MINUTES

Thursday, May 17, 2018

Santa Cruz City Council Chambers
809 Center Street
Santa Cruz, CA 95060

1. Introductions

The meeting was called to order at 9:07 a.m.

Members present:
Jacques Bertrand  Randy Johnson
Ed Bottorff       Virginia Johnson (alt.)
Sandy Brown       John Leopold
Greg Caput        Mike Rotkin
Trina Coffman-Gomez Andy Schiffrin (alt.)
Cynthia Chase

Staff present:
George Dondero    Grace Blakeslee
Yesenia Parra     Shannon Munz
Cory Caletti      Anais Schenk
Sarah Christensen Fernanda Dias Pini

2. Oral communications

Jack Nelson, Campaign of Sustainable Transportation (CST), spoke on climate change and the pressing need to address it. He stated that Commissioners should consider climate issues when making transportation policy.

Michael Saint, Campaign for Sensible Transportatin (CST), supports the plan for a transit and rail corridor. He stated that the RTC should place a greater focus on climate change when deliberating transportation issues and that there needs to be a greater emphasis to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, He recommends that the RTC appropriate more funding for the Santa Cruz Metropolitan Transit District (METRO).
Ryan Sarnataro, Live Oak resident, stated that there should be a public review period between the time the Unified Corridor Study (UCS) is delivered to the Commission for deliberation and when the Commission votes on it. He noted that a document should be released to show how much the County is required to pay for repairs and upgrades to the corridor, and to ensure that the contract restricts Progressive Rail (PGR) from ignoring local regulations.

Brian Peoples, Trail Now, stated his disappointment in RTC staff lobbying the California Transportation Commission (CTC) to have a train on the rail corridor.

Barry Scott, Aptos resident, discussed the May 11, 2018, Santa Cruz Chamber of Commerce Sonoma-Marin Rail Area Rail Transit (SMART) trip and the positive economic impacts of the train. Mr. Scott encourages the Commissioners to enter into an agreement with PGR.

Rick Longinotti, CST, invited Commissioners to the Zero New University of California Santa Cruz (UCSC) Traffic event, and promoted a petition asking METRO to provide free bus passes to downtown Santa Cruz workers.

William Menchine, Santa Cruz County resident, encouraged Commissioners to consider an evaluation and analysis of Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) on the corridor, as well as the addition of dedicated transit lanes as a mass transit alternative to rail transit. Mr. Menchine asked that BRT be evaluated as part of the UCS.

Corrine McFarland, Santa Cruz County resident, is concerned that the rail service operator agreement will be only beneficial to PGR.

Barbara Roettger, Santa Cruz County resident, opposes the agreement with PGR and stated that she believes most County residents are opposed to freight service and car storage on the North Coast. Ms. Roettger is concerned about rail companies overriding local and state regulations, and stated that all resources should be allocated into modernizing and incentivizing ridership of the bus system.

Gail McNulty, Greenway, stated that County residents agree that the corridor should provide an alternative to Highway 1; that the PGR contract will jeopardize this vision, and freight rail might impede all other options. Ms. McNulty also noted her concern regarding storing empty and residual cars on the tracks.

Jessica Evans, City of Santa Cruz resident, encourages the Commission to further communicate to the public the difference between the right-of-way property that the RTC purchased and the freight easement, which is not owned by the RTC. Ms. Evans noted language in the Surface Transportation Board’s permission for the RTC to purchase the rail right-of-way. The STB states that the RTC can be the owner if it is not the operator and that is only possible if the freight easement is retained by the common carrier freight operator.
3. Additions or deletions to consent and regular agendas

No additions or deletions to the regular agenda.

**CONSENT AGENDA**

*There was no consent agenda*

**REGULAR AGENDA**

4. Planning Transit for a Prosperous Santa Cruz County Presentation and Workshop with Jarrett Walker

*(George Dondero, Executive Director)*

George Dondero, Executive Director, gave the staff report and presented Jarrett Walker, international consultant in public transportation planning and policy, and author of *Human Transit: How Clearer Thinking about Public Transit Can Enrich Our Communities and Our Lives*, the first speaker in the Innovators in Transportation Speaker Series.

Mr. Walker conducted an interactive workshop for the Commission entitled “Planning Transit for a Prosperous Santa Cruz County”.

*Commissioner Johnson left the meeting.*

Commissioners discussed: ridership vs. coverage and economic fluctuations; transit marketing; Santa Cruz Metropolitan Transit District’s (METRO) solution to the bus coverage vs. ridership dilemma; minimal frequency for buses in urban areas/standard for transit service; incremental game-changing choices in transit; alternate designs to encourage driver behavior; reconfigure services to meet needs; funding limitations; housing and transportation planning; the cost of freedom and the purpose of travel; autonomous vehicles; effects of the physical placement of the University of California Santa Cruz in the county; other communities where voters passed a tax increase measure specifically for transit funding.

Jarrett Walker’s responses to Commissioners questions: The best marketing is clear and compelling information; basic quality and quantity of service gets the biggest payoff; tolerable waiting time is related to the length of trip; purpose of ridership has to be determined between increased ridership or coverage; policy for coverage standard; make choices in geometrical or mathematical choices; next game-changer in transit is pricing; pricing for single-occupancy travel; give people a choice between paying in time and paying in money; other cities trying to expand transit are avoiding sales taxes due to its regressive nature; funding is about going where the money is – land, road pricing, and parking pricing; biggest funding/tax issues: progressive or regressive, if it incentivizes helpful behavior, and if it is reliable; autonomous vehicles are an end-state vision, which are dependent on many variables to be
in place, and that it will still also be impacted by induced demand; that transit succeeds by serving you while serving other people; and that many other communities across the country have adopted tax measures to provide funding for transportation needs.

Brian Peoples, Trail Now, stated that he considers the light rail station in San Jose to be a terrible investment because it sits vacant most of the time, and that there needs to be more discussion about the utilization of space. Mr. Peoples cited the 2012 Columbia University Study which stated that automated vehicles would increase efficiency by allowing passengers to work while commuting and because automated cars would allow for optimized efficiency.

Rick Longinotti, CTS, asked about the factors that contribute to the success of communities that are expanding their bus services as most other cities in the US seem to be experiencing a decrease in transit ridership.

Michael Saint, CST, appreciates the RTC for hosting the Innovators in Transportation Series and stated that he would have liked these presentations a couple of years ago. Mr. Saint supports the options to curtail the dominance of automobile usage, but opposes the plan, specification, and estimate (PS&E) for the Highway 1 auxiliary lanes, and he also suggested that the RTC look at the Aptos choke point.

Gail McNulty, Greenway, believes it is important to put greater emphasis on the current bus transit system. Ms. McNulty discussed ideas from the presentation and how they apply to local issues, specifically gridlock on Highway 1. She discussed the benefits of active transportation, and asked what incremental changes can be made to the current transportation infrastructure to provide solutions in the more immediate future.

Ryan Sarnataro, Live Oak resident, stated that riding a bicycle around the county is dangerous. He also asked how do you rate the ability for people to become secure in different modes of transportation, how do you measure that throughput?

Barry Scott, Aptos resident, thanked the RTC for the Innovators in Transportation Series and stated that a simple starter service on the rail line would transform the county’s network of opportunity, noting that METRO service can work with rail in a symbiotic manner.

Stanley Sokolow, Santa Cruz County resident, asked if an elite transportation service for a more expensive fare would make sense; if it purported to move people faster. Mr. Sokolow stated that it does not make sense to offer parking permits at a lower cost rather than to offer monthly bus pass to downtown employees, and suggested that the RTC regulate parking fees as a way to discourage driving.
Jack Nelson, CST, discussed using carbon pricing, similar to the measure adopted by Vancouver, British Columbia, as a way to discourage people from driving.

Barbara Ruettger, Santa Cruz County resident, discussed the environmental benefits of public and active transportation; that a train would not alleviate congestion on the Aptos choke point; that more buses should be used for commuters along Highway 1, and that she supports increasing parking fees.

5. Unconditional Commitment Letter per the Ralph M. Brown Act
(T. Brooke Miller, RTC Legal Counsel)

T. Brooke Miller, RTC Legal Counsel presented the staff report recommending that the RTC approve and authorize the Chair to execute the unconditional commitment letter per the Ralph M. Brown Act.

Commissioners discussed: That RTC and staff followed the legal process; staff consulted with rail companies prior to the release of the RFP to obtain an understanding of interest in taking over for Iowa Pacific; that the RTC went through an open process and review period of the submitted RFPs; that it is RTC policy to maintain the rail line with freight service to the extent that it is possible; and the need for closed session negotiations when negotiating real estate.

Brian Peoples, Trail Now, stated that autonomous cars are the future. He noted that he supported Measure D and is disappointed in the RTC leadership for having preliminary meetings with PGR prior to releasing the RFP.

Gail McNulty, Greenway, stated that negotiations for a rail operator were rushed and that it was not a fair playing field when the RFP was released. Ms. McNulty stated that the options for uses of the corridor need to be protected, that signing an agreement with PGR will not allow for it; that the RTC has not given enough consideration to alternative uses of the corridor, and that it should be careful when deciding on a rail operator.

Commissioner Rotkin moved and Commissioner Leopold seconded the motion to approve RTC legal counsel and staff recommendation that the Regional Transportation Commission (RTC) approve and authorize the Chair to execute the attached unconditional commitment letter (Attachment 1) per the Ralph M. Brown Act.

The motion carried unanimously with Commissioners Bertrand, Bottorff, Brown, Caput, Coffman-Gomez, Leopold, Rotkin, and Commissioner Alternates V. Johnson and Schiffrin voting ‘aye.’
6. Highway 1 41st/ Soquel Auxiliary Lanes Project Delivery Options  
(Sarah Christensen, Senior Transportation Engineer)

Sarah Christensen, Senior Transportation Engineer, presented the staff report.

Commissioners discussed: construction liability settlement for previous projects; impacts on employment opportunities; cost savings; the roles of Caltrans, RTC, and the federal government on the design process; previous work history with Caltrans; if a consultant would provide the most expeditious design process; requested that RTC staff present a detailed proposal of the costs of the Commission carrying out the entire program as opposed to working with Caltrans; that federal funding is not needed for the design; timeframe schedule was also negotiated with Caltrans.

Rick Longinotti, CTS, cautioned the Commission about funding projects which do not have a legally valid Environmental Impact Report (EIR) and stated that the RTC might have to explain to a judge why alternatives to the corridor where explored by the UCS but not on the EIR.

Jack Nelson, CST, stated that this project is based on the assumption that the Highway 1 EIR will be approved, which is not necessarily the case. Mr. Nelson also stated that the draft EIR did not address the issue of induced demand; questioned whether the final EIR will address important questions related to the problem, and stated that there was no study session to look at public concerns relating to the draft EIR.

Brian Peoples, Trail Now, supports widening Highway 1 and is hopeful the Commission will be more consistently accountable. Mr. Peoples stated that the Commission has a poor track record of delivering EIRs on time and that he would like to believe that this project will be different.

Gail McNulty, Greenway, stated that she is hopeful that improvements are made to Highway 1 to address congestion; that the RTC is moving towards the best solutions for the entire county, and that it is not closing doors to alternative uses of the corridor.

Commissioners discussed: Release timeline of the final EIR and how it is different from previous estimates; CEQA process and the need for the final EIR to be certified; that work should be staged accordingly to the release of the final EIR; the CEQA process; that democratic processes take time.

Commissioner Rotkin moved and Commissioner Bertrand seconded the motion to:

1. Approve being the implementing agency for the Plan, Specifications, and Estimate (PS&E) phase (otherwise known as the design phase) for the Highway 1 41st/Soquel Auxiliary Lanes Project with Caltrans responsible for oversight and a portion of the design package; and
2. Authorize the Executive Director to enter into negotiations with Caltrans for a cooperative agreement outlining the responsibilities of the RTC and Caltrans District 5 for the PS&E phase of the 41st/Soquel Auxiliary Lane Project.

The motion carried unanimously with Commissioners Bertrand, Bottorff, Brown, Caput, Coffman-Gomez, Chase, Leopold, Rotkin, and Commissioner Alternates V. Johnson and Schiffrin voting ‘aye.’

CLOSED SESSION

No closed session items

Meeting adjourned at 12:02 p.m. Next meetings

The next TPW meeting is scheduled for Thursday, August 16, 2018 at 9:00 a.m. at the Watsonville City Council Chambers, 275 Main Street, Watsonville, CA.

The next RTC meeting is scheduled for Thursday, June 14, 2018 at 9:00 a.m. at the Watsonville City Council Chambers, 275 Main Street, Watsonville, CA.

Respectfully submitted,

Fernanda Dias Pini, Staff

Attendees:
Jessica Evans    Santa Cruz County Resident
Maxwell Evans    Santa Cruz County Resident
Thomas Hiltner  Santa Cruz Metropolitan District
Rick Longinotti Campaign for Sustainable Transportation
Corrine McFarland Santa Cruz County Resident
Gail McNulty    Greenway
Will Menchine    Santa Cruz County Resident
Brian Peoples    Trail Now
Pete Rasmussen  Santa Cruz Metropolitan District
Barbara Ruettgger Santa Cruz County Resident
Michael Saint   Campaign for Sustainable Transportation
Ryan Sarnataro  Santa Cruz County Resident
Barry Scott     Coastal Rail Santa Cruz
Stanley Sokolow Campaign for Sustainable Transportation
David Van Brink Santa Cruz County Resident