April 14, 2010

The Santa Cruz County Regional Transportation Commission
1523 Pacific Avenue
Santa Cruz, CA 95060

Re: Support for the Rail Corridor Acquisition

Dear Commissioners:

I am writing on behalf of the Campaign for Sensible Transportation to support with enthusiasm your staff recommendation that you proceed with the acquisition of the Santa Cruz Branch Rail Line.

We are very fortunate that the opportunity to acquire this currently underused corridor exists. The time is now. We must not lose the opportunity. It is an opportunity that will not come again.

The line passes through three of our four cities (Watsonville, Capitola and Santa Cruz), in addition to other unincorporated communities such as La Selva Beach, Rio Del Mar, Aptos, Live Oak and Davenport. It also passes through or near several state parks and beaches—Manresa, Sealcliff, New Brighton, Twin Lakes, the Santa Cruz Boardwalk, Natural Bridges, Wilder Ranch, and the more recently acquired Coast Dairies property.

Furthermore, it connects with the rail line that extends north up the San Lorenzo River to Henry Cowell State Park and Felton. To the south, it provides the potential for trips around Monterey Bay to Marina, Seaside and Monterey. Moreover, it provides an opportunity for the connection to the main line at Watsonville Junction.

Since the corridor has not been used in recent years to serve passengers, most people have not experienced travel along the rail line. Throughout its length, the line is much closer to the ocean than is Highway 1, and is remarkably scenic, providing excellent views of our California coast. (I am informed by Mike Hart, President and CEO of the Sierra Railroad Company, that they “would welcome the opportunity to share the views along the line with the decision makers”. Perhaps here is an offer you may wish to take up.)

Of special interest to many Santa Cruz County residents is the opportunity to create a pedestrian and bicycle path within the rail corridor, adjacent to the rail tracks. As
is noted on your website (http://www.sccrtc.org/transit.html#acquire), many (a recent count by the Rails-to-Trails Conservancy shows 145) such “rails-with-trails” have been constructed in other parts of the country, and have proved uniformly popular. They are safe. Such an adjunct to our county’s transportation system is sure to be well-used, both for recreational and commuter use. We are strong advocates for both pedestrian and bicycle projects, and we very much support the implementation of a rail-trail along the corridor.

We are aware that the new operator of the freight service (Sierra Railroad Company) is working to increase the use of the rail line for freight, and is also interested in implementing recreational passenger service between Santa Cruz and Davenport. We support both.

In conclusion, we strongly urge your support of the acquisition.

Sincerely,

Peter Scott, Co-chair
The Campaign for Sensible Transportation

cc: Congressman Sam Farr
    State Senator Joe Simitian
    Assemblymember Bill Monning
    Sierra Railroad Company
    Rails-to-Trails Conservancy
Ed Porter  
105 Lighthouse Avenue  
Santa Cruz, CA 95060  
(831) 427-0836  
April 14, 2010

Santa Cruz County Regional Transportation Commission

Dear Commission members,

I want to voice my strong support for the public acquisition of our coastal rail corridor. This is a once in a lifetime opportunity for the residents of our County.

Future transportation needs may take any of several different directions. But, the asset that is the rail corridor has no other equal. There is no doubt that it can provide a variety of different kinds of public transportation. It is unique and there will only be this one opportunity to acquire it. Once it is subdivided and absorbed into the neighborhoods along the line, there is little probability we will see such an opportunity again.

So I urge you to act in a timely fashion and move expeditiously to complete the acquisition of the rail corridor.

Sincerely,

[Signature]

Ed Porter