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## **NEWS RELEASE**

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### **California Transportation Commission Approves Santa Cruz Branch Rail Line Purchase**

Sacramento, CA - Today the California Transportation Commission (CTC) unanimously approved the Santa Cruz County Regional Transportation Commission's (RTC) application to purchase the Santa Cruz Branch Rail Line (Branch Line) from Union Pacific using Proposition 116 bond funds.

After nearly ten years of negotiations and review of the property's condition, the RTC has secured State approval to purchase the Branch Line for \$14.2 million with a commitment to make \$5 million in improvements. In a letter urging the CTC to approve the project, Congressman Sam Farr noted, "The acquisition of this 32-mile coastal rail corridor is a vital element of the Central California Coast's efforts to provide multi-modal solutions to its significant transportation problems." By preserving the rail line as a continuous transportation corridor, the RTC will be able to provide transportation options for residents and visitors that may be feasible in the future. This could include passenger rail, transit, bicycle and pedestrian uses. In the near term, the RTC will continue existing freight and recreational rail service and plans to establish new recreational rail service along the scenic north coast between the main beach area in Santa Cruz and the historic town of Davenport eleven miles north.

Funding for the purchase and improvements to the line comes from Proposition 116, the region's share of State Transportation Improvement Program (STIP), and a \$1.5 million federal earmark secured by Congressman Sam Farr. Proposition 116 was approved by voters in 1990 and designated \$11 million for rail projects in Santa Cruz County. \$10 million in State Transportation Improvement Program (STIP) funds were designated for the project in 2000. Release of the

Proposition 116 and State Transportation Improvement Program (STIP) funds designated for the purchase is temporarily on hold due to state funding shortfalls and delays in passage of the State Budget.

In May, after much analysis, community discussion and input, the RTC unanimously agreed to go forward with the acquisition, concurring that the Proposition 116 funds facilitated the opportunity to provide transportation options for current and future generations. RTC Commissioners are optimistic about the future potential of the 130-year old transportation corridor which, for many decades, has been restricted for use exclusively by freight rail service. The Branch Line connects to the California Coast Line at the Pajaro Station in the Watsonville Junction and spans many of the area's top attractions -- including parks, community centers, schools, beaches and villages – and is within walking or bicycling distance from much of the county's residential population. RTC Commissioner and County Supervisor John Leopold noted, "Acquisition of the rail line corridor will allow our County to plan for future transportation solutions that link large parts of our region and promote strategies that reduce greenhouse gas emissions, promote tourism and support new employment opportunities for local residents." Commissioners recognized the diverse outpouring of support from the community, including businesses, individuals and groups who submitted support letters to the CTC or testified at the meeting.

For more details about acquisition of the Santa Cruz Branch Rail Line or other projects, visit the RTC website at <http://www.sccrtc.org/transit.html#acquire> or call 831.460-3200.

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