

Summary of Public Comments on the Draft Study and Updates in Final Rail Transit Study

The following is a summary of comments received on the draft rail feasibility study by topic and a summary of updates made in the final study (*shown in italics*). Input was received by the RTC via emails, letters, comment forms, an online survey, and at several meetings held from May 21, 2015 to July 31, 2015. All of the emails, comment letters, and forms, as well as the survey results, were posted on the RTC website and available to the RTC board. While the following summary does not include every unique comment, additional information is included in the final document in response to most comments and questions received during the comment period. Answers to some questions and comments are beyond the scope of this feasibility study and would not be explored until detailed analysis is done in later phases, including project-level environmental review, design engineering, or operational service planning; or as part of a comparative unified corridors plan.

GENERAL SUMMARY OF COMMENTS

- Comments received ranged from strong support for any type of rail service, to support of certain types or frequency of service, to voicing concerns about potential impacts or certain aspects of scenarios analyzed, to strong opposition to any type of rail service, to opposition to any activity on the rail line and other comments in between.
- Many respondents that expressed general support for rail transit proposed specific parameters (e.g. service area, station locations, vehicle types, cost, service hours) for a preferred service scenario.
- Concerns expressed by those opposed to rail transit often focused on the number of daily trains, cost, ridership estimates, horn noise, and trail integration.

SERVICE CHARACTERISTICS

- **SERVE WATSONVILLE:** Strong support for serving Watsonville to address congestion and equity. Some suggested a "hybrid" scenario, with peak or commute hour service to Watsonville and regular local service between Westside Santa Cruz and Aptos/Cabrillo throughout the day. *Document Updates: Section 8 was revised to show options for a hybrid scenario that serves Watsonville.*
- **REGIONAL RAIL CONNECTIONS:** Support for regional rail connections at Pajaro to provide both links for Santa Cruz County residents to travel to places outside the county and for visitors to come to Santa Cruz County without their vehicles, many citing that regional connection would be key to project success and/or funding. Connections to Monterey were also encouraged. *Document Updates: Addressed in document as Scenario J and revised Section 8.*
- **HOURS and FREQUENCY:** Concerns were expressed that 60 trains a day is too many. Others requested that trains run frequently so service is convenient for regular use. Some respondents wanted frequent service throughout the day (not just peak periods). Some communicated importance of late night service for students and workers with non-traditional hours. Some were opposed to early morning or late night service. Some requested that train service operate on holidays. *Document Updates: The sample service scenarios identified in the study include a range of service hours and frequencies in order to understand differences in costs and ridership. Text edited to emphasize that actual service hours would be established with public input during service planning*

(similar to bus system service planning), including in Sections 8 and 9. Section 8 suggests scalable implementation options.

- **SPEED:** Concerns that trains traveling 45-60 mph would be too fast in neighborhoods. *Document Updates: Clarifies that under the scenarios analyzed, trains are traveling 25-35 mph on average, provides information on regulations regarding train speeds, and sample trip graph (Section 5.1.2).*
- **FARES:** Requests for a unified fare card that works on buses. Request for affordable fares. Requests that rider fares cover a higher percentage of the cost. *Document Updates: Additional information added to Section 9.3 about fare collection and rate options used by transit systems. Additional information on farebox recovery ratios (portion of cost covered by rider fares) added to section 6.4.3.*
- **SPUR LINE:** Requests for service to downtown Santa Cruz via Chestnut Street, to Harvey West businesses, and to San Lorenzo Valley; suggestions to reach out to Roaring Camp and Big Trees RR. *Document Updates: Executive Summary includes explanation that this study focuses on the main portion of the RTC-owned Branch Rail Line between Santa Cruz and Watsonville/Pajaro. Coordination with Big Trees/Roaring Camp to extend service toward Harvey West and the San Lorenzo Valley could take place in the future.*
- **OVER-THE-HILL:** Interest in expanding future train service to the Bay Area north through the Santa Cruz mountains. *Document Updates: Expanded discussion in the "history" section of Section 1: Introduction regarding the history of rail corridor over "the hill" and current conditions. This study focuses on the existing RTC-owned Santa Cruz Branch Rail Line.*

VEHICLES:

- **VEHICLE TECHNOLOGY:** High level of interest in lighter, smaller, quieter, more efficient vehicles than traditional commuter trains. Interest in energy options other than diesel. *Document Updates: Expanded information on current and potential future vehicle options, including rail transit vehicles that are low and zero emission, included in Sections 2 and 8.2.4. General information about available vehicle technologies/types is already included in the document.*
- **VEHICLE DESIGN:** Requests that rail cars have the capacity to accommodate many bikes, large baggage (surfboards, kayaks, etc.), dogs and restrooms. *Document Updates: Text added throughout the document and in Section 2, especially regarding bikes on board. Section 8 notes that given the high level of community interest in this feature, specifications for rail transit vehicles should include accommodations for transporting bicycles. The specifics would be decided at future stages. Vehicle design and floor plan could undergo public review prior to vehicle procurement/purchase.*

STATIONS

- **STATION LOCATIONS:** Concern expressed that proposed stations are not close enough to major destinations and employment centers, such as UCSC, Dominican Hospital, the Capitola Mall, and Cabrillo College. Suggestion that downtown station be moved to the north leg of the wye (by old Depot Park station) to be closer to downtown and Laurel St. buses serving UCSC, others suggested that Westside Santa Cruz be considered the primary UCSC station instead of Bay St. *Document Updates: Section 8 was modified to include a potential initial service option with less frequent service and shorter length between Watsonville and Depot Park in downtown Santa Cruz. Text added to Section 8 regarding access to/from stations. Coordination with METRO buses and future developments*

discussed in Section 9. Appendix H includes maps and information on key destination and employment areas within ¼ and ½ mile of potential rail stations analyzed in this study.

- AMENITIES: Suggestions that stations include bathrooms and concessions/retail (latter to finance project) and wi-fi in stations/on trains to enhance trip productivity. *Document Updates: Updated text in several sections to clarify that detailed station design would be decided at future stages of rail transit development.*
- PARKING: Comments that additional parking at stations is needed, and that permitting may be appropriate to prevent spill over into neighborhoods. *Document Updates: Discussion of parking in Sections 8 and 9 expanded to identify policy decisions and experience in other areas, and coordination needed with local jurisdictions for parking restrictions. The location and size of park-and-ride lots would be analyzed in future stages of rail transit development.*

COST

- COSTS & FUNDING: Concerns expressed about the total cost, that cost would outweigh benefits, cost per rider, that funding (including ongoing Operating & Maintenance) is uncertain, and that considerable support by taxpayers would be required. Comments that project will be more expensive in the future, so investment should happen now. *Document Updates: Text added to Sections 6, 8 and 9 about cost and funding methodology, farebox recovery rates, and comparable rail system costs. O&M costs are based on an average of costs shown in the National Transit Database; study includes 30% contingency. Sections 6 and 7 include comparisons of costs and farebox recovery rates for other transit systems.*
- ALTERNATIVE SPENDING OPINIONS: Support expressed for spending funds on other transportation projects, including widening Highway 1, expanding Metro bus service, and fixing local roads. Comments that rail construction costs less than widening Highway 1. *Document Updates: The Santa Cruz County Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) included an analysis of different funding scenarios for the countywide transportation system. Comparative information about specific other transportation modes or projects is proposed to be analyzed as part of Unified Corridors Plan.*
- METRO FUNDING: Concern that rail project would dilute funds to Metro. *Document Updates: Section 6.4 modified to focus on funding sources that are potentially available for rail transit and text added to Section 6.4 to emphasize that the study assumes funds currently designated for METRO operations would not be available for rail transit; STIC and METRO UCSC fees removed from list of candidate sources.*

RIDERSHIP

- RIDERSHIP MODEL: Ridership numbers were thought to be either too optimistic (high) or too conservative (low), especially for Watsonville. Clarification requested on how the ridership numbers were generated, including Santa Cruz specific factors (students, tourists), growth projections, and how rail transit ridership might affect congestion on Highway 1 and local arterial roads. Concern was expressed that those who do not currently ride the bus would not switch out of their cars, or that Santa Cruz does not have the density to support rail. *Document Updates: Discussion in Section 5 on ridership methodology expanded. Appendix added with the input factors used. Modify text related to the AMBAG travel demand model to clarify about model capabilities.*

TIMING

- TIMING: Comments that it is taking too long to implement rail service and that a 10 year time line is too long. *Document Updates: The timeframe would depend on when/if a certain service alternative is pursued; based upon experience of other rail projects implemented in the past decade, a 10 year timeframe is considered realistic for a system requiring environmental review and procuring new vehicles.*

IMPACTS AND BENEFITS

- NOISE: The most common concern voiced was regarding noise. In particular, horn noise was of greatest concern, though there was some concern regarding the noise from vehicle engines and wheels. Many people reported being bothered by the horn noise from past recreational trains on the Westside of Santa Cruz and voiced opposition to any rail projects if that volume of horn/duration of signal were to be used. Support expressed for Quiet Zones, though some are concerned that Quiet Zone crossing warnings would still be too loud. *Document Updates: Additional information on horn options and regulations, quiet zones, rail infrastructure and vehicles added to Section 8.*
- ENVIRONMENT: Belief was expressed that the rail project would have positive environmental impacts and reduce emissions in general. Concern was expressed about emissions from trains on nearby neighborhoods. Strong support was expressed for creating environmentally-friendly alternatives to automobile travel. Belief expressed that Highway 1 creates too much pollution via congestion. *Document Updates: Text added to Section 8 regarding vehicle emissions. Environmental benefits and impacts would be evaluated in more detail in a future environmental documentation phase. Text added in several sections on California, regional (RTC and AMBAG), and local sustainability goals and plans.*
- ECONOMY: Belief expressed rail project would be good for the economy, specifically providing access to jobs and increasing mobility options for visitors. *Document Updates: Add additional information on economic benefits of transit included in Section 1.*
- LAND USE: Concerns and/or support that rail transit could result in densification around stations. Some believe this will create an undesirable urban feel, while others believe it will curb urban sprawl and preserve agricultural land, support the state-mandated Sustainable Communities Strategy (SCS), support construction of affordable housing options, and/or encourage new employers to locate in Santa Cruz County. Others stated that rail could provide access to recently approved development, such as Aptos Village. *Document Updates: Add additional information on impacts rail has on land use and the SB375 Sustainable Communities Strategy (SCS) added to Section 1.*
- CROSSINGS: Strong concern was expressed about potential traffic impacts that rail transit (especially with the maximum studied - 60 trains/day) would have at street crossings, and requests that more information be included in the study. *Document Updates: Text on at-grade crossing and gate downtimes added to Section 8, including information about typical crossing gate time on local streets, based on other rail systems and factors that might impact crossings.*
- CONGESTION RELIEF: Many respondents commented rail transit would reduce congestion, some others believe it will not. Many focused on the need for more reliable and faster alternatives to driving or riding buses on congested roads. *Document Updates: Introduction and Section 7 updated to clarify that rail transit would increase travel choices by providing an additional travel option with reliable travel times.*

- **PROPERTY VALUES:** Concern that rail project would negatively affect nearby property values. Comments that the rail project would positively affect property values and economic activity near stations, particularly in commercial areas. *Document Updates: Information added to Section 7.4 about the role rail has had on property values in other areas.*
- **ACCESS TO COAST:** Some concern expressed that rail transit would restrict beach access; the Coastal Commission stated it would enhance beach access. *Document Updates: Information from Coastal Commission comment letter added. Coastal access would also be analyzed in the environmental document.*

INTEGRATION WITH OTHER MODES:

- **ACCESS TO STATIONS:** Many questions about access to and from the rail transit system or “first/last mile” and total trip time. Strong support for using bicycles to access rail transit. Other suggestions include shuttles, ride pools, a bike/pedestrian bridge to Cabrillo. *Document Updates: Text added to Section 8 regarding access to/from stations.*
- **BUS COORDINATION:** Comments strongly support Metro bus and rail service working in tandem as an integrated transit network. Specifically, a system of feeder busses to the rail line is suggested, with many suggesting that current Metro routes will need to be modified. *Document Updates: Study includes information about current transit routes, assumes funding sources currently used for bus operations would not be used for rail operations, and includes information about a coordinated transit network. Section 9 includes discussion about schedule planning and coordination and transit system governance options.*
- **Trail/MBSST:** Strong support for the trail. Some supported a trail only option. Others supported combined trips using trail and rail to go longer distances, especially for people with limited mobility. Questions about safety, access to, and width of the trail, including need for additional bridges and the locations of sidings. *Document Updates: Discussion on integration and coordination of trail and rail, as well as right-of-way widths expanded in Introduction.*
- **BIKES:** Strong support for allowing bicycles on trains, including a bike-specific car similar to Caltrain. Strong support for covered/secure bike parking at stations, inclusion of bike sharing systems, as well as the need to improve bicycle facilities around stations (in addition to MBSST). *Document Updates: Information about bike on board railcars added to Section 2. Section 8 recognizes strong support for integrated bicycle facilities, amenities and accommodation of bikes on rail transit vehicles. Document notes that specific details about vehicle and station amenities would be determined in future project stages.*
- **RECREATIONAL TRAINS:** Respondents generally less supportive of recreational trains than rail transit. Concerns expressed that rail line would only benefit tourists. Others expressed belief that tourists using the train would be of benefit to the economy and reduce tourist-related congestion. Support for recreational trains to Davenport, Coast Dairies and other north coast public lands. *Document Updates: Sections 1 and 2 include information about current and potential future recreational excursion and tourist-type passenger rail services. Text was added to emphasize that the scope of this study is public transportation and notes that ridership projections from recreational users was not modeled, but could result in higher ridership numbers. Text also added under Sections 1 and 7.4 to reflect benefits identified by the California Coastal Commission.*
- **OTHER MODES:** Other ideas for modes/use of the rail line (besides the Monterey Bay Sanctuary Scenic Trail/Coastal Rail Trail) include: Bus Rapid Transit (BRT), Railbus, Personal Rapid Transit (PRT),

monorail, a new road, waste removal, and utility location (water, broadband). *Document Updates: The scope and budget of this analysis limited the analysis of rail transit technologies to those widely used in the United States. Additional text was added to Sections 2 and 8 about potential rail transit vehicle options, including vehicles that are low and zero emission.*

- FREIGHT: Comments that there is limited demand for freight and that rail transit should have priority use of the rail line. Requests for clarification about the requirements for providing freight service and how freight and passenger rail would function together, including vehicle or temporal separation requirements. Comments that nighttime freight service could be unpopular. *Document Updates: Provided additional clarification under "Regulatory Setting" and "Integration/ Coordination with Freight Service" in Chapter 9 about federal and state rules and regulations.*

Other comments not included above:

SUPPORT OPINIONS

- Start rail service as soon as possible
- Rail line is great resource - be brave, think big
- Transportation alternatives – rail and trail - are needed, especially because of congestion and growth
- Do not remove the tracks – will be an important future asset
- Transit here should be more like Europe/East Coast/Portland
- Bus is not a viable alternative, is stuck in traffic

OPPOSE OPINIONS

- Trains should not run through residential neighborhoods
- V2V technology will surpass rail technology
- Rail right-of-way should only be used for a trail, no trains
- Train will ruin beauty/peace

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