Transit Corridors Alternatives Analysis
Milestone 3 - Email Received between 6/03/20-11/27/20
From Partner Agencies/Community Groups/Businesses

Partner Agency Comments

November 18, 2020

Chair Bruce McPherson and Commissioners
Santa Cruz County Regional Transportation Commission
1523 Pacific Avenue
Santa Cruz, CA 95060

Dear Chair McPherson and Commissioners:

With the draft Transit Corridors Alternatives Analysis (TCAA), the City of Santa Cruz (City) would like to reaffirm our support for trail and transit on the rail line and our appreciation of the Regional Transportation Commission’s (RTC) continued work to further sustainable transportation options for Santa Cruz County.

In 2015, the City adopted a resolution reaffirming support for the Monterey Bay Sanctuary Scenic Trail Network Master Plan and the preservation of the rail option. As a City, we recognize how critical transportation solutions are to addressing the looming threats of climate change. We continue to support passenger transit on the rail line, in accordance with our General Plan and Climate Action Plan policies supporting public transportation on the rail corridor and transit-oriented development land use patterns. Further, as a City, we adopted the Monterey Bay Sanctuary Scenic Trail Master Plan and are moving forward with building the trail adjacent to the rail, in accordance with that adopted plan.

The TCAA identifies a locally preferred scenario of Electric Commuter Rail or Electric Light Rail on the branch rail line. Either of these options are supported by our existing policy framework. While there is more work to come, we are encouraged by the TCAA in moving our community towards greater transportation sustainability.

As a City, we continue to support rail with trail on the rail line and are thankful for the RTC’s continued work to bring sustainable multimodal transportation options to Santa Cruz County. The City looks forward to working with the RTC on the next steps of this process.

Sincerely,

Justin Cummings
Mayor

Donna Meyers
Vice Mayor
Dear Regional Transportation Commission:

The Santa Cruz, Big Trees & Pacific Railroad (SCBT), a subsidiary of Roaring Camp, is the only local railroad company that has operated in Santa Cruz County for over 57 years, making us a landmark. Our employees are locals, we work with local vendors, and our business brings thousands of visitors to the area who utilize other businesses, such as hotels, restaurants, retail stores and gas stations during their stay. The Santa Cruz community enjoys many of the events we host throughout the year, such as Mother’s Day Brunch, Easter Egg Hunts, Holiday Lights Train, the Channukah Train, as well as large community fundraisers like Redwood Mountain Fair. Our community outreach even includes location support for disaster relief providers, such as CalFire and the National Guard, during the recent CZU Lightening Complex Fire. We are proud to say we are truly a community business.

The Felton Branch Line connects Roaring Camp to the Beach Boardwalk via the wye and Beach Street portion of the Santa Cruz Branch Line. Thousands of people travel the route that connects the two parks each season, alleviating hundreds of cars off the highways and surface streets of Santa Cruz. Our trackage rights extend down to the Boardwalk and it is important for the Regional Transportation Commission (RTC) to be reminded that the SCBT’s position is to be able to fully utilize our trackage rights. While the SCBT certainly plans on cooperating with the RTC in whatever path it follows, the SCBT is not willing to accept increased costs or liability exposure as a result of the RTC’s decisions. We believe a shared use of the line is achievable through special signal equipment.

Several alternatives provide that freight will not be available north of Park Ave. in Capitola. This would be a negative impact for our railroad, prohibiting future replacement of equipment, such as new locomotives that cannot be shipped via truck due to dimensions and clearance challenges on Santa Cruz County surface roads. It is imperative to our railroad that the track from Watsonville to Santa Cruz remains intact so that we can bring equipment by rail, without this possibility our future will be severely impacted.

Several alternatives suggest adding a separate set of tracks between the east leg of the wye and the Boardwalk, as a means to separate transportation modes. This suggestion poses a serious challenge to the RTC, community and especially the stakeholders in the immediate area. The Boardwalk should be
advised that this option is under consideration as it is anticipated it would not be favored by the Boardwalk. However, we believe that a shared single track can be achieved through special temporal separation signals that control vehicle movement on the track. We again want to stress our trackage rights on this section of the railroad and our ability to fully utilize those rights.

The Alternative Analysis also suggests limiting our train movements to the east leg of the wye and to make depot park the terminus of our train route, instead of the Boardwalk. Both of these options would severely impact our railroad financially, logistically and are not acceptable to our business plan.

Finally, future planning should not rule out freight anywhere along the Branch Line. There is the possibility of agriculture and landfill shipments from North County, technology and industry in West and Central Santa Cruz County, and one must always consider industries that will emerge in the future. A single train can haul hundreds of truckloads of goods at one time. It is the most efficient way to move goods, reducing the burden on highway infrastructure and road systems.

We appreciate the RTC taking the time to consider the impact of the Alternative Analysis on our railroad and look forward to working with the RTC as it moves towards a decision.

Best regards,

Melani Clark
CEO, Roaring Camp Railroads
November 27, 2020

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

Re: Approve Electric Passenger Rail as the Locally Preferred Alternative

Dear Commissioners and Staff,

Without reservation, we agree with the TCAA/RNIS recommendation that Electric Passenger Rail be selected as the Locally Preferred Alternative. We urge you to approve the recommendation and move forward with developing a strategic business plan and exploring governance options for future transit service along the Santa Cruz Branch Rail Line.

Chapter 6 of the TCAA/RNIS summarizes the many reasons Passenger Rail is clearly the best of the 18 alternatives considered for providing high-capacity public transit alongside the Coastal Rail Trail, and we will not repeat them here. We are grateful the evaluation of alternatives was guided by our community’s commitment to the triple bottom line framework of equity, environment and economy. Knowing the recommendation is based on the triple bottom line gives us a high degree of confidence that passenger rail is the very best investment and will provide maximum benefits for the people, the planet and our shared prosperity.

There are several benefits to selecting passenger rail not specifically included in Chapter 6. Because these benefits are important, we list them here:
- CRT/LRT will protect 100% of the existing ROW allowing completion of the Rail Trail ASAP.
- CRT/LRT will generate 29% more permanent jobs and 22% more construction jobs than BRT.
- On average, CRT/LRT will be about four times safer than BRT.

We want to acknowledge the excellent work of the RTC, METRO and Caltrans staff who jointly collaborated with the expert consulting team in preparing the TCAA/RNIS report. Please see the addendum to this letter for our specific comments offered only with the intent to make this excellent report even better.

Thank you,

Sally Arnold
Board Chair
Santa Cruz County Friends of the Rail & Trail

CC: Santa Cruz Metropolitan Transit District, Board of Directors
     FORT Board

P.O. Box 1652, Capitola, CA  95010-1652  www.railandrail.org  831-419-4622
Addendum to the letter dated 11/27/20

“Approve Electric Passenger Rail as the Locally Preferred Alternative”

1. Several items to be addressed and or previously addressed were not included in the draft TCAA/RNIS report. Some, but not all of these items, include the following:
   1. Analysis of METRO’s future funding stream
   2. Governance options for capital and operating phases of the project
   3. Connector services for First Mile / Last Mile options
   4. Next steps for implementation of high-capacity public transit in the rail corridor

2. Table 5.2 includes a line for “O&M Costs/Year” for the alternatives. When comparing the listed O&M costs to the range of costs provided in the body of the report (page 5-15), we noticed the $19.5M figure listed for BRT was the low value in the stated range of $19.5m-$21m but the $25M figure listed for CRT/LRT was the high value in the stated range of $23m-$25m. Please use the same relative values within the range for all the alternatives or explain the reason for what could appear to be bias in the figures chosen.

3. Regarding O&M costs provided for CRT/LRT in Table 5.2 and on page 5-15, it appears the quoted range is $10m to $12m higher than the $13.2M estimate for O&M cost provided in the 2019 Unified Corridor Investment Study (page B-12). Please explain the substantial increase, especially in light of the general trend of substantial decreases in O&M costs for electric vehicles. Please also provide a detailed breakdown of items included in the O&M cost figures.

4. Table 5.2 includes a line for “O&M Cost/Passenger Mile” for the alternatives. The figures listed for CRT & LRT are three to four times higher than the figures provided in the National Transit Database (NTD) maintained by the Federal Transit Administration, but the listed figure for BRT is roughly the same as found in the NTD. Please provide a detailed breakdown of the items included and the calculation for each of the CRT/LRT O&M figures.

5. Table 5.2 appears to provide cost figures over 30 years yet in the body of the report there is this statement: “Total revenues assumed 25 years of revenues (2020-2045) reported in 2020 dollars,” (the last bullet on page 5-24). Table 5.3 appears to use a 25 year time horizon as well. Please explain and resolve these apparent discrepancies.

6. Under the LRT column in Table 5.12, the typical fare ranges from $1.75 - $3.25, yet the average fare used for estimating funding revenues is shown as $4.50. Please explain and resolve this apparent discrepancy.

7. Thanks for discussing the range of fares for these systems. Given that many, if not most, public transit users will probably purchase monthly “all-access” type passes providing access to the entire public transit system, it would be helpful if the report included cost estimates for monthly “all-access” passes. Please provide cost estimates for “all-access” passes for a BRT + regular bus, CRT + regular bus, and, LRT + regular bus.

8. Table 5.17 lists “Estimated signal gate down time” for CRT/LRT at 90/75 seconds respectively. Please provide the data and methodology for these estimates as our collective experience with the actual signal gate down time of other CRT/LRT systems indicates signal gate down times will be much shorter; perhaps half the estimates provided. Providing a comparison with the ‘downtime’ of a typical red light would be informative and helpful in understanding the magnitude of the estimated signal gate down times.
9. While Table 5.17 provides estimates of signal gate down times, BRT is proposed to have double the frequency of CRT/LRT during peak travel times. Therefore, signal gates will be down twice as often for BRT service as for CRT/LRT service. Accordingly, the estimated impact of each alternative on the affected road network’s Level of Service, if any, should be included in the table. Furthermore, the total gate down time per hour for each alternative should be listed allowing an “apples to apples” comparison between alternatives.

10. Under the discussion of Regional Connectivity beginning on page 5-52, it was good to see the illustration from the State Rail Plan. It would be helpful and educational if a graphic from TAMC’s “Monterey Bay Area Network Integration Study – Future Service Vision” dated October 2020, was included to illustrate the regional rail network described, especially “around the bay” service between Santa Cruz and Monterey. Assuming you agree, here is an illustration for your consideration:

![Monterey Bay Area Integrated Network](image)

Above illustration from page 2 of TAMC’s “Monterey Bay Area Network Integration Study – Future Service Vision” dated October 2020

11. It is our understanding the auto travel times listed in Table 5.16 are for an automobile trip on Highway 1 between Larkin Valley Rd. and Morrissey Blvd. We understand Table 5.16 is intended to illustrate the impact of implementing transit on the SCBRL, which is described in the body of the report to be “no impact”. Given the adjacent location of Table 5.16 to Table 5.15, the casual reader is likely to be misled in thinking the times listed in the two tables can be directly compared. Of course, doing so would lead that same casual reader to mistakenly think that peak travel time in a car between Pajaro Station and Natural Bridges Drive would be roughly the same as travel by CRT/LRT. Please provide a far more detailed explanation of Table 5.16 or update Table 5.16 with estimates of auto travel time using the same trip starting/ending points as the transit alternatives. An apples to apples comparison would be more useful and more accurate.
November 24, 2020

Santa Cruz County Regional Transportation Commission

RE: CFST Response to Transit Corridor Alternatives Analysis

Dear Commissioners,

The Campaign for Sensible Transportation advocates for transportation systems that reduce greenhouse gas emissions and provide equitable mobility to the residents of Santa Cruz County.

By consensus of the CFST Working group, this is our response to the RTC’s Transit Corridor Alternatives Analysis:

We support the preferred alternative for the railroad corridor identified by staff as part of the TCAA study - an electric rail system - as long as the service allows for a contiguous trail alongside the service in the right of way. We acknowledge the financial and other hurdles that need to be addressed prior to its implementation, and advise the Commission to continue to study additional technologies that may become relevant to future transit uses of the corridor.

We also support dedicated bus lanes on Highway One that do not involve additional auxiliary lanes.

Thank you for your consideration.

Bruce Van Allen
Co-Chair, CFST
Choose Rail for the Locally Preferred Alternative

Dear RTC Commissioners and Staff,

I’m writing to let you know that we at Regeneración - Pajaro Valley Climate Action strongly support rail transit for the rail corridor. Please follow the recommendation of the TCAA study and choose rail transit as the locally preferred alternative.

We are now in a climate emergency. Since the transportation sector accounts for over half of Santa Cruz County emissions, it’s imperative to make significant changes in our transportation systems as quickly as possible. We especially need alternatives to cars carrying one person.

Electric Passenger Rail would connect everyone along the rail corridor between Santa Cruz and Watsonville, and connect our county to the regional and state rail network at the Watsonville Pajaro Junction.

Rail is superior to the bus option for many reasons. We are concerned about the bus option because: 1) it would take longer to develop 2) there could be major problems with right of way since existing easements were for purpose of rail and 3) with a limit of 3 bikes per bus that makes it a risky bet on whether any individual could count on riding to station and getting on with their bike.

In contrast, electric train will be faster, accommodate many more bikes, more accessible, and will be implemented sooner.

We envision staff at PV High who live in North County utilizing the train to get to Ohlone Parkway and then walk, bike, carpool or shuttle to school; young people employed by the Boardwalk taking the train to and from work, and UCSC, hotel, restaurant workers taking the train to downtown and connecting to their final destination.

The many benefits of providing passenger rail alongside the trail make it clear that choosing passenger rail is the best way to transform our county into a more equitable, more sustainable, more prosperous community for everyone.

Sincerely,

Nancy

Nancy Faulstich - Executive Director, Regeneración
The Sierra Club supports the preferred alternative for the railroad corridor identified by staff as part of the TCAA study - an electric rail system, as long as the rail system allows for a contiguous trail within the rail corridor. The Santa Cruz Group of the Sierra Club is comprised of some 4000 members throughout Santa Cruz County.

The Sierra Club has long advocated for rail transit systems because rail transit promotes Transit Oriented Development (TOD), an effective strategy for reducing urban sprawl and preserving open space. In the long run, because rail is centered on a single line and around stations, it supports infill along the corridor and a lifestyle in which residents are able to walk for a majority of their needs and use the train for longer trips. Trips taken via electric rail systems have low greenhouse gas emissions per rider and encourage civic interactions. They allow residents long range mobility without the need for significant investments of personal capital. Rail transit on the corridor will reduce greenhouse gas emissions and provide equitable mobility to the residents of Santa Cruz County.

We also understand that electric rail on the corridor is only one component of a broader integrated county transit system. We urge the RTC to create an integrated transit network with rail and bus connectors, to be (ideally) run by the Metro and to build dedicated bus

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only lanes on Highway One and study additional technologies that may become relevant to our future transit system, both on the corridor and within the county.

Thank you for your consideration,

Micah Posner, Executive Committee Chair

Sierra Club, Santa Cruz Group
November 25, 2020

Chairperson McPherson
Santa Cruz County Regional Transportation Commissioners
1523 Pacific Avenue
Santa Cruz, CA 95060

Dear Chairperson McPherson,

Ecology Action’s strategic plan calls for decarbonizing our building and transportation systems while supporting zero emission vehicles, multimodal, and active transportation. The RTC staff and TCAA consultant’s recommended Transit Corridor Alternative Analysis’ (TCAA) preferred alternative aligns with these goals because the proposed electric rail transit solution is a viable way to reduce carbon emissions. Currently over 50% of greenhouse gas emissions are generated by passenger and freight transportation in Santa Cruz County.

A Coastal Rail Corridor that includes both a biking/walking path and electric passenger rail service can meet the mobility needs of a wide variety of residents and visitors as we look for alternatives to gasoline fueled car trips. Rail and trail can complement each other as people can bike along the Coastal Rail Trail to a train station, board the train with their bike, and then bike to their final destination. With the growing popularity of ebikes—that go further, faster with less effort than regular bikes—the bike and train connection can be available to more residents.

Electric rail service also could provide much needed reliable and sustainable transportation options for those living in south county who work in north county. Watsonville area residents face horrific commuter traffic going to and from work. A fully developed Coastal Rail Corridor will connect our communities.

Thank you for moving forward with increased sustainable transportation options as we need to move decisively in providing climate crisis solutions.

Sincerely,

[Signature]

Chief Executive Officer
Ecology Action