



**Santa Cruz County Regional  
Transportation Commission  
Transportation Policy Workshop**

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**AGENDA**

**Thursday, October 19, 2017  
9:00 a.m.**

**NOTE LOCATION THIS MONTH  
SCCRTC Conference Room  
1523 Pacific Ave  
Santa Cruz CA**

*NOTE*

*See the last page for details about access for people with disabilities, translation services, and meeting broadcasts.*

*EN ESPAÑOL*

*Para información sobre servicios de traducción al español, dirijase a la última página.*

*AGENDAS ONLINE*

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**COMMISSION MEMBERSHIP**

Caltrans (ex-officio)	Tim Gubbins
City of Capitola	Jacques Bertrand
City of Santa Cruz	Sandy Brown
City of Scotts Valley	Randy Johnson
City of Watsonville	Oscar Rios
County of Santa Cruz	Greg Caput
County of Santa Cruz	Ryan Coonerty
County of Santa Cruz	Zach Friend
County of Santa Cruz	John Leopold
County of Santa Cruz	Bruce McPherson
Santa Cruz Metropolitan Transit District	Cynthia Chase
Santa Cruz Metropolitan Transit District	Ed Bottorff
Santa Cruz Metropolitan Transit District	Norm Hagen

*The majority of the Commission constitutes a quorum for the transaction of business.*

1. Roll call

**OPEN SESSION**

2. Oral communications

*Any member of the public may address the Commission on any item within the jurisdiction of the Commission that is not already on the agenda. The Commission will listen to all communication, but in compliance with State law, and may not take action on items that are not on the agenda.*

*Speakers are requested to sign the sign-in sheet and state their name clearly so that their names can be accurately recorded in the minutes of the meeting.*

3. Additions or deletions to consent and regular agendas

**CONSENT AGENDA**

*All items appearing on the consent agenda are considered to be minor or non-controversial and will be acted upon in one motion if no member of the RTC or public wishes an item be removed and discussed on the regular agenda. Members of the Commission may raise questions, seek clarification or add directions to consent agenda items without removing the item from the consent agenda as long as no other Commissioner objects to the change.*

**REGULAR AGENDA**

4. Visualizing Sustainable Transportation – Owl Viewer Available  
(oral report by George Dondero, Executive Director and Anais Schenk, Project Manager)
5. Highway 17 Access Management Plan Update  
(Kelly McClendon, Caltrans)
  - a. Highway 17 Access Management Plan hand out
6. Request to Conduct a Peer Review of the Great Santa Cruz Trail 2016 Report  
(George Dondero, Executive Director)
  - b. Staff report
  - c. Letter from Friends of the Rail and Trail
  - d. Letter from the Santa Cruz Area Chamber of Commerce
  - e. Letter from Bike Santa Cruz County
  - f. Letter from the Sierra Club
  - g. Comment letter on the GSCT report from RTC staff
  - h. Letter from Rail-to-Trails
  - i. Letter from Greenway Santa Cruz County
  - j. Letter from Santa Cruz County Business Council
5. Adjourn and Next meetings

The next RTC meeting is scheduled for Thursday, November 2, 2017 at 9:00 a.m. Watsonville City Council Chambers, 275 Main Street 4<sup>th</sup> floor Watsonville Ca

The next Transportation Policy Workshop meeting is scheduled for Thursday, November 16, 2017 at 9:00 a.m. at the RTC Offices, 1523 Pacific Avenue, Santa Cruz, CA

## HOW TO REACH US

Santa Cruz County Regional Transportation Commission  
1523 Pacific Avenue, Santa Cruz, CA 95060  
phone: (831) 460-3200 / fax: (831) 460-3215

Watsonville Office  
275 Main Street, Suite 450, Watsonville. CA 95076  
phone: (831) 460-3205  
email: [info@sccrtc.org](mailto:info@sccrtc.org) / website: [www.sccrtc.org](http://www.sccrtc.org)

## COMMENTS FROM THE PUBLIC

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*smoke and scent-free.*

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## **TITLE VI NOTICE TO BENEFICIARIES**

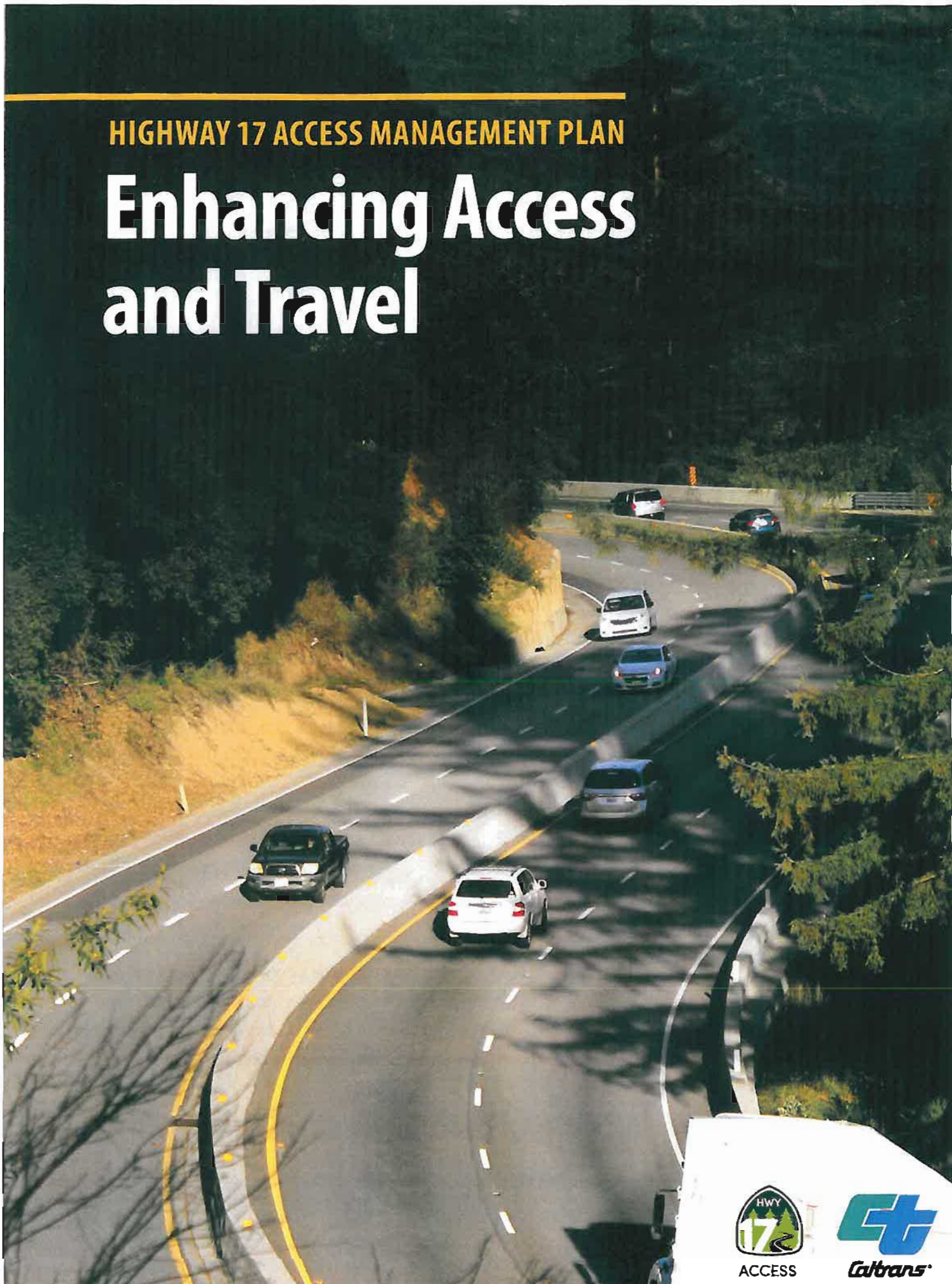
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HIGHWAY 17 ACCESS MANAGEMENT PLAN

# Enhancing Access and Travel





## Highway or Local Road?

Highway 17 is the main link between Santa Cruz County and Silicon Valley. It functions like an urban freeway with high numbers of fast moving vehicles, but it's located in a predominantly rural area. It's also a local road for the thousands of people who live along it and rely on their access to neighborhoods, local streets, and individual driveways.

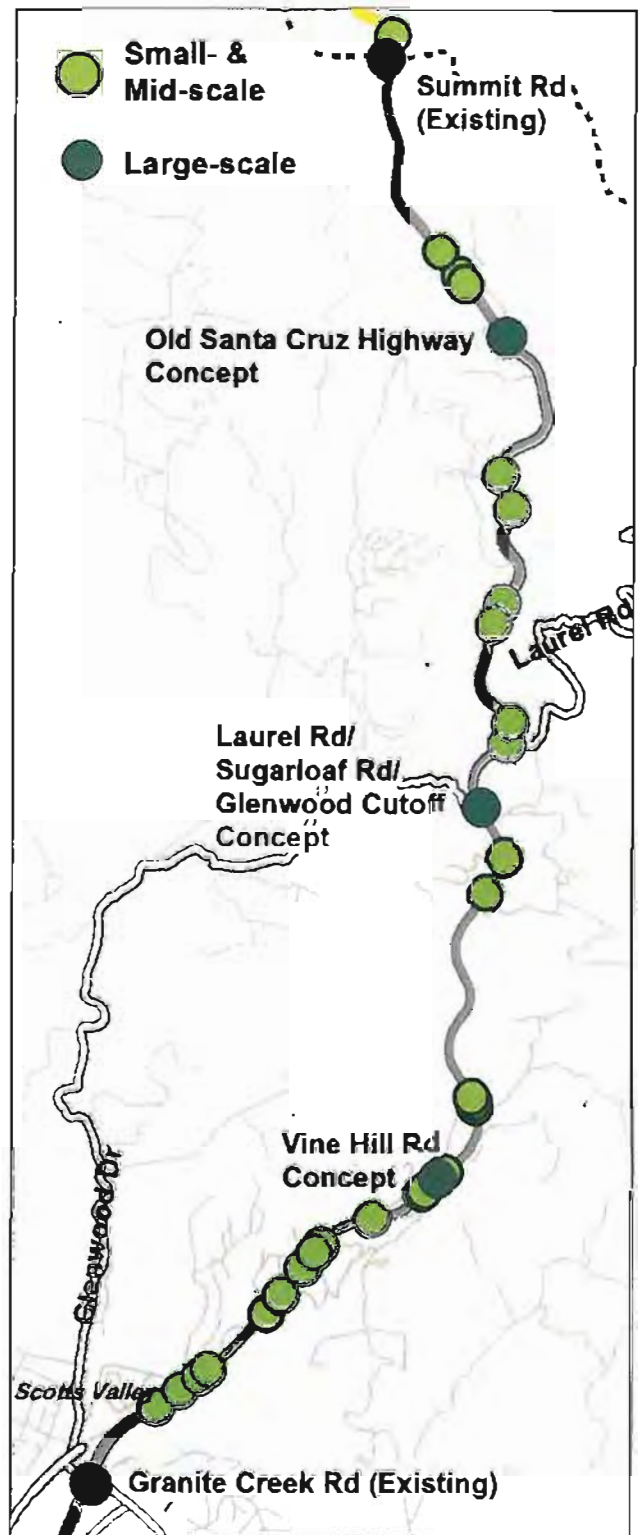
Those two simultaneous uses—regional highway and local road—can cause traffic challenges, especially at access areas where cars and trucks enter and exit the roadway. Each access area has multiple points—transportation engineers call them conflict points—where vehicles slow to exit, accelerate from a stop to enter, or make left turns. Those actions can cause unexpected changes in traffic flow, and all too frequent bumper-to-bumper traffic, especially during rush hour.

# Improvement Concepts

The Plan includes recommendations for improvements through 32 concepts, including small-scale driveway improvements, medium-scale driveway consolidations, and relocations and the three large-scale interchange projects highlighted in the following pages. The projects strategically balance local access and highway mobility; each is designed for long-range compatibility with the other concepts. None will impede access, although some traffic may need to travel slightly farther on frontage streets. The projects also align with Land Trust of Santa Cruz County efforts to install a wildlife habitat connectivity crossing.

Each conceptual project will individually need further design and engineering, environmental studies, and public review. Prioritizing and implementing the projects will depend on available funding and balancing costs and benefits. Caltrans and its partners will be working to leverage potential funding, including local, regional, state and federal sources.

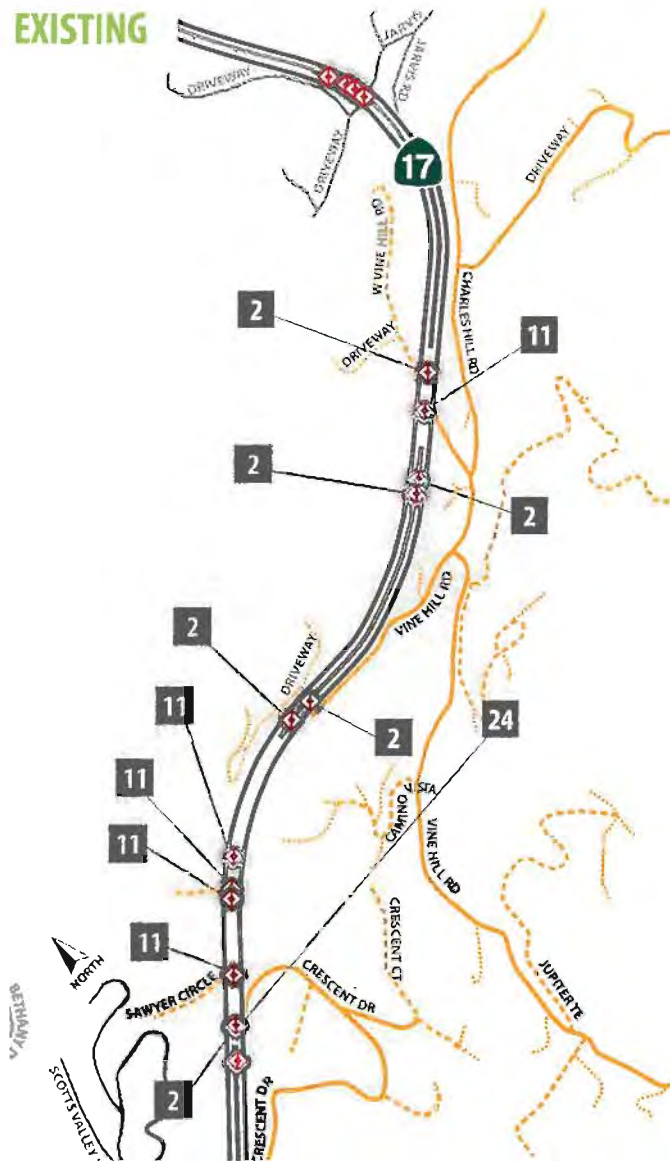
You'll find a full set of concepts for the study area at [ca-hwy17amp.org](http://ca-hwy17amp.org).



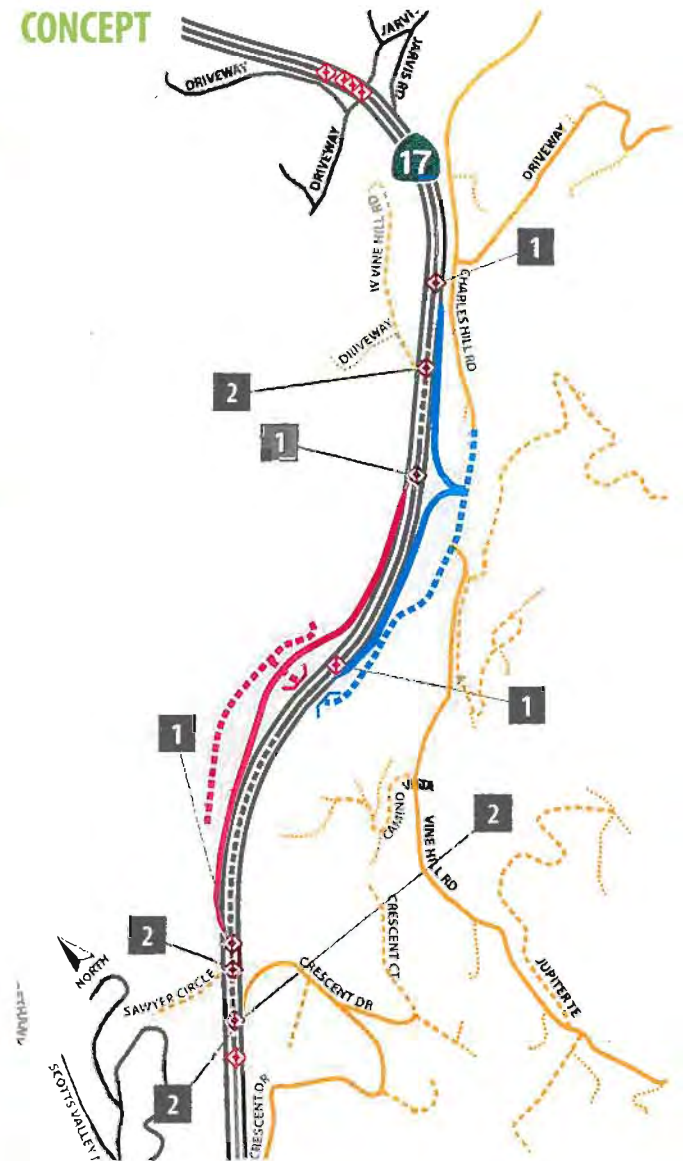
The plan focuses on 7.1 miles from Granite Creek Road in Scotts Valley to Summit Road.

# Vine Hill Road

## EXISTING



## CONCEPT



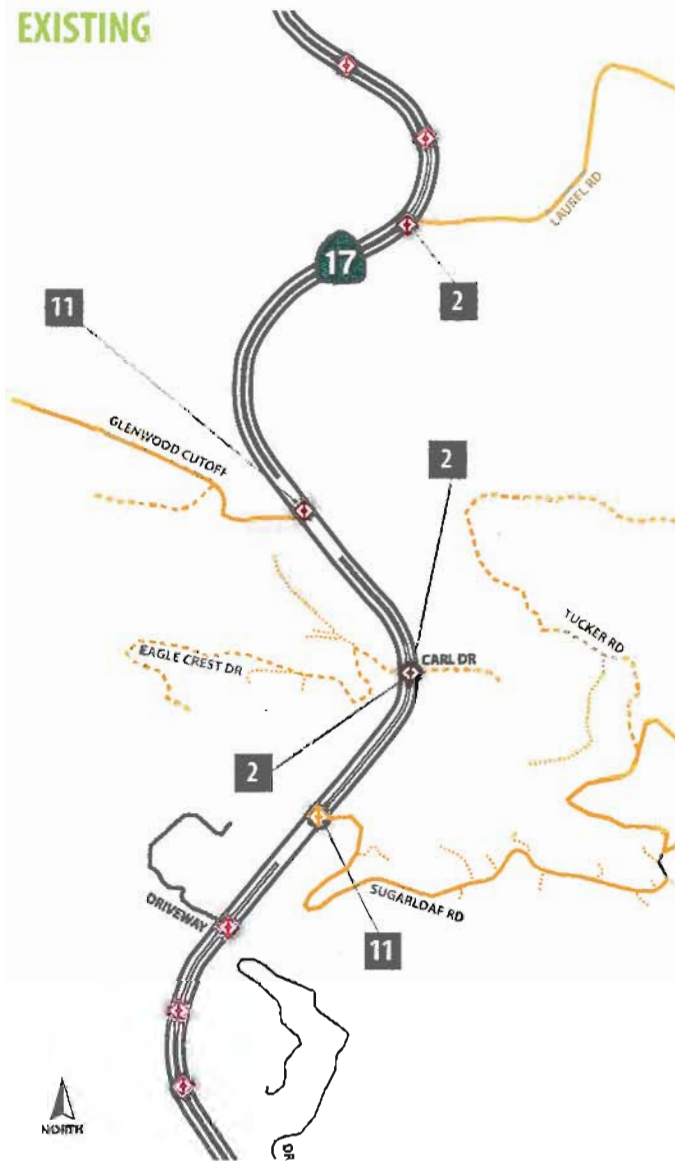
Vehicles now may make left hand turns onto and from Vine Hill Road. The conceptual interchange would extend the median barrier from Crescent Drive to north of Vine Hill, add ramps and a frontage network that will carry local traffic under the highway.



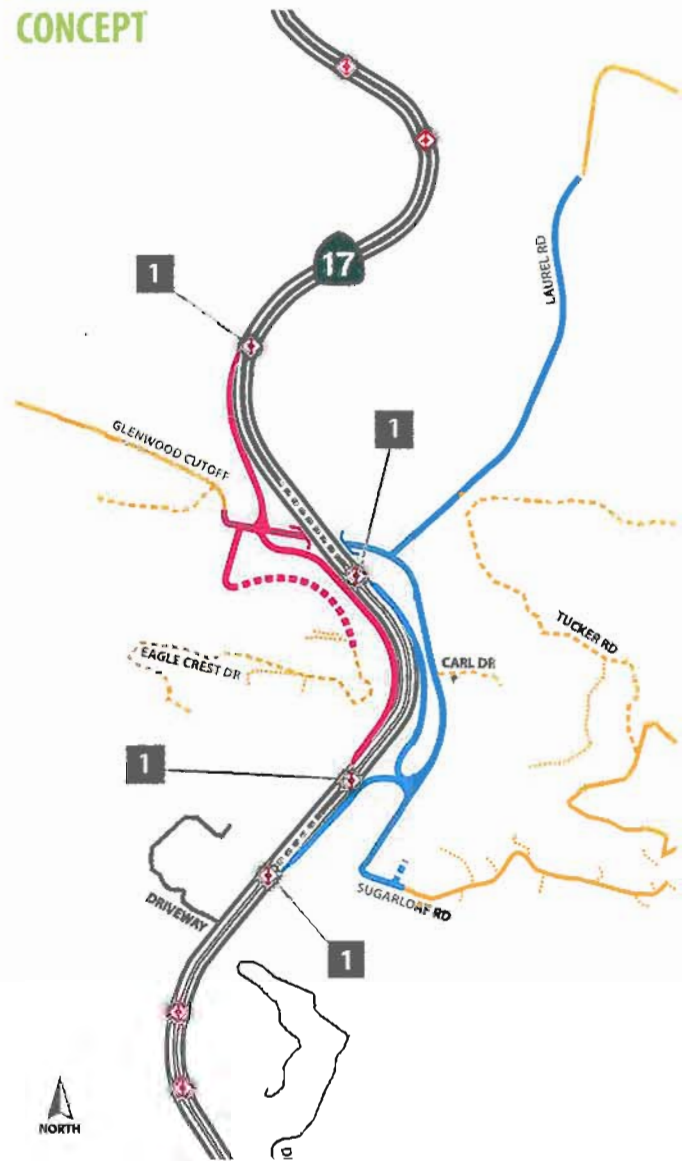
Reduces conflict points from **91 → 12**

# Sugarloaf Road/Laurel Road/Glenwood Cutoff

EXISTING



CONCEPT



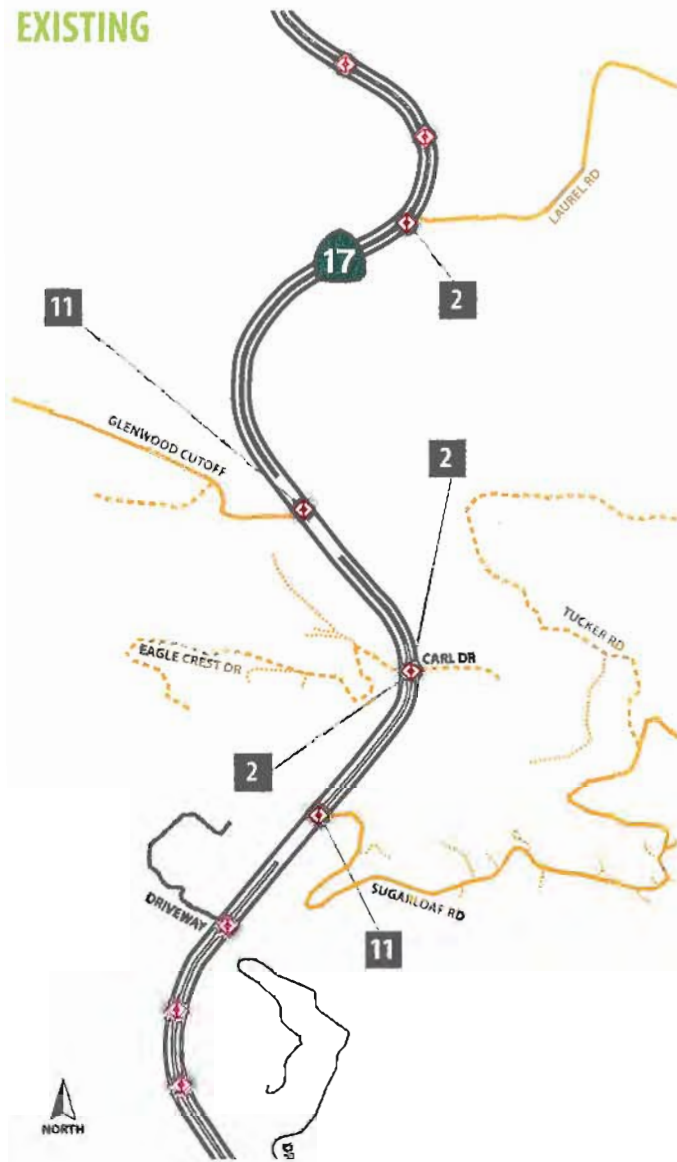
The conceptual interchange would provide off and on ramps for each direction and provides southbound access with a new frontage road network and an underpass beneath the highway.

Reduces conflict points from

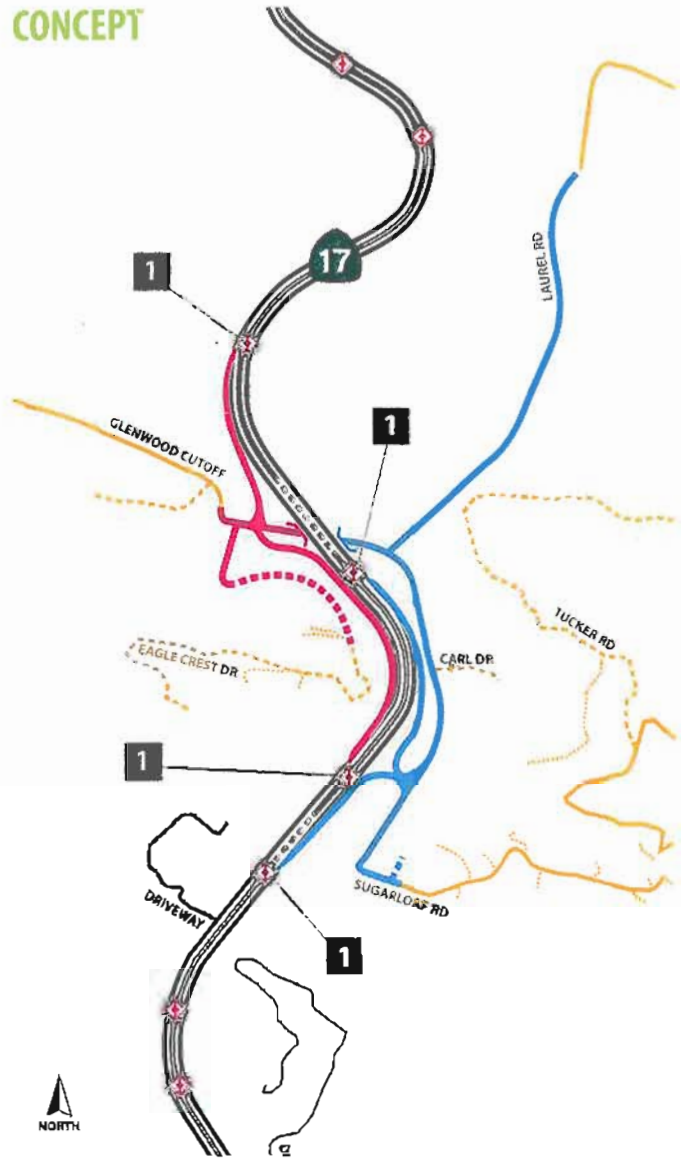
**28 → 4**

# Sugarloaf Road/Laurel Road/Glenwood Cutoff

## EXISTING



## CONCEPT



The conceptual interchange would provide off and on ramps for each direction and provides southbound access with a new frontage road network and an underpass beneath the highway.

Reduces conflict points from **28 → 4**



## A COMMUNITY-BASED PLAN

Many highway improvements have already been made on Highway 17. That's why Caltrans developed a long-term Access Management Plan for the 7.1 mile section between Granite Creek Road and Summit Road. These solutions will fundamentally change how people get on and off the highway.

The Plan recommendations will help manage the corridor as a whole, rather than considering each access point separately. It establishes a framework for reducing conflict points by controlling the location, spacing and design of driveways, roads, medians, and interchanges. The goals are to maintain safety, reduce traffic congestion, and improve access for residents.

This conceptual Plan is based on input from the local community, and through a partnership of Caltrans, the California Highway Patrol, Scotts Valley, Santa Cruz County, the Santa Cruz County Regional Transportation Commission, and many other community partners. Over 150 community members attended six workshops, and over 100 more left comments on the interactive online map and via email.

 **7.1**  
MILES

 **60,000**  
CARS PER DAY

 **59**  
ACCESS POINTS

 **240**  
CONFLICT POINTS

 **70%**  
OF ACCESS-RELATED COLLISIONS  
INVOLVE LEFT TURNS  
(national statistic for all roads)

## REDUCING VEHICLE CONFLICT POINTS

An effective access management program that reduces vehicle conflict points allows vehicles to move more efficiently and reliably. By maximizing the existing roadway capacity, access management techniques help reduce travel time and delay. This will also reduce fuel consumption and improve air quality. Here are some of the access management techniques the Plan proposes for this section of the highway.



### Median Barriers

The Plan recommends a continuous, solid median barrier to separate opposing lanes of traffic, and eliminate left turns across the mainline.



### Grade Separations

To maintain access at interchanges with median barriers, grade separations will link to frontage streets to carry traffic over or under the highway rather than across.



### Frontage Streets

Street networks along a major highway create integrated connectivity within an area and offer residents a way to travel locally, as well as to safely and conveniently access the highway system.



### Auxiliary Lanes

Deceleration lanes let cars slow down alongside the faster moving traffic before exiting, and acceleration lanes give vehicles a chance to speed up before merging onto the highway.



### Driveway Location Improvements

There are a variety of techniques to reduce the friction caused by numerous proximate access points, including consolidating entry points for neighboring properties, relocating some driveways to local roads, and eliminating some duplicate driveways.



### Driveway Design Improvements

Increasing the turning radius and widths and decreasing slopes for some driveways will make it easier to enter and exit, minimizing the difference in speeds between turning vehicles, and through traffic.

Each concept offers a benefit to a specific location; the total package of concepts will work together to provide corridor-wide benefits.

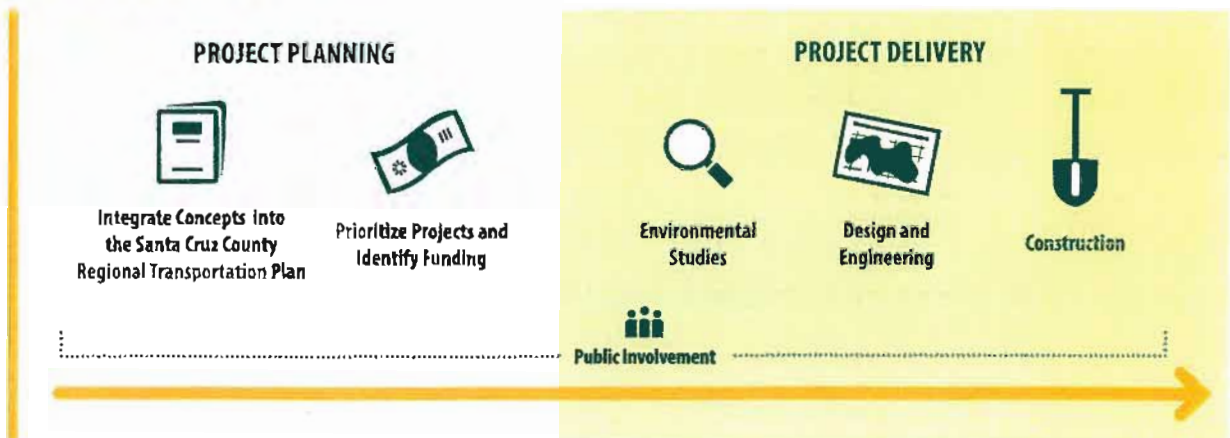


Caltrans District 5  
50 Higuera St.  
San Luis Obispo, CA 93401

## Reliable, Convenient Highway Access

The Highway 17 Access Management Plan would maintain safety, reduce traffic congestion and improve access for residents. In addition to the proposed concepts, Caltrans will continue to fulfill its responsibility as owner and operator of the highway system, including maintenance and safety improvements as necessary. The process of improving highway systems is very thorough, comprehensive, and can take many years. Implementing the concepts in this Plan will require local sponsors and collaboration between Caltrans and its partners to obtain funding.

### What's Next



**AGENDA:** October 19, 2017

**TO:** Transportation Policy Workshop

**FROM:** George Dondero, Executive Director

**RE:** Request to Conduct a Peer Review of the Great Santa Cruz Trail 2016 Report and RTC Studies

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## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

Staff recommends that the Regional Transportation Commission (RTC):

1. Consider the costs and benefits of conducting a peer review of the Great Santa Cruz Trail 2016 report as well as peer reviews of the Monterey Bay Sanctuary Scenic Trail (MBSST) Master Plan and the Rail Transit Feasibility Study; and
  2. If the RTC supports these actions, then it should authorize staff to either: execute a contract amendment with Kimley Horn Associates or a contract with another consultant to be selected and authorize the use of RTC restricted reserves to pay for these peer reviews.
- 

## **BACKGROUND**

The RTC worked for a couple of decades to purchase the Santa Cruz Branch Rail Line to preserve the rail corridor, improve the existing railroad infrastructure for continued use and construct a bicycle and pedestrian path adjacent to the rail line. The process involved securing the necessary funding, conducting much investigation and analysis, holding countless public meetings including evening meetings, and extensive negotiations for purchase and operating agreements. The main source of funding for the rail line purchase was Proposition 116, a ballot measure approved by California voters in 1990 that provided \$11 million for passenger rail projects in Santa Cruz County.

After a multi-year planning process with extensive public participation, in 2013 the RTC adopted a Master Plan and certified an Environmental Impact Report for development of the rail trail. The project is designed as a rail-with-trail and envisioned to be located adjacent to the existing rail road tracks in such a way as to fulfill the RTC's Proposition 116 obligations, and its responsibilities under federal laws and regulations governing common carrier railroad lines. The County of Santa Cruz and the Cities of Santa Cruz, Capitola, and Watsonville adopted the Master Plan as a guiding document for implementation of rail-with-trail projects in their jurisdictions. Through numerous RTC actions spanning many years, 13 miles of trail are under development adjacent to the 32-mile rail corridor and approximately \$24

million has been secured in grants and private donations for building the trail projects. These are located on the north coast, in the City of Santa Cruz, in mid-county/Live Oak and in the City of Watsonville.

On October 20, 2016, a privately funded report was presented to the Regional Transportation Commission by a group then known as the Great Santa Cruz Trail Group, and since renamed Santa Cruz County Greenway. The premise of the report is that the best use of the rail corridor now owned by the RTC is to remove all railroad tracks and build a bicycle and pedestrian trail. The report asks that the RTC consider a "trail only" option for the rail corridor, an option that was previously considered and rejected in past studies conducted by the RTC. When the Great Santa Cruz Trail 2016 report was presented to the Commission, the sponsors requested that the RTC consider its findings when doing any future planning or analysis of the rail corridor. A copy of the report can be found on the RTC website here: [GSCT2016](#) (scroll down to page 6).

In November 2016, over two-thirds of Santa Cruz County voters approved Measure D to fund transportation in the County. The Expenditure Plan sets aside eight percent of Measure Revenues (approximately \$55 million total over 30 years) to be *"used for preservation of the Rail Corridor infrastructure and analysis of its future potential use to better serve Santa Cruz County residents and visitors. Projects include analysis (including environmental and economic analysis) to answer important community questions about possible future transit and other transportation uses of the corridor through an open, transparent public process; and maintaining and repairing the publicly-owned Santa Cruz Branch Rail Line."* The Measure also set aside approximately \$118 million over 30 years to fund further development of rail trail projects of which \$16 million has already been obligated (bringing the total programmed to the rail trail project to approximately \$40 million). The economic and environmental analysis of the rail corridor is now underway as part of the Unified Corridors Investment Study (UCS) which is designed to evaluate potential future investments in the rail corridor, the Highway 1 corridor, and Soquel Drive – Freedom Blvd. This project will look at several scenarios with different bundles of projects using available computer modeling tools and other traditional planning methods.

## DISCUSSION

Recently, the RTC received four letters requesting that an independent peer review be conducted of the Great Santa Cruz Trail 2016 report. Letters ([Attachment 1 through 4](#)) are from the Santa Cruz Area Chamber of Commerce, Sierra Club, Friends of the Rail and Trail, and Bike Santa Cruz County. The letters raise some serious concerns about use of the GSCT report findings to conduct analysis in the Unified Corridor Investment Study (UCS). The GSCT report is notable in that it was privately funded and was not conducted through a public and transparent process. The letters ask that the RTC add peer review of this study into the scope of work for the existing UCS consultant, Kimley Horn Associates. Although RTC staff was offered the chance to comment and did send a comment letter ([Attachment 5](#)) it should be noted that many significant concerns raised in the comment letter were

not sufficiently addressed nor incorporated into the final report. In addition the Rails to Trails Conservancy provided a comment letter on the final GSCT report (Attachment 6.)

In September, the RTC received a letter from Greenway Santa Cruz County stating that a peer review of the GSCT report would be a redundant exercise and waste of public funds (Attachment 7). The letter further states that if the RTC were to conduct a peer review of the GSCT report, then it should also conduct peer reviews of the Rail Transit Feasibility Study, The Monterey Bay Sanctuary Scenic Trail Master Plan, and an RTC staff report of December 8, 2016 providing information on the costs and time delay associated with a trail-only approach to constructing the trail. A memorandum from the Santa Cruz County Business Council Executive Committee (Attachment 8) requests that the RTC not spend any resources on a peer review of the GSCT report.

It should be noted that unlike the GSCT report, studies produced by the RTC go through an extensive public engagement and review process with multiple opportunities for partner agencies, local businesses, community organizations and groups, and members of the public to comment and participate in the development of the studies. This is achieved in a variety of ways including:

- Soliciting public input through email, the local media, surveys, stakeholder meetings, public workshops, etc.; and
- Presenting different components and/or stages of a study at public meetings to RTC committees, to the RTC and to the general public at public workshops.

In addition, peer groups are included as part of the review of study deliverables to help ensure that study results are consistent with experience in other areas and other studies and if not, that any differences are adequately supported. Such was the case for the Rail Transit Feasibility Study which included representatives from agencies who run rail transit service or have been working on implementing rail transit service. These representatives were from various parts of California and from other states.

Kimley Horn Associates provided an estimate of between \$16,000 - \$20,000 to conduct the peer review of the GSCT report. It will also require extracting data from the new SCCRTC model, and input from an economic consultant at additional cost. Another consideration is the likely delay to completing the UCS that would be incurred. Staff understands that commissioners and the public would like to see completion of the UCS at the earliest possible date. The expected completion date is December 2018, without adding any peer review efforts. Staff has asked Kimley Horn for a cost estimate of the additional peer reviews requested by Greenway. That information may be provided at the October 17 Transportation Policy Workshop, if available. If such work is to be undertaken, it would likely add additional delay to completion of the UCS and funds to pay for these studies would come out of the RTC reserves.

Therefore, staff **recommends that the RTC consider the costs and benefits of conducting a peer review of the Great Santa Cruz Trail 2016 report as well as peer reviews of the MBSST Master Plan and the Rail Transit Feasibility Study. If the RTC supports these actions, then it should authorize staff to either: execute a contract amendment with Kimley Horn Associates or a contract with another consultant to be selected and authorize the use of RTC restricted reserves to pay for these peer reviews.**

## **SUMMARY**

The RTC has received four letters requesting that an independent peer review be conducted of the Great Santa Cruz Trail 2016 report, and two letters opposing such an action. Staff recommends that the RTC consider the costs and benefits of conducting these peer reviews before deciding what action, if any is to be taken.

### Attachments:

1. Letter from Friends of the Rail and Trail
2. Letter from the Santa Cruz Area Chamber of Commerce
3. Letter from Bike Santa Cruz County
4. Letter from the Sierra Club
5. Comment letter on the GSCT report from RTC staff
6. Comment letter on the GSCT report from the Rails to Trails Conservancy
7. Letter from Greenway
8. Memo from SCC Business Council



## ATTACHMENT 1

July 13, 2017

**George Dondero, Executive Director**  
**Santa Cruz County Regional Transportation Commission**  
1523 Pacific Ave  
Santa Cruz, CA 95060

**Re: Great Santa Cruz Trail Group study referenced in the Unified Corridor Study**

Dear Mr. Dondero,

As you know, the Great Santa Cruz Trail Group (GSCTG) submitted and presented a report, the privately funded, to support their idea that the highest and best use of the rail corridor is to remove the existing tracks and construct separate bicycle and pedestrian paths. We understand this same GSCTG report was cited as a reference document in the Unified Corridor Study, currently underway. Because the GSCTG report contains several egregious misrepresentations, we urge the RTC to immediately perform a rigorous technical peer review of the GSCTG report.

While the GSCTG report contains many misrepresentations, the most egregious of these is the cost analysis presented on page 27, supported by a summary table on page 23 (copies attached). On page 27, the report compares the per-mile capital costs of their trail-only plan with the rail-with-trail plan detailed in the Monterey Bay Sanctuary Scenic Trail Network Master Plan (the MBSST plan). This comparison is an egregious misrepresentation of facts because:

1. The \$1.6M per mile cost cited is the simple arithmetic average of the costs of five example projects summarized on page 23. Unfortunately, the five example projects are substantially different than their trail-only proposal in design, configuration, scope of work, time of construction, construction market location and even whether or not the example project is in a rail corridor (see attached - Analysis of the Five GSCTG Example Projects). In fact some of the examples cited were mostly constructed in the last century and one has not yet even started construction. In spite of these substantial differences, there is no evidence any adjustments were made to normalize the figures to their proposed project. Accordingly, the estimated per-mile capital cost appears to be grossly underestimated.
2. Furthermore, the \$1.6M per-mile cost does not include the RTC's \$32M estimated cost of removing the tracks from our existing rail corridor. Considering the cost of track removal alone, raises their per-mile cost by over \$1M per-mile to \$2.6M.
3. The cited \$4M per-mile cost of the rail-with-trail is a fully loaded cost figure and includes all pre-construction costs such as design, engineering, permitting, construction management and contingency. Dividing the estimated \$75.6M construction cost by the 30.3 miles of trail, yields a corrected capital cost of only \$2.5M per-mile.

Accordingly, it is our considered opinion that if the cited costs of the GSCTG example projects were adjusted to account for the differences identified in the attached table, and, the \$32M cost of track removal was included,



the estimated per-mile capital cost of the GSCTG trail-only proposal would substantially exceed the estimated \$2.5M per-mile capital cost of the MBSST rail-with-trail. **For this reason alone, the RTC should immediately provide an independent peer-review and analysis of the GSCTG report.**

However, there are a number of other claims made in the GSCTG report that warrant independent peer review including:

On pages 9-12, the GSCTG report discusses various constraints. Pages 11-12 contain two maps illustrating multiple ROW constraints where existing ROW is noted to be: 15', 15-20', 20', <20', 20-22', 20-25', 25' max, and <25'. Each and every one of these claimed ROW dimensions should be compared against the available ROW described in the property record to avoid any misrepresentation of the available ROW along the rail corridor.

In a text box on page 15, the GSCTG makes six claims about the proposed Great Santa Cruz Trail. The validity of these claims should be investigated and the veracity of each claim tested and compared to the proposed rail trail detailed in the MBSST Network Master Plan.

On pages 24 through 26, the GSCTG report implies that anticipated use of their proposed separated bike and pedestrian facility will be greater than that of the MBSST. An independent review should explore the analysis provided and report on the validity of any implied claims made in the GSCTG report.

On page 27, the GSCTG report states a belief that a trail-only option could be open for use sooner than the current planned rail-with-trail as detailed in the MBSST. The validity of this claim should be addressed in the peer review.

Furthermore, both Barry Scott and Mark Mesiti-Miller submitted written comments (October 17, 2016) raising other serious concerns with the GSCTG report. We also remind you of a letter sent to the RTC from the Rails-to-Trails Conservancy dated August 17, 2016 raising several additional issues with the GSCTG report. All concerns expressed in the aforementioned documents should be addressed in the peer review.

Lastly, the peer review process must evaluate the trail proposed in the GSCTG report against the adopted public policies delineated in the MBSST Network Master Plan.

We trust the RTC will promptly undertake the independent peer review outlined above. Should you wish to discuss this matter any further or if FORT can be of any assistance, please contact me.

Respectfully submitted,

Bruce Sawhill, Chair  
Friends of the Rail & Trail

July 28, 2017

George Dondero  
Executive Director  
Santa Cruz County Regional Transportation Commission  
1523 Pacific Ave  
Santa Cruz, CA 95060

**Re: Peer review of the Great Santa Cruz Trail Group study**

Dear Mr. Dondero,

Many of my Chamber members have brought up an issue that I would like clarification on regarding the proposed steps involved with the Regional Transportation Commission's Unified Corridor Study (UCS) and specifically, the Monterey Bay Sanctuary Scenic Trail proposed for the existing rail corridor.

As a matter of background and as you know well, the Chamber was actively involved in supporting Measure D which received the necessary 2/3 voter approval so future transportation alternatives could be explored.

It is our understanding that a separate proposed use of the rail corridor - Great Santa Cruz Trail Group (GSCTG) report was sent to the RTC for consideration last year. We understand that the organization had a name change but essentially the report submitted last year is basis of their suggested future use of the corridor. The Chamber is also aware, the RTC included the GSCTG report as a reference document in the documents provided to the retained RTC consultant responsible for completing the UCS.

The UCS must be conducted in an open and transparent public discussion. The Chamber believes that any potential use option should receive a full analysis — both environmental and economic — to ensure the public is receiving the most accurate and factual information.

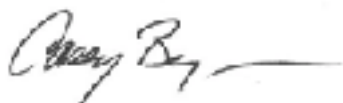
When the RTC or any public agency conducts an analysis of a project, that analysis should be given careful review based on the most reliable information available to the public. In some instances an agency may call upon a third party peer review to conduct an unbiased evaluation of the project or proposed project. This is common through the public planning process and is considered 'best practice.'

I would like to know if that peer review is in the RTC consultant's scope of work? If it is not in the current scope of work, the Chamber requests the RTC staff take this peer review request to your Commission for consideration. A third party peer review of the GSCTG report and other proposed options would provide the public the best and unbiased understanding of the best use of the corridor.

page 2, George Dondero, Executive Director, RTC  
Letter to Request Peer review

From what we understand to date, no analysis has been done. To ensure the integrity of the UCS and the relationship that this independent report could provide on the overall scope of the UCS, this step may be necessary. Whenever important issues arise in our community, the Chamber supports a transparent and public consideration of the facts involved. A review by objective experts would be useful to individuals, organizations and community stakeholders relying on UCS reference documents for reliable information. As the public agency responsible for the integrity of the UCS and the associated public process, the RTC should take appropriate steps to ensure that an independent peer review provides that level of scrutiny for the public's benefit.

Thank you for considering our views on this important issue.



Casey Beyer  
Chief Executive Officer  
Santa Cruz Area Chamber of Commerce



**BIKE SANTA CRUZ COUNTY**

703 Pacific Avenue • Santa Cruz, CA 95060  
(831) 425-0665 [www.bikesantacruzcounty.org](http://www.bikesantacruzcounty.org)

## ATTACHMENT 3

August 4, 2017

George Dondero, Executive Director  
Santa Cruz County Regional Transportation Commission  
1523 Pacific Ave  
Santa Cruz, CA 95060

Re: Peer review of the Great Santa Cruz Trail Group study

Dear Mr. Dondero,

We understand the RTC recently received a request to provide a peer review of the Great Santa Cruz Trail Group (GSCTG) study from the Santa Cruz County Friends of the Rail and Trail (FORT).

Bike Santa Cruz County (BSCC) has reviewed FORT's request and agrees a prompt peer review of the GSCTG study is warranted. Accordingly, BSCC supports FORT's request and trusts the RTC will promptly proceed with the peer review.

Should you wish to discuss this matter any further, please contact me.

Respectfully submitted,

Janneke Strause  
Executive Director  
Bike Santa Cruz County  
[director@bikesantacruzcounty.org](mailto:director@bikesantacruzcounty.org)  
(831) 425-0665

## ATTACHMENT 4



### SANTA CRUZ COUNTY GROUP

Of The Ventana Chapter

P.O. Box 604, Santa Cruz, CA 95061

<https://ventana2.sierraclub.org/santacruz/>

e-mail: [sierraclubsantacruz@gmail.com](mailto:sierraclubsantacruz@gmail.com)

August 24, 2017

Regional Transportation Commission  
1523 Pacific Ave  
Santa Cruz, CA 95060

Re: Sierra Club Requests Peer Review of the GSCTG Study

Dear Mr. Dondero and Commissioners:

We understand that the RTC recently received a request to provide a peer review of the Great Santa Cruz Trail Group (GSCTG) study from the Santa Cruz County Friends of the Rail and Trail (FORT). The Sierra Club has reviewed FORT's request and believes FORT has raised vital unanswered questions about the numbers and conclusions in the GSCTG study and agrees a peer review of the GSCTG study is warranted. Accordingly, the local Sierra Club supports FORT's request for the RTC to obtain a peer review of the GSCTG study.

Sincerely,

Greg McPheeters  
Chair, Santa Cruz Group, Sierra Club



## ATTACHMENT 5

July 7, 2016

Mr. Bud Colligan  
South Swell Ventures  
Sent via email

Dear Mr. Colligan:

RTC staff appreciates the opportunity to comment on the draft report titled “The Great Santa Cruz Trail 2016.” RTC staff agrees that the addition of bicycle and pedestrian facilities along the Santa Cruz Branch Rail Line right-of-way with connections to the rest of the area’s bicycle and pedestrian network will vastly improve bicycling and walking for Santa Cruz County residents and visitors. This will help significantly towards achieving the goals for bicycling and walking established in the 2014 Regional Transportation Plan.

### General Comments

While RTC staff appreciates and shares the goal of enhancing and increasing bicycling and walking in our county, we find the report to be limited in scope and incomplete in its analysis. The question intended for the report to answer as identified on page 1 (“What is the best use of the corridor within an overall transportation system for the county and region?”) would indicate that a comparison of a range of different options would have been addressed.

For instance, the RTC and the community’s goal of providing a multimodal transportation system that serves the multitude of users in Santa Cruz County are not taken into account. The rail line corridor is an extremely valuable new asset for Santa Cruz County. The RTC has the responsibility to maximize its usage, both now and in the future, based on the needs of the community. A rail-with-trail keeps the option open for passenger rail service to serve the future needs of residents and visitors of Santa Cruz County. Many residents in Santa Cruz County are not able to utilize a multi-use trail but could greatly benefit from passenger rail service along this corridor, and others might use both in combination to travel longer distances.

The RTC’s decision to [purchase the Santa Cruz Branch Rail Line](#) (to continue existing rail service, implement recreational rail service, preserve the rail corridor, construct a bicycle and pedestrian path alongside the tracks, and explore future potential additional uses of the corridor ) was the result of nearly two decades of work, studies, analysis, inspections, and many public meetings and hearings at which a broad range of community members expressed support.

As the regional entity charged with planning and public policy for future transportation needs, the RTC is required to conduct a public process when developing any planning document to determine the needs of the community. A complete Trail Only study would also need to go through a public process and

account for time and costs related to undoing contracts and agreements with the California Transportation Commission (CTC), Surface Transportation Board (STB) and Iowa Pacific Holdings. A significant amount of regulatory, administrative and legal resources and expenses would be incurred over a multi-year process which would delay implementation of any trail project. These costs and the delay are not factored in to the per-mile estimate.

In general, RTC staff did not review the majority of the numbers and figures (such as cost, usage, level of service) that were developed for this study for accuracy. The following comments are offered to clarify stated inaccuracies.

### Specific Comments

1. The map on the second page of the PDF file states, “32-Mile Former Santa Cruz Branch Line Corridor.” This is still an active rail line with Iowa Pacific Holdings operating on the line as discussed on page 3; therefore, it should be characterized as, “32-Mile Santa Cruz Branch Rail Line Corridor.”
2. Page ii states, “This report studies a never before considered “Trail Only” option for the Santa Cruz Branch Line.” This is not correct. The RTC considered adding such an option to the list of alternatives in the environmental document for the Monterey Bay Sanctuary Scenic Trail Network. The [RTC unanimously decided](#) not to include it in the environmental document. In addition, in the 1990’s the RTC sent a letter to the California Transportation Commission (CTC) asking about the possibility of using Proposition 116 funds to purchase the Santa Cruz Branch Rail Line Corridor only to build a trail as a way to preserve the corridor. The CTC responded that such a project would not be eligible for Proposition 116 funds.
3. Page 1: The third sentence of the first paragraph states, “In 2010, the Santa Cruz County Regional Transportation Commission (SCCRTC) used \$11 million of this funding to purchase the Santa Cruz Branch Rail Line to provide rail service alongside a trail.” This is not correct. The sentence should read, “In 2012, the Santa Cruz County Regional Transportation Commission (SCCRTC) used \$10.2 million of this funding to purchase the Santa Cruz Branch Rail Line to continue existing rail service, implement recreation rail service, preserve the rail corridor, construct a bicycle and pedestrian path alongside the tracks, and explore future potential additional uses of the corridor.”
4. Page 1: The fourth sentence of the first paragraph states, “The current direction – for a Rail-with-Trail approach – was set as a result of the Proposition 116 requirements.” This is not correct. The RTC’s decision to [purchase the Santa Cruz Branch Rail Line](#) for the purposes specified in Item 3 above was the result of nearly two decades of work, studies, analysis, inspections, and many public meetings and hearings at which a broad range of community members expressed support and opposition for different options.
5. Page 1: The blue text at the bottom right hand corner states, “...up to 32 miles of existing unused rail corridor...” This is not correct. The Santa Cruz Branch Rail Line is an active rail line with Iowa Pacific Holdings as a railway operator, as stated on page 3. Parts of the rail corridor

are currently being used regularly or semi-regularly and rail vehicles may operate anywhere on the entire rail line according to rights granted by federal law and the STB.

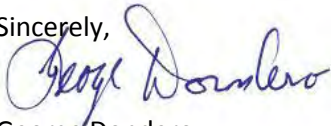
6. Page 3: The last sentence of the first paragraph states, "Occasional seasonal tourist trains continue to operate, but no regular passenger service has existed since the last run of the Suntan Express in 1959." Santa Cruz Big Tress and Pacific Railroad operate trains to the Santa Cruz Beach Boardwalk during the greater part of the year and likely consider that their service is not occasional but rather regular scheduled tourist service. The train that operated from San Jose to Santa Cruz until 1959 was known as the "Suntan Special."
7. Page 3: The last sentence of the fourth paragraph states, "Yet it is just this scenario (trail-only) that seems most likely to be fully constructible and operational within a short time frame using discrete and attainable funding." It may be true that a trail-only scenario can be fully constructed more quickly if legislative mandates, contracts and agreements are not factored in; however, the RTC must plan and implement projects for the long term to provide for the transportation needs of the current and future generations. For this reason, the RTC, on behalf of the community, must be very careful about short-term projects that may prematurely eliminate options to meet long-term transportation needs. Thus, while a trail may be "constructible" within a short time frame, that construction period is likely to begin much later than assumed in the Trail-Only scenario due to time and resources needed to undo agreements and contracts with the CTC, STB, Iowa Pacific and others. Based on our experience with the rail industry and the attendant regulatory agencies, it would be naive to assume otherwise.
8. Pages 7 and 8: Walking and bike sheds also show the population of the county that could more readily utilize passenger rail service along the rail corridor. By providing an improved walking, biking and transit options, more people can be served along this rail corridor.
9. Page 9 indicates that the RTC established a 25-foot minimum width policy for the rail-and-trail system. It should be noted that the RTC policy is for a 12-foot minimum trail with a 20-foot envelope to be used exclusively for train operations (as per the agreement with Iowa Pacific). The RTC acknowledged that 25 feet is the absolute minimum width that would allow for a train and trail system. At a planning level (without right-of-way surveying), the RTC determined that only 1/3 of a mile fits under the very limited constraint.
10. Page 13: The challenges of building a trail of this magnitude that extends the length of the county are discussed throughout the Master Plan. These challenges are surmountable and in fact the North Coast segment, Westside Santa Cruz and Watsonville sections of the trail are in design and will be constructed in the next few years. Grant applications have been submitted to fund sections of the trail in mid-county.
11. Pages 24-26 and Appendix B regarding Anticipated Usage of the Trail: The study states that the trail will draw an estimated 890 to 1,400 new daily bicycle commuters. This number of new daily bicycle commuters is inconsistent with the statement in the report that this trail would then serve as a catalyst for increasing bicycle and pedestrian commutes from 3% to 20% of commute trips. Often more conservative estimates for walkshed and bikesheds are used in usage models than those used in this trail study (pages 7-8). Appendix B shows that the study counted census commute trips of up to 8 miles with start and end points within 1.5 miles of the

corridor when estimating use. This is significantly higher than the more common modeling assumption that people may commute by bike if their trip is a maximum of 3 or 5 miles.

12. Notably, the Rail Transit Feasibility Study estimated up to 5,500 trips (boardings) per day (Scenario G) under baseline/current conditions. Your report shows only half of that number. The bolded text on page 24 suggests that the only justification for investing in transit is congestion reduction. While there can be some congestion reduction resulting from shifting trips from single-occupancy vehicles onto transit, this study fails to discuss the other benefits of public transportation. Most significant are that transit expands options for traveling between destinations and for some public transit is the only option, especially for those traveling more than 3 miles or with limited abilities. For instance 70 percent of local transit riders have an annual income of under \$25,000 and 60 percent of riders have an annual household income of below \$15,000 and 82 percent of riders do not have access to a private vehicle. Rail transit provides more predictable travel time reliability and reduce travel times, especially compared to bicycling, walking, and even the bus and driving between some destinations.
13. Page 27: The Rail with trail level of service (LOS) based on trail widths are misrepresenting the widths for the segments noted. For example, on the La Selva Beach segment, an additional bridge is proposed for the trail parallel to the rail bridge and for the north coast, the draft design is for 12 ft paved and 6 to 12 ft decomposed granite. The RTC will utilize the maximum allowable widths for the trail in each section. RTC staff is not aware of any study showing that potential trail usage is measurably impacted if a trail is 2 feet wider or narrower.

RTC staff appreciates the opportunity to review the study and your enthusiasm for providing the Santa Cruz County community with the finest bicycle and pedestrian facilities possible. We look forward to continuing to work with you and your team on forging solutions desired by the community as a whole.

Sincerely,



George Dondero  
Executive Director

CC: Regional Transportation Commission



## ATTACHMENT 6

Western Regional Office  
436 14<sup>th</sup> Street, Suite 416  
Oakland, CA 94612  
Tel 510.992.4662

[www.railstotrails.org](http://www.railstotrails.org)

August 17, 2016

Regional Transportation Commissioners and Staff  
Santa Cruz County Regional Transportation Commission  
1523 Pacific Avenue  
Santa Cruz, CA 95060

Dear Commissioners and Staff,

On behalf of Rails to Trails Conservancy, I would like to submit comments on the *Great Santa Cruz Trail* report, which studies the potential for a trail-only option along the Santa Cruz Branch Line as an alternative to the rail-with-trail project that has been moving forward. The report raises some important issues to be considered by local policymakers. Our *America's Rails with Trails* report, which reviews the experience of rail-with-trail projects from across the country, was cited several times. I would like to clarify several items in the report where our study was cited, as they may lead readers to an incorrect understanding of our position on the Santa Cruz project and on rail-with-trail projects in general.

Rails-to-Trails Conservancy strongly supports the development of all rail trail projects, including both rail-to-trail and rail-with-trail, but we do not take a position on whether rail service is appropriate for a particular community. *America's Rails-with-Trails* was undertaken to demonstrate that in corridors where jurisdictions have elected to operate rail service that trails may also be viable, and to document the practices that have been employed on these projects throughout the country.

Regarding the references to our report in the *Great Santa Cruz Trail* report:

- 90% of rail-trails are in trail-only corridors (p. 21) – This is accurate, but should not be taken to mean that trail-only projects are inherently preferable. As our study found, the number of rail-with-trail projects around the country has grown significantly.
- “The average setbacks between rail and trail is 20-30 ft. in Rail-with-Trails corridors, with higher speed trains yielding larger setbacks or safety separations.” (p. 22) This is accurate as a general statement, but it should be noted that there are numerous examples of trails located immediately adjacent to light rail corridors (e.g. Minneapolis and Denver), where rail service operates at high frequency and relatively high speed. As with other rail-with-trail projects, project designs have incorporated measures to address safety concerns (typically fencing).
- Sidebar on p. 31: These comments are incorrectly attributed to our *America's Rails-with-Trails Report*. Rails-to-Trails Conservancy has not taken a position on the viability of transit service in Santa Cruz County.

We at Rails-to-Trails Conservancy are very excited about the development of the coastal trail in Santa Cruz County. It has the potential to become a major destination and provide significant benefits to the community, and we look forward to supporting this effort as the development of the trail continues.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Barry Bergman". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Barry Bergman  
Manager of Trail Development  
Rails-to-Trails Conservancy, Western Region Office



## ATTACHMENT 7

September 13, 2017

Dear Commissioners,

Recently, private groups appealed to the RTC Commissioners to do a peer review of the Great Santa Cruz Trail Report (GSCTR). Those groups, Friends of the Rail Trail, Bike Santa Cruz County, the Sierra Club and the Chamber of Commerce, have a clear position to build rail-with-trail. We are pleased that these parties want to definitively bring light to the facts regarding the rail corridor. Determining the facts has always been a fundamental objective of Greenway.

Nevertheless, **a peer review of the GSCTR is a redundant exercise and waste of public funds.** Let's recall that the RTC was invited to have a staff member on the GSCTR steering committee. The RTC declined. Then the RTC staff was given the opportunity in June 2016 to review the GSCTR for three weeks. It provided over two pages of specific comments which were incorporated into the report. The consultants from Nelson Nygaard also presented the GSCTR at the RTC's Transportation Policy Workshop in October 2016. All the groups above attended and made comments on the report. As part of the Unified Corridor Investment Study (UCIS) RFP, numerous studies are already called out for review including the GSCTR. **If you would like to "peer review" the GSCTR, such a peer review should be applied to all the studies listed below:**

***"Task 2.1: Review Previous Studies Relevant to Project***

Consultant shall review previous studies in project area including the Santa Cruz Branch Rail Line Rail Transit Feasibility Study (2015), the 2014 Santa Cruz County Regional Transportation Plan, the Monterey Bay Sanctuary Scenic Trail Network Master Plan (2014), Highway 1 Tier I/Tier II Draft Environmental Impact Report, Sustainable Santa Cruz County Plan (2014), the Santa Cruz Metro Short Range Transit Plan (2014), the Great Santa Cruz Trail Report (2016), and the Major Transportation Investment Study (1999)."

If you wish to proceed with **select "peer reviews,"** the following documents would be in order, since they raise many more issues than the GSCTR:

1. **Monterey Bay Sanctuary Scenic Trail Network Master Plan (MBSST).**

We now know that the MBSST has led us down a pathway that cannot be implemented as envisioned, does not provide a contiguous trail from Davenport



to Watsonville, causes substantial environmental damage to the corridor, and whose costs are greatly understated. Peer review of the following must be completed:

- a. Costs of all twenty segments
  - b. Number of miles of retaining walls that will be built
  - c. Number of trees that will be cut down by type by segment
  - d. Cubic yards of earth removed to build retaining walls or create a shelf for the trail as envisioned in section 17a.
  - e. Comparison of costs for bridges over Hwy 1 with currently known bridge costs for Mar Vista and Chanticleer bridges over Hwy 1 as well as comparison of bridge costs spanning gulches and creeks and past bridge costs for similar spans
  - f. Likelihood of environmental and regulatory approval for a 400 foot boardwalk across Harkins Slough, central California's largest fresh water slough
  - g. Safety comparison between a 12 foot multi-use trail and a 26 foot trail with separate bike and pedestrian paths
  - h. Quality of service comparison between the two trails in "g" above
2. **Rail Transit Feasibility Study (RTFS)**. The RTFS states that only 300 roundtrip passengers per day will take a train from Watsonville to Santa Cruz, despite the fact that proponents continually advertise a train as helping to relieve Hwy 1 congestion. We also know that the capital costs outlined in the RTFS are understated, and there is no proposal for how annual operating deficits will be paid. It is important that the following are peer reviewed:
- a. The total capital cost and annual operating deficit of each Scenario B, D, E, G, G1, J & S
  - b. Estimate of costs for quiet zones, parking, any acquisition of right-of-way, inflation and interest, and any other costs besides these not included in the RTFS
  - c. Estimate of the probable cost overruns when compared to all train projects cataloged by the Department of Transportation from 1986 to 2013.
  - d. Estimate of the increased cost of construction from 2015 to 2030 based on annual average increases in inflation
  - e. Ridership estimates for each Scenario above
  - f. **Actual ridership and annual growth/decline in ridership of systems with a population similar to that of Santa Cruz County**
  - g. Why the RTFS consultants initially recommended Scenario E, a train from Santa Cruz to Aptos only



- h. Why the RTFS consultants recommended diesel trains in Section 8.2.4
  - i. Why the RTFS consultants stated in Section 8.2.4 that the **cost for constructing light rail and modern streetcar lines ranges from \$50 million – \$100 million per mile and up and that neither of these technologies is cost-effective for the Santa Cruz line**
  - j. Why Section 6.1.2 of the RTFS states replacement of all rail to be used for passenger service was assumed as part of the analysis
  - k. Why Section 6.1.2.2.1 of the RTFS states that **existing ties are not suitable for the higher forces generated by higher rail vehicle speeds and increased passenger traffic contemplated by the operating plan**
  - l. Comparison of monthly and annual plans for a METRO pass vs. likely rail passenger fares using similar fare plans like SMART for similar length segments
  - m. Specific funding sources, if any, for capital outlays and annual operating deficits. What county matching is needed for any state or federal grants for capital outlays. What taxes are needed to subsidize annual operating deficits. How would such taxes be implemented?
3. **RTC Staff Memo of December 8, 2016.** This memo, while not a study, is regularly referenced by the four groups above in letters and other inputs to the UCIS team. There are assertions in the memo that are not backed up by supporting documentation or references. As such, a peer review would examine:
- a. Amount of repayment to the CTC likely and the range of options
  - b. Independent discussion with Iowa Pacific regarding a buyout of the remaining years on its contract
  - c. Measure D funds as a source to repay the CTC, since Measure D wording appears to provide for that if the best use of the corridor is determined to be something other than rail transit
  - d. The difference in the mitigation of hazardous materials for a trail next to the tracks and one in which the tracks are removed for a trail
  - e. Salvage value of the existing rails and ties
  - f. Why additional surveying is required in a Trail Only scenario where the middle of the corridor is used for the trail, and not the current RTC rail with trail plan
  - g. Identify specific funds that would be lost in a Trail Only scenario
  - h. Since railbanking is provided for in both the Purchase Agreement with Union Pacific and the Operating Agreement with Iowa Pacific, are there any other legal constraints that would prevent implementation of railbanking?



- i. Provide equal information of delays and cost from legal challenges to the current RTC plan
- j. Review “8 years and \$32 million” assigned to implementation of Trail Only in light of the information learned above and provide specific information to support the resulting numbers

Greenway wholeheartedly supports the gathering of relevant facts to make a reasoned community decision about the best use of the rail corridor. Commissioner Friend proposed some time ago that a group of citizens be appointed to ask the right questions and attempt to come up with a common set of facts with which we could all work. Commissioner Leopold has stated that he would like to see the RTC identify key issues with which the Commissioners need to familiarize themselves prior to the ultimate decision about the disposition of the corridor. We support both of these efforts.

What we do not support is a publicly funded effort to cherry pick data from one side by private groups with opposing views. If you are looking for a peer review of any documents, we would suggest spending the money to peer review the *output* of the Unified Corridors Investment Study, since it will be the most important guiding document for the ultimate disposition of the rail corridor.

Sincerely,

Executive Director and Board Members of Santa Cruz County Greenway

Abbygale Gonzalez  
Bud Colligan  
Gail McNulty  
Miles Reiter  
Nancy Connelly  
Robert Quinn  
Robert Stephens  
Ryan Whitelaw  
Will Mayall  
Will Menchine  
William Ow



## ATTACHMENT 8

Dear Santa Cruz County Regional Transportation Commissioners,

It has come to the attention of the Santa Cruz County Business Council Executive Committee that a select group of individuals and organizations have asked the RTC to use valuable staff time, and thus public funds, to “peer review” the Great Santa Cruz Trail Study, completed by Nelson Nygaard. While the Business Council appreciates the effort to get as much accurate information as possible, it is our understanding that no other publicly funded study by the RTC is subject to the same academic rigor as is being suggested. It strikes us as inappropriate that this one study would be singled out, especially given that the study was privately funded, when the RTC has been adamant in refusing to accept the information presented in the Great Santa Cruz Trail Study into the public process. If you are not going to use the information to inform your policies, why would you then use public money to “peer review” it?

The Santa Cruz County Business Council Executive Committee would like to encourage you to not spend limited staff time and public resources on further investigating studies. We believe that such an action could delay the outcome of the Unified Corridors Study, which is focused on this exact issue. However, if you do decide to move forward with the peer review process, then we hope you would apply the same standard to all relevant, publicly funded studies, including the Monterey Bay Sanctuary Scenic Trail Master Plan, and the Ridership Feasibility study, as well as the upcoming Unified Corridor Study.

Sincerely,

The Santa Cruz County Business Council Executive Committee