and in the dome will help on going analyses aimed at improving the AOS and thermal control of the optics in real time.

The total contribution to sDIQ from the dome environment is modest. Including all sources of turbulence generated by the facility, the budget (i.e residual contribution after control) to contribute to the DIQ is only $0.09''$. Clearly all systems for controlling these contributions need to be working well and reliably. The observatory will need to rely on the ability to characterize parts of the DIQ coming from this environment. Thus we will prioritize reliable operation and calibration of our DIMM, in-dome seeing monitors, as well as the atmospheric profiler on Cerro Pachón, RINGSS.

3.3 Normalized Étendue

Much of the effective speed (Normalized Étendue) is already demonstrated to be sufficient to start the LSST, The field of view factor, f_A , is excellent and stable. The sensitivity factor, f_S , is also very good. This factor has the potential to help overall performance because of its dependence on delivered image quality. Getting the system contribution to the DIQ from 0.6 to 0.4 (coupled with site free air atmospheric seeing of $0.7''$) would raise f_S from 0.94 to 1.3. Apart from this, all the optics are delivered as is the focal plane. The performance of all these components is excellent and can be maintained. The observing efficiency or f_O is also in good shape. The telescope dynamic performance (slew speed, acceleration, and jerk) is sufficient for the LSST planned cadence.

The TMA is capable of accelerating more than we currently operate it. Higher acceleration requires improvements in the control of dynamic loads on the M1M3 glass via force actuators. However the current performance with glass is captured in the scheduler simulator and is only a modest hit to overall survey speed. We will continue to work on improved dynamic control even as we operate for LSST. Slew and settle performance are well understood and adequate. Modest gains on fO are forecast for the rest of SV and early operations. We expect the current value to go from 0.97 to 1.05.

This leaves the System Availability, Current performance of 0.75 needs to be improved. Doing only science like observations we have reached 85% at times. We need to continue to improve on procedures and reliability of systems throughout the summit facility as we go forward. This means training for faster troubleshooting and fault recovery, making communications on the telescope system bus more reliable, improving reliability of telescope, dome, and camera functions. These have all seen marked progress as expected throughout system integration, test, and commissioning. We will assume current performance of 75% conservatively.

Using the combined SRD minimum specifications the lowest Normalized Étendue allowed is 0.7. This level is nearly in hand; see Table 1 and the "Sustained Performance values". We will start the LSST consistent with System Availability of 75% which leads to $fE = 1.01$ using the Needed to Start LSST column f factors in Table 1. However, the actual value will be better given that we expect the System Availability to improve significantly and DIQ will also push fE to the right as it improves.

There remains the question of how reliably (often) we keep the performance in the green SRD box. Clearly some images will fall outside the box for any number of reasons, even in steady state operations. For purposes of starting the LSST, we will adopt a criteria that we can begin if we are more often than not in the box on average.

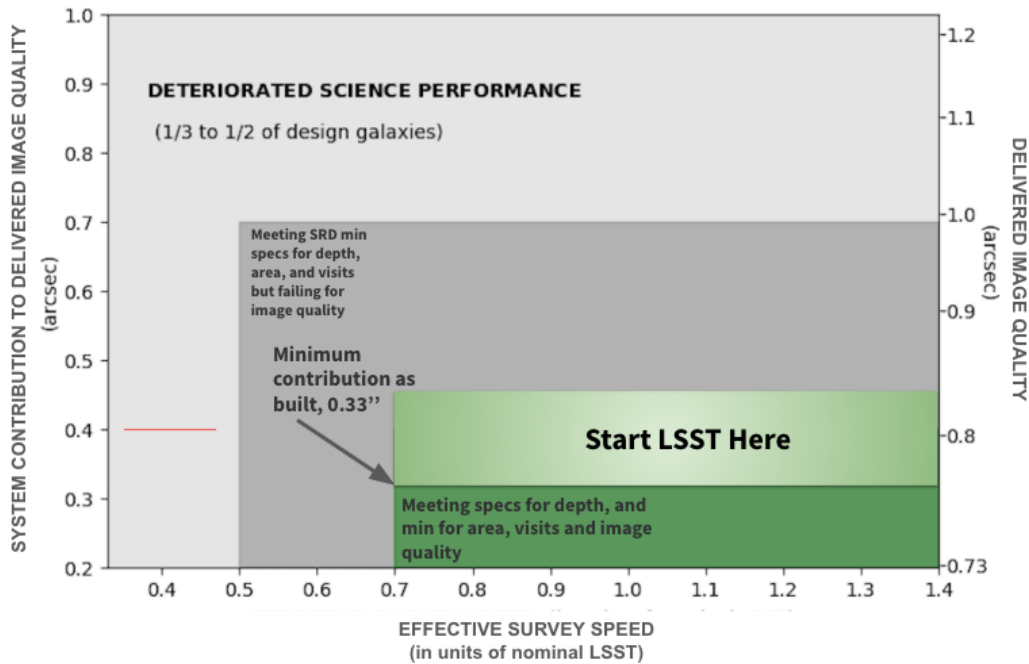


FIGURE 4: Image quality versus effective survey speed or Normalized Étendue. The large green rectangle represents the region in this space within which we can confidently start the LSST while working to maintain and improve performance. We expect to enter this box near the middle top where the shading is lighter.

4 Process to decide when to begin the LSST

In the following, we describe the process to reach the decision to start the LSST given an understanding of the state of the system and it's performance as outlined above. We envision three phases to be able to successfully start the LSST. These are 1 Preparation phase; 2 Implementation phase; 3 Decision,—Approval—Launch phase.

4.1 Preparation Phase (now - Oct 25th)

We are actively setting up an Early Operations Optimization Team which is distinct from the organization in the Rubin Operations steady state plan [RDO-018]. This team is largely made up of staff from the Construction era SIT-COM (System Integration and Test – Commissioning) team who have just finished commissioning the system. This team, it's daily workflows and planning coupled with the nightly execution of observations by the Nighttime Operations Team is best placed to drive the final performance gains needed to get to LSST in this Early

Operations period. For now, we envision this period to be Q1 FY26, but it could be shorter or longer. The team reports up through the AD for Rubin Summit Operations (RSO) and ten to the Directorate,

The Rubin Directorate in Operations has started discussion with NOIRLab Communications, SLAC Communications, Rubin EPO as well as SLAC and NOIRLab leadership on public engagement and Press Releases surrounding the start of the survey (including alert generation). Our plan is to develop the press release and engagement strategy so that it is ready when we are for the survey start.

We will set up with the Rubin team a Start of LSST Board (SLB). This board will consist of key members of the Early Operations Optimization team and is in fact a precursor to the Data Release Board (Blum, RDO-018, DRB; see). The membership will include the ADs of the operations departments, the Head of LSST and the Deputy Head of LSST, and the former leads of integration, commissioning, and science validation from SIT-COM. This board will monitor progress on performance optimization and recommend to the Directorate when the system is ready for the start of the LSST. The SLB will be chaired by the Head of LSST.

In this preparation phase, the Early Operations Optimization team will flesh out plans for engineering observations and performance tracking with the rest of the Rubin Operations team. Nightly workflows (observations, tests, analysis, metrics) will be defined and ready for the return to on-sky observing. Rubin System Performance will be rolling out key performance indicator (KPI) tools and tracking to assist with the ultimate decision to launch the survey. These tools and KPIs will continue to be developed throughout the LSST. The criteria and process to reach a decision for the start of the survey will be fully defined in this phase including how the criteria will be measured against on-sky performance.

Finally, as the preparation phase ends, we will communicate with our stakeholders and advisory/management bodies so that everyone knows what to expect as we emerge from the engineering shutdown and pre-survey maintenance period. We will confer with the SAC on RTN-093, and seek final approval for the criteria and process from the Rubin Management Board (RMB). The agencies will be notified of our plans.

4.2 Implementation Phase (Oct 25 - Launch)

As we go back on sky, the Operations team will work with the Construction team on daily needs for high priority nighttime work as well as the punch list of items to finish construction. It is expected the punch list will require very few nights off sky.

In the beginning, most the observing will be engineering blocks to gather data on the changes to the system made as a result of the analysis of the data taken prior to the shutdown. Periodic observations sets (Blocks) will be obtained in survey mode (known as Feature-Based Scheduler, or FBS, mode) to gauge our trajectory in the performance space (e.g. Figure 4. FBS Blocks will be sufficient in length to measure effective survey speed, median DIQ (and ellipticity and focal plane uniformity). The SLB will review the periodic performance and formally vote on starting the survey. If a consensus vote is not obtained, the Early Operations Optimization team, led by the AD or RSO, will make further tests for further analysis. This cycle will be repeated until consensus is reached.

In this period, we will communicate with stakeholders on progress. The communications group will ready our press release and other engagement elements so that we can engage quickly when the decision is made to start the survey.

4.3 Decision–Approval–Launch phase

Once the SLB votes to start, they will bring this recommendation to Rubin Directorate. If the Directorate concurs with the recommendation, they will take it to the RMB for concurrence. If not, the Directorate will work with the SLB to resolve any final concerns. Once the RMB has concurred with the start decision, the agencies will be notified through the JOG and the survey will start. Assuming a successful start, the Early Operations Optimization team will be dissolved and members will take up their regular Operations roles. The SLB will continue as the DRB.

5 Schedule

The Project and Operations teams will complete several reviews as described below in order to closeout the construction phase, handover to Operations, and demonstrate readiness to

begin the LSST. The first of these, Construction Completeness Review (CCR) 1, was held in October, 2024. CCR2 took place in July, 2025. Concurrent to CCR2, the Operations team went through the Operations Readiness Review (ORR) 1. Both reviews were run in parallel with the same NSF–DOE review panel convened to review and report out for the Observatory as a whole. A modest set of recommendations were made and Construction and Operations are addressing them.

Construction Closeout and Operations Readiness Reviews:

- CCR1 – readiness for the start of on-sky commissioning, as exemplified by substantial completion and integration of subsystems, and evidenced by direct measurement of the optical throughput of the integrated system
- CCR2 – capability to support LSST science goals, as exemplified by the System First Light technical milestone, and evidenced by delivered single-visit image quality (including active control of optics)
- CCR3 – reliability to initiate the LSST survey, as exemplified by the Science Validation Surveys, and evidenced by the readiness of Rubin Observatory Operations to accept the as-built Observatory
- CCR4 – closeout of the Construction project, as exemplified by service of scientifically validated survey-scale data products as part of the Operations Early Science Program, and evidenced by completed scope of system-level requirement verification, reporting, and final accounting

As of September 2025, the science validation phase of Construction is nearly complete. SV and system optimization will run through September 22. The facility will then shut down until October 24 to complete the remaining large integration activities that are required before starting regular operations. It is known that a number of activities will continue in operations managed by the construction project. These activities are captured in the “punch list”. It is expected approximately 10 FTE of effort in FY26 going through at least June will be required to finish the punch list.

CCR3/ORR2 will be held in October at the end of the observatory shut down. The combined review will be held with Observatory, partner, and agency staff. No review panel will be present.

The team will present the status of the observatory following SV and the shutdown activity, the plans for the punch list, and the plans for early operations regarding continued optimization and readiness to start the LSST.

Following CCR3/ORR2 and the concurrent "Handover", the Operations team will begin to regularly run the system, taking responsibility for the observatory on October 25th. The priority for the Operations team is to drive the system to the state captured by the criteria in this document and start the LSST. Figure 5 shows the current milestones for the Project and Operations. The period after CCR3/ORR2 is uncertain, but likely will involve continued pre-survey optimization.

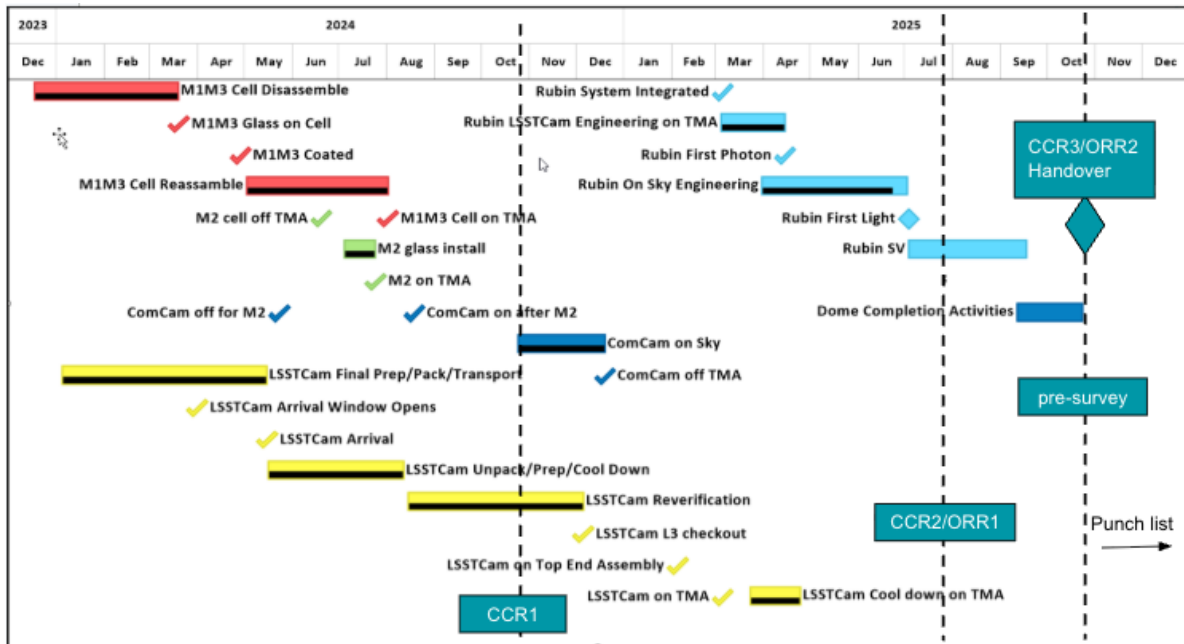


FIGURE 5: Rubin Observatory Schedule as of September 01, 2025. Formal completeness reviews including operations readiness are shown in the Figure and described above. Handover to the Operations is set for October 25, 2025 and pre-survey optimization will continue until the performance criteria described in this document are met for starting the LSST. In parallel, some activities and work by the Construction team will continue in FY26. Some of these activities will positively impact on sky performance.

6 References

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7 Acronyms

Acronym	Description
AD	Associate Director
AOS	Active Optics System
AURA	Association of Universities for Research in Astronomy
CCR	Construction Completeness Review
CCR1	Construction Completeness Review 1
CCR2	Construction Completeness Review 2
CCR3	Construction Completeness Review 3
CCR4	Construction Completeness Review 4
DIMM	Differential Image Motion Monitor
DIQ	Delivered Image Quality
DM	Data Management
DOE	Department of Energy
DP1	Data Preview 1
DP2	Data Preview 2
DR1	Data Release 1
DRB	Data Release Board
EPO	Education and Public Outreach
FBS	Feature-Based Scheduler
FOV	field of view
FTE	Full-Time Equivalent
FWHM	Full Width at Half-Maximum
FY26	Fiscal Year 2026
FoV	Field of View (also denoted FOV)
HVAC	Heating, Ventilation, and Air Conditioning
JOG	Joint Oversight Group
LHN	long haul network
LPM	LSST Project Management (Document Handle)
LSE	LSST Systems Engineering (Document Handle)
LSR	LSST System Requirements; LSE-29
LSST	Legacy Survey of Space and Time (formerly Large Synoptic Survey Telescope)
LSSTCam	LSST Science Camera

M1M3	Single piece of glass for Primary Mirror/Tertiary Mirror
M2	Secondary Mirror
MREFC	Major Research Equipment and Facility Construction
NOIRLab	NSF's National Optical-Infrared Astronomy Research Laboratory; https://noirlab.edu
NSF	National Science Foundation
ORR	Operations Readiness Review
ORR1	Operations Readiness Review 1
ORR2	Operations Readiness Review 2
OSS	Observatory System Specifications; LSE-30
PSF	Point Spread Function
PSTN	Project Science Technical Note
Q1	Quarter one
QE	quantum efficiency
RDO	Rubin Directors Office
RINGSS	
RSO	Rubin Summit Operations
RTN	Rubin Technical Note
SA	System and Services Acquisition
SAC	Science Advisory Committee
SCOC	Survey Cadence Optimization Committee
SIT	System Integration, Test
SLAC	SLAC National Accelerator Laboratory
SRD	LSST Science Requirements; LPM-17
SV	Science Validation
TBD	To Be Defined (Determined)
TMA	Telescope Mount Assembly
US	United States
USDF	United States Data Facility
WFS	WaveFront Sensor