



Santa Cruz County Regional Transportation Commission Transportation Policy Workshop

MINUTES

Thursday February 18, 2010

9:00 a.m.

SCCRTC Conference Room
1523 Pacific Avenue, Santa Cruz

1. Introductions

Chair Mark Stone called the meeting to order at 9:03 am. Self introductions were made.

Commissioners present:

Dene Bustichi	John Leopold
Tony Campos	Kirby Nicol
Ron Graves	Ellen Pirie
Norm Hagen (Alt)	Andy Schiffrin (Alt)
Randy Johnson	Mark Stone
Don Lane	

Commissioner absent: Antonio Rivas

2. Oral communications

Charles Huddleston imagined Santa Cruz in 2025 with the rail line purchased and run by electricity. He encouraged Commissioners to proceed with purchase of the rail line and consider electricity to power future trains.

Jack Nelson expressed concern about government "greenwashing" of environmental issues and quoted author James Hansen who faulted government agencies for saying that they support green policies, but take no action to put the policies in place.

Les White asked that people contact state-level elected officials and ask them to oppose the governor's proposed gas tax swap because of the devastating effect it will have on transit. Mr. White also said that asking legislators to insist that Regional Transportation Planning Agencies, such as the RTC, become the

repositories for taxes, in the event that the gas tax swap becomes a reality, would protect transit funding more than if the tax revenues were distributed by AMBAG.

3. Additions or deletions to consent and regular agendas

Executive Director George Dondero said that there were add-on pages for Item 6. He said that the closed session will be taken before the open session and that the open session will reconvene with Item 6 followed by Items 4 and 5.

The Commission adjourned into closed at 9:12 am

7. Review of items to be discussed in closed session –Taken out of order after Item 3

CLOSED SESSION

9. Conference with Labor Negotiators Pursuant to Government Code 54957.6 – Taken out of order after Item 7

Commission Negotiators: George Dondero and Yesenia Parra

Bargaining Units: Mid-Management Unit and General Representation Unit

8. Conference with Real Property Negotiator Pursuant to Government Code 54956.8 for acquisition of the Santa Cruz Branch Rail Line Property: Santa Cruz Branch Rail Line from Watsonville Junction to Davenport – Taken out of order after Item 9

Agency Negotiator: Kirk Trost, Miller Owen & Trost

Negotiation Parties: SCCRTC, Union Pacific

Under Negotiation: Price and Terms

OPEN SESSION

10. Report on closed session

There was nothing to report.

CONSENT AGENDA

No consent items

REGULAR AGENDA

6. Santa Cruz Branch Rail Line Acquisition – Revised Uniform Transit Application (*Luis Mendez, Deputy Director*) – Taken out of order after closed session

Deputy Director Luis Mendez delivered the staff report and said that the addition of a passenger rail component to the Proposition 116 application would help make the application stronger. He noted that state law does not require and Environmental Impact Report for an active rail line.

Commissioners discussed the flexibility of the plans once the application is submitted, whether the funds would have to be returned if the agency could not afford to run the passenger rail, and if there was a required amount of time that the recreational rail would have to continue to be in service.

Mr. Mendez said that the Proposition 116 language states that funds are to be used to provide for passenger rail, but just by preserving the rail line it is preserved for future passenger rail. He added that the California Transportation Commission (CTC) has never asked that funds be returned.

Commissioners discussed obtaining a standard agreement to clarify CTC requirements, the business plan and the probability of the STIP funds being available, given the state's current economic climate.

Mike Hart, Sierra Railroad, said he is very confident that the recreational rail will be successful. He said that Sierra Railroad deals with travel groups for the other dinner trains that they operate and that the basic business plan for the Santa Cruz line is in place. He said that a detailed plan will take a few months to develop and that the rail line will not have to be subsidized.

Public comment was taken.

Bill Comfort presented two alternatives to the staff recommendation to change the policy recommending an environmental impact report for passenger rail. One alternative was to use the existing Big Trees excursion train service and the other was to complete an EIR for the "dinner train" after submitting the Proposition 116 application.

Charles Huddleston encouraged going forward with the acquisition process.

Micah Posner agreed that the RTC should make the strongest proposal possible in applying for funding.

Georgiana Clark, Big Trees Railroad, said that she deals with travel groups and the public and would like to bid on providing the recreational service to Davenport.

Bruce Sawhill said that the railroad has been in Santa Cruz since the 1870s and that it is a resource that should be owned and used by the public.

Marilyn O' Rourke said that she is concerned that the state will consider the Proposition 116 application deceptive. She disagreed with the recommendation to change the RTC policy regarding the Environmental Impact Report and asked if hazardous materials would be carried on the line.

Bill Malone said it is a good idea to add the recreational rail element.

Peter Scott endorsed speedy pursuit of the funding.

Commission Alternate Andy Schifrin said that it would be a mistake to remove the requirement to conduct an environmental impact report on the passenger rail for the mid county area, noting that an EIR was done for the section of rail line from Santa Cruz to Watsonville. He moved to approve the staff recommendations, with a change to the fourth recommendation, that the Regional Transportation Commission (RTC):

1. Review and approve with revisions as appropriate the attached revised draft uniform transit application for \$10.2 million in Proposition 116 funds and \$10 million in State Transportation Improvement Program (STIP) funds for acquisition of the Santa Cruz Branch Rail Line right-of-way (ROW) for corridor preservation, rail line improvements & recreational passenger rail service from Santa Cruz to Davenport;
2. Adopt a resolution authorizing the Executive Director to submit a Uniform Transit Application and allocation request for \$10.2 million in Proposition 116 funds and \$10 million in STIP funds for acquisition of the Santa Cruz Branch Rail Line ROW for corridor preservation, rail line improvements and recreational passenger rail service from Santa Cruz to Davenport;
3. Direct staff to seek letters of support from legislators, business groups, community groups, agencies and individuals in support of the above mentioned uniform transit application; and
4. Revise Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) policy 2.4.6 to state, "Retain the option of future in-county passenger rail service for when it is financially feasible, acceptable to the community and, except for the line segment between the Yacht Harbor in Santa Cruz and Davenport, only after the completion of an environmental impact report."

Commissioner Leopold seconded the motion.

Commissioners continued to discuss the staff recommendation to remove the self-imposed policy of requiring an environmental impact report for future in-county passenger rail service. It was noted that applying for the Proposition 116 funds does not mean that the RTC is going to buy the rail line.

The motion (Resolution 18-10) passed with Commissioner Johnson voting "no".

4. Release of the 2010 Draft Regional Transportation Plan – Taken out of order after Item 6

Commissioners Stone and Campos departed the meeting. Commissioner Johnson chaired the remainder of the meeting.

Transportation Planner Grace Blakeslee gave the staff report saying that the 2010 Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) is a minor update to the 2005 RTP with a more extensive update planned for 2012. Executive Director George Dondero said that the chapter on greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions recognizes some of the initiatives currently underway to address GHG issues but that significant challenges are posed because specific direction from the state and sufficient modeling information is not available. He noted that the analysis presented by the study *Moving Cooler* was the primary resource used for the GHG chapter.

Commissioners discussed concerns about some of the strategies proposed to meet emissions reductions, saying that certain suggestions from the groundbreaking study *Moving Cooler, an Analysis of Transportation Strategies for Reducing Greenhouse Gas Emissions*, did not apply to Santa Cruz. Concerns included that language regarding HOV lanes applied to existing lanes as opposed to creating new HOV lanes, that Santa Cruz lacked “expressways”, that Santa Cruz already has access to zip cars, that pricing strategies have a higher impact on low income communities and that an equity analysis might be helpful, and that more information was needed before a decision on “bottleneck relief” was made. The executive summary of *Moving Cooler* will be shared with Commissioners.

Executive Director Dondero said that the chapter could be expanded somewhat, but noted that the draft RTP is scheduled to be released March 1st and a public hearing held at the April 1st RTC meeting. He stressed that the Commission is not being asked to adopt the recommendations in the chapter as policies.

Responding to Commissioner concerns, Mr. Dondero said that including a list of goals for the RTC to achieve in order to reduce GHG emissions could be beneficial even if the Commission does not have the funding to put the goals into practice because it shows awareness of the issues and the steps the RTC would take if funding were available.

Commission Alternate Schiffrin moved and Commissioner Pirie seconded to approve the staff recommendations to:

1. Review and provide input on the proposed new greenhouse gas chapter of the RTP;
2. Authorize staff to release the Draft 2010 Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) and Supplemental Draft Environmental Impact Report (SDEIR) for public review March 1- April 15, 2010;

3. Schedule a public hearing on the Draft RTP and EIR for April 1, 2010 with additional direction to consider the comments made by Commissioners today.

Commissioner Graves asked that the Governor's quote on page 4-5 be removed from the chapter. The maker and second agreed.

Jack Nelson said that he sees the chapter as laying a foundation for future RTPs, but that he thought there were factual errors regarding HOV lanes. He added that a vehicle miles traveled (VMT) tax is a regressive tax charging the same rate for gas guzzlers as for more fuel efficient vehicles.

The motion passed unanimously.

5. Highway 1 HOV Lanes Project Sustainable Transportation and Access Rating System (STARS)

Senior Planner Kim Shultz said that the STARS Technical Advisory Committee met on February 5th and proposed 12 credits for evaluating the Highway 1 HOV Lanes project. Mr. Shultz said that the committee, using a menu of potential credits, chose 12 credits that would fit within the time and budget constraints of the project and which were not addressing issues already being addressed in the environmental documents required for the project. It was noted that additional credits could be applied for after the project is completed.

Commission Alternate Schiffrin departed the meeting.

After discussion, Commissioner Bustichi moved and Commissioner Pirie seconded to approve the staff recommendations that the Regional Transportation Commission (RTC) approve development of the twelve credits identified by the STARS Technical Advisory Committee shown in Attachment 1 for evaluation and application to the Highway 1 High Occupancy Vehicle (HOV) Lanes Project.

Bill Malone said that he is concerned that the STARS system could be used as a tool to justify the end product. He said that part of the methodology described when STARS was first introduced to the Commission was that a project was analyzed when it is started and alternative transportation methods investigated. He encouraged the Commission to take this approach with the highway widening saying that credibility depends on it.

The motion passed unanimously.

11. Next meetings

The meeting adjourned at 12:03 pm.

The next SCCRTC meeting is scheduled for Thursday, March 4, 2010 at 9:00 a.m. at the Board of Supervisors Chambers, 701 Ocean St, Santa Cruz, CA.

The next Transportation Policy Workshop is scheduled for March 18, 2010 at 9:00 am at the SCCRTC Offices, 1523 Pacific Avenue, Santa Cruz, CA.

Respectfully submitted,

Gini Pineda

ATTENDEES

Charles Huddleston

Jack Nelson

Howard Sosbee

Les White

Georgiana Clark

Patrick Mulhearn

Bill Comfort

Peter Scott

Spike Alper

Mike Hard

Bruce Sawhill

Bill Malone

Marilyn O'Rourke

Micah Posner

Jack Nelson

SCMTD

Big Trees Railroad

Assemblymember Monning

CFST

CFST

Sierra Railroad

People Power