



May 19, 2021

Kailash Muzumber, Chair of the Interagency Technical Advisory Committee (ITAC)

Santa Cruz County Regional Transportation Commission (RTC)

Re: Item 8 on the ITAC Agenda for May 20th: Highway 1 – State Park to Freedom Auxiliary Lanes and Bus on Shoulder Project & Coastal Rail Trail Segment 12 Addition of Interim Trail Alternative

Re: Item 10 on the ITAC Agenda for May 20th: Capitola Trestle Update & Interim Trail Alternative

Greetings Kailash Muzumber and ITAC Committee Members,

The Santa Cruz County Friends of Rail & Trail (FORT) a grassroots community organization founded in 2002 to promote using the rail corridor for both rail transit and a multi-use trail, urges the ITAC to advise the RTC to take no action on the proposed addition of an “interim trail alternative” to the scope of the proposed Highway 1 and Capitola Trestle projects for many reasons including, but not limited, to the following:

The RTC has ZERO policies in any of its adopted plans, including the long range Regional Transportation Plan and the short range Regional Transportation Improvement Program, for including an interim trail use in any project, either proposed or currently under development. In fact, this proposed interim trail use is 100% contrary to the last 20+ years of adopted RTC and California State transportation policy.

- The RTC does not have full understanding of the step-by-step process and feasibility of railbanking given the various operational and funding agreements already in place. No steps to study an interim trail use (requiring a substantial expenditure of funds and staff resources) should be taken until the research and legal analysis is undertaken on the process, feasibility and cost of a railbanking action. Additionally, that information should be deliberated holistically by the RTC since what happens in terms of studying an interim trail use for Segment 12 and the Capitola Trestle will also impact other segments that are presently in the preliminary development, final design or permitting phase.
- An interim trail use of the rail line has already been considered and rejected by the RTC on multiple occasions and spending \$750,000 of Measure D funds (estimated at \$700,000 for Segment 12 and \$50,000 for the Capitola Trestle) “studying” yet again an interim trail use of the rail line, is clearly an irresponsible use of hard-earned taxpayer funds, risks further delay in constructing the much desired rail trail and, will certainly reduce, perhaps completely eliminate, opportunities for outside grant funding of the rail trail itself.

- An interim trail use of the rail line would further delay and certainly and substantially increase the cost of implementing electric passenger rail service which the RTC selected as the locally preferred alternative for the Santa Cruz Branch Rail Line at its Feb 4, 2021 meeting. Not acting to offer Santa Cruz County residents and businesses an alternative to Highway 1 will lead to an increase in GHG emissions inconsistent with the urgent and imperative goals of local, regional, state, federal, and worldwide climate action plans. Additionally, an interim trail use of the rail line inherently promises to be a temporary facility that would be reverted back at a doubled cost with no concluding trail.
- Estimated project costs are clearly a concern with a number of the RTC's regional projects, including electric passenger rail service, Highway 1 Auxiliary Lanes and Bus on Shoulder, and, the Monterey Bay Sanctuary Scenic Trail (a.k.a. the Rail Trail). A more useful process would be to consider these projects and costs together, and to craft a reasonable plan for future implementation of all these projects as outlined in the Unified Corridor Investment Study based on approved policy positions, advancing rail technology and the likelihood of dramatically increased funding for public transit.

Additional relevant information follows:

1. Any interim trail use of the existing rail corridor is essentially infeasible as an interim trail use would require the Federal Surface Transportation Board (STB) to approve abandoning the rail line and railbanking the corridor. With Progressive Rail formally withdrawing its notice of intent to abandon the rail line and Roaring Camp subcontracting the freight business in Watsonville, it appears that any opportunity to abandon the rail line and railbank the corridor is at least seven years away as the current Administration, Coordination and License Agreement for the rail line does not end until July 16, 2028. With Roaring Camp, a federally recognized freight rail operator, committed to fighting any attempt to abandon the rail line and insisting on access to freight rail business to or from the national rail network, the STB will not allow the Santa Cruz Branch Rail Line (SCBRL) to be abandoned or railbanked. Summarizing, any interim trail use of the rail line is certainly infeasible for at least a decade and will most likely remain infeasible indefinitely.
2. The RTC purchased the SCBRL with many millions of dollars allocated from California State Proposition 116 and in so doing accepted several conditions including using the rail line for passenger rail service as delineated in the following excerpts from California Transportation Commission Resolution PA-08-01 approving the allocation of Prop 116 funds to the RTC:
 - (a) *intercity passenger rail projects connecting the City of Santa Cruz with the Watsonville Junction; or*
 - (b) *other rail projects within Santa Cruz County which facilitate recreational, commuter, intercity and intercounty travel;*
3. Removing the existing railroad tracks and constructing a paved trail in their place for an interim trail use is inconsistent with the Measure D expenditure plan approved by more than two thirds of county-wide voters which includes the following language requiring funds be used for "preserva-

tion of the Rail Corridor infrastructure... and maintaining and repairing the publicly-owned Santa Cruz Branch Rail Line”.

4. Removing the existing railroad tracks and constructing a paved trail in their place for an interim trail use is inconsistent with the resolution adopted by the RTC in January 2019 that stipulated the rail corridor be used for both a multi-purpose trail and high capacity public transit.
5. Removing the existing railroad tracks and constructing a paved trail in their place for an interim trail use is inconsistent with the resolution adopted by the RTC in February of 2021 that stipulated electric passenger rail was the locally preferred alternative for providing high capacity public transit in the rail corridor.

With regards to studying the potential for using existing rail line infrastructure (bridges, trestles, etc) such as that proposed under both item 10 and item 8 of the agenda, for all the reasons listed above the ITAC should recommend that the RTC not support such action nor recommend the RTC allocate any Measure D taxpayer funds toward any additional engineering analysis of the Capitola Trestle for a potential interim trail alternative on the SCBRL.

Furthermore, the ITAC should recommend to the RTC that a more appropriate use of the \$50,000 allocated toward engineering analysis of the the Capitola Trestle would be to explore the suitability of using the Capitola Trestle to support an interim use of the rail line for recreational rail or excursion rail service utilizing an ultra-light rail vehicle such as the TIG/m vehicle for which the RTC has received a technically feasible, if not also, financially feasible proposal.

The RTC, local governments, Caltrans, METRO, and other agency and community partners have engaged in countless public processes over the years, including passing Measure D, to agree on regional transportation policy and projects. It can feel disheartening to now face seemingly ad-hoc proposals of unrealistic and infeasible alternatives. FORT looks forward to continuing to work with the RTC and others in our community toward comprehensive solutions that will address the real challenge to reducing greenhouse gasses and offering alternatives to sitting in traffic.

Thank you very much for your consideration.

Faina Segal, Chair
Santa Cruz County Friends of the Rail & Trail

Cc: RTC Commissioners
Guy Preston
Rachel Moriconi

Subject: May 20th Meeting

I heard there is a meeting planned for May 20th which includes two topics concerning the railroad tracks and bridges in Santa Cruz County. I would like to share my view point regarding the railroad history of the area. Please find a letter attached that I would like to share with the commissioners.

Respectfully, Jim Kliment

May 17, 2021

RE: May 20th meeting regarding local railroad bridges.

Dear RTC Commissioners,

Santa Cruz and the surrounding local area is rich in railroading history. I am a member of the Santa Cruz Researchers Anonymous group and have been studying the roles railroads played in the development of the local area. The history starts from the first Santa Cruz & Felton Railroad in 1875 to the evolution that took place making the Southern Pacific the primary railroad serving the area before the Union Pacific merger. The "Sun Tan Special" brought in swarms of tourist. What is now Depot Park, was a bustling hub with a passenger and freight station, multiple sidings and an engine house with a turntable. The history of the local railroads are a part of the heritage of Santa Cruz, just like the heritage of the "Boardwalk", "blue plated homes", the pier, sandy beaches and surrounding redwood forest. A real effort needs to be made to preserve this local history for future generations to enjoy as well as provide a learning experience.

Other locales have made tragic mistakes by pulling up rails and destroying bridges which cannot be economically replaced. Some examples of regrettable decisions include the Los Angeles "Pacific Electric Red Cars" that serviced the communities from Pasadena to the "Long Beach Pier". The Yosemite Valley Railroad that delivered passengers and freight from Merced to Yosemite National Park. Even the local Southern Pacific rail line from Olympia to San Jose was removed before World War II. Can you imagine what it would like if these historic rail lines still existed? Just think, if the line from Santa Cruz to San Jose still existed, it could have provided an efficient way to move commuters to Silicone Valley. It is imperative that further future history is not destroyed by eliminating the local tracks over the Santa Cruz bridges just for pathways. An agreement was recently signed to work with Progressive Rail to provide freight and tourist service within the local communities. As a result these tracks can still contribute financial income to the local communities as well as provide an alternative to highway travel.

In the past, Joseph and Anna Welch, Andrew Phillip Hill and Josephine McCracken inspired a movement to save the ancient redwoods trees, because "once an ancient redwood tree is cut down, it's lost forever". Norman Clark, the founder of Roaring Camp Rail Roads, became a true railroading preservationist at an early age and is responsible for leading a movement to preserve steam locomotives for historical heritage purposes. He believed it is important to experience history rather just reading about it. Just like the ancient redwood trees, once railroading historical sites and machinery are destroyed, they too are gone forever. Solutions are possible without the removal of the rails, as long as proper discussions are held with knowledgeable people.

Sincerely,
Jim Kliment

From: Carey Pico <carey.pico@yahoo.com>; Sent: Wednesday, May 19, 2021 8:53 AM
 Subject: my presentation for May 20, Interagency Technical Advisory Committee meeting
 Yesenia

Please find attached my "Pico_Rail Bank Delay" power point presentation. I plan to present it to the ITAC meeting for Item 8
 Please respond "received" for my assurance

Thank and best wishes
 Carey



Rail banking: Alternative fact 1

1) George Dondero, public letter:

"Thousands of miles of tracks have been torn up [for rail banking], not a single mile of track is believed to ever have been replaced"

Fact:

1. Rails-to-Trails Conservancy has partial list of tracks reactivated from rail banking. (so do I)
2. Abandoned rails have also been reactivated.



Alternative fact 2

II) Land Trust Exec. Director:
"Railbanking = No Rail Ever"

Fact:

"Interim [trail] use is subject to restoration or reconstruction for railroad purposes [and shall not be treated] as an abandonment of the use of such rights-of-way for railroad purposes"

Source: National Trails System Act of 1983, Sec. 8.d



Alternative fact 3

RTC FAQ (webpage):

"The environmental analysis [for trail only] is expected to take several years and involve lots of public participation"

Fact:

1. Trail EIR began on 8/23/2012 (**before** corridor purchase on 10/12/2012).
2. EIR completed on 11/7/2013
3. The MBSST Master Final Plan approved on 11/7/2013
4. Total: 14 months

Source: RTC Final EIR, Introduction



RTC's systematic discredit of rail banking has interfered with rational decisions

Rail banking is a 5-8 month process once initiated
(source: STB attorney, 49 U.S.C. 10903 & STB
Sec.1152.20 et al.)

EIR and Rail Bank can proceed simultaneously to shorten
time

"The biggest time cost are the years of community arguing
on direction before applying for rail bank" (STB attorney)



From: Nadene Thorne <nadenetd@yahoo.com>
Sent: Wednesday, May 19, 2021 11:56 AM
To: Regional Transportation Commission <info@sccrtc.org>
Subject: Input for members of the ITAC, meeting on 5/20/21

I am writing to urge the members of the Interagency Technical Advisory Committee to follow the staff recommendations regarding items # 8 and #10 to add an interim trail cost estimate and construction timeline to these two projects so the public and the commissioners can clearly see and evaluate the time, cost, and benefits of each plan.

Now that it appears that the commission has set the rail construction project on a longer term course while more definitive funding is explored, and further, that the RTC has stated definitively that the railroad tracks will have to be removed and replaced for any future train, it only makes good public policy sense to explore alternate trail construction plans and their associated costs. It may also simply be a requirement of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA).

The subject of 'train and/or trail' has been a source of much passion and discord in the county, and planning that at this stage does not take into consideration the costs and benefits of each of these projects would do a disservice to county residents who feel strongly about these decisions.

In short, and particularly in light of the latest decisions taken by the RTC commissioners, why would you *not* request interim trail cost estimates and considerations in these two weighty and expensive projects?

Thank you,
Nadene Thorne
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