



Santa Cruz County Regional Transportation Commission

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

September 7, 2012

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Community Acquisition of Rail Corridor Inches Closer

For the second time in less than one year, the federal Surface Transportation Board (STB) granted a petition by the Santa Cruz County Regional Transportation Commission (RTC) to acquire the 32-mile Santa Cruz Branch Rail Line and move forward with closing escrow on the transportation corridor. Re-submittal of the petition was required when the short line operator selected by the current owner, Union Pacific Railroad, pulled out of the deal at the eleventh hour and the RTC was in a position to solicit and select a short line operator best suited to the local community. The STB's decision is one of the last steps in community acquisition of this significant transportation corridor -- one that runs parallel to the Highway 1 corridor and within a mile of census blocks containing over 50% of the county's population.

"The communities of Santa Cruz and Monterey counties have come together to make the dream of healthy, environmentally friendly forms of alternative transportation along the bay a reality," said Congressman Sam Farr. "Today's decision brings us one step closer to realizing that dream. I am excited that Central Coast residents and visitors will soon have a new opportunity to travel along and experience the Monterey Bay Sanctuary."

"The intent of acquiring this key transportation corridor is to provide mobility options for current and future generations," noted Commission Chair Kirby Nicol. "I'm confident that the benefit of this purchase, generously supported by voters through Proposition 116, will be experienced by residents, visitors and business interests alike."

Iowa Pacific, doing business locally as the Santa Cruz and Monterey Bay Railway, was already approved by the STB as the local operator enabling them to begin operation along the rail corridor. Initial operation will include transporting freight. In the near term, the operator plans to run a Polar Express train for the holidays beginning in Santa Cruz and going north where the tracks are in the best condition.

As included in the negotiated agreement between the RTC and Union Pacific approved in 2010, the purchase includes funding set aside to upgrade a number of structures. The RTC will proceed with work on both wood and metal trestles over the next year. The California Transportation Commission approved the sale and release of funding at their January 2011 meeting including \$14.2 million for the Branch Line with a commitment to make \$5 million in improvements. The majority of funding for the project comes from Proposition 116, approved by voters in 1990, which designated \$11 million for rail projects in Santa Cruz County. Other funds include \$1.5 million in federal funds secured by Congressman Sam Farr and \$10 million in State Transportation Improvement Program (STIP) funds were designated for the project in 2000.

Other tasks needed to conclude the acquisition and close of escrow include: finalizing purchase documents, completing the escrow process, and purchasing necessary insurance policies. In response to high levels of interest, an event will be planned to celebrate community ownership of the rail corridor.

For more details about acquisition of the Santa Cruz Branch Rail Line or other projects, visit the RTC website at <http://sccrtc.org/projects/rail/rail-line-purchase/> or call (831) 460-3200.

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The Santa Cruz County Regional Transportation Commission (RTC) is responsible for delivering a full range of safe, convenient, reliable, and efficient transportation choices for the community. While promoting long-term sustainability, the RTC provides transportation services, planning, and funding for all travel modes. Information about the Regional Transportation Commission's projects and programs can be found at www.sccrtc.org or by calling 831-460-3200.