

From: Rick Hyman
To: Bicycle Advisory Committee
Re: Comment for item #10 Measure D 5-Year Plans, BAC Meeting October 3, 2022

From: Rick Hyman
Sent: Friday, September 30, 2022 8:51 AM
To: Regional Transportation Commission <info@sccrtc.org>
Subject: RTC Oct 6 2022 meeting Item 23 rail trail maintenance

Dear Commissioners:

I am pleased to read that you are concerned about rail trail maintenance and that staff has met with local staffs to discuss funding. As trail development progresses and the hence sees more users, I suggest that you consider more comprehensive maintenance strategies. For example, it may make sense to have only one or two entities responsible (e.g., jurisdictions with trail segments in the north county contract with the City of Santa Cruz and in the south county contract with the City of Watsonville) or for the RTC itself to contract with a private company to perform all of the maintenance. It may also make sense to combine or at least coordinate rail track maintenance with rail trail maintenance, at least for vegetation control and litter clean-up. I would suggest looking towards other rail trails in the country of at least similar lengths to help you determine the best way forward, not only cost-wise, but also operationally. Future users should be able to expect a uniform, safe and enjoyable experience along whatever portion of the rail trail that they are on irrespective of jurisdiction.

Again, thanks for your focus on this important topic.

Rick Hyman

Attachment: RTC Staff Report to Commission Meeting October 6, 2022, regarding Coastal Rail Trail Maintenance and Trail Funding

AGENDA: October 6, 2022

TO: Regional Transportation Commission (RTC)

FROM: Grace Blakeslee, Senior Transportation Planner
Guy Preston, Executive Director

RE: Coastal Rail Trail Maintenance & Trail Funding

RECOMMENDATIONS

Staff recommends the Regional Transportation Commission:

1. Continue to advance Coastal Rail Trail projects by strategically investing funds to complete pre-construction activities;
 2. Continue to strategically program funds to leverage State and Federal grant opportunities;
 3. Negotiate maintenance agreements with local jurisdictions responsible for maintenance and joint responsibilities for seeking funding and return to the Commission for authorization for approval;
 4. Continue to require that maintenance agreements be in place, prior to advertising for construction bids; and,
 5. Continue to prudently program funding for corridor and trail maintenance responsibilities on a yearly basis, as part of the Measure D – Five Year Program of Projects.
-

BACKGROUND

In November 2016, over two-thirds of Santa Cruz County voters approved a ½-cent transaction and use tax (sales tax) for transportation projects and programs (Measure D-2016). The voter-approved [Expenditure Plan](#) allocates 17% of Measure D revenues to the Active Transportation category (Measure D-AT) for the 32-mile Coastal Rail Trail. The ordinance states that funds will be used for trail construction, maintenance, operation, management and drainage of the rail and trail corridor and will leverage other state and federal grants for completion of the trail network.

Measure D-AT funds are programmed through FY27 to the 17 miles of Coastal Rail Trail projects under development (MBSST segments 5, 7 thru 12 & 18). In May of 2022, the Commission requested staff to provide additional

information regarding trail maintenance costs and funding at a subsequent meeting. There are 15 miles of Coastal Rail Trail (MBSST segments 6, 7-Phase 3, 13-17 & 19-20) that have not advanced past the master planning stage and Measure D funding has not been programmed to these segments. A map showing the status of Coastal Rail Trail Projects is [here](#).

In August 2022, the RTC released a Request for Proposals (RFP) with a scope of work being engineering and environmental review of remaining Coastal Rail Trail segments (except Segments 6 and 7-Phase 3) combined with development of Electric Passenger Rail Transit along the Santa Cruz Branch Rail Line.

DISCUSSION

Maintenance of Coastal Rail Trail projects is required to preserve capital investments and provide a positive trail user experience. At their May 2022 meeting, RTC requested that staff provide additional information regarding trail maintenance costs, funding and strategy. Since then, RTC moved forward on segments of the Coastal Rail Trail that have not advanced past the master planning stage by issuing an RFP for environmental services, and RTC will need to consider programming future Measure D-AT funding to further develop, construct and maintain these segments.

Measure D – AT Category Capacity and Programming Commitments

The Measure D –AT category is currently projected to generate \$194 million in revenue over the 30-year life of the program, which includes an allowance for growth. \$56 Million in Measure D-AT funds have been programmed to fund trail development and construction, corridor maintenance, and trail maintenance over the first 10-years of the Measure. This programming does not fully fund the segments currently under development. Construction will be dependent on grant awards, and trail maintenance funding beyond FY27 still needs to be identified. Even with grant awards, Measure D – AT programming exceeds revenue projections for this 10-year period and will require debt financing to maintain current project schedules. Nonetheless, staff and financial consultants project there will be sufficient funding to complete construction of trail segments under development, including the expenditures for debt service, assuming grant awards. However, RTC and local jurisdictions will need to leverage grant funds to construct trail segments and jointly consider new funding sources for trail maintenance to not over subscribe Measure D-AT funds over the life of the Measure.

Remaining Coastal Rail Trail Development & Construction Cost Estimates

RTC staff recently updated planning level cost estimates for some of the segments that have not advanced past the master planning stage, including

Segments 13-16 (\$192 million) and Segments 17A (\$131 million). Segment 17A provides for a trail along the rail facility. An alternative route, Segment 17B, would be aligned on the existing facilities on San Andreas Road and Beach Street.

The cost to construct the remaining trail segments (Segments 13-20) of the trail exceeds the remaining Measure D-AT category revenue and may be insufficient to leverage grant funding to construct the entire 32-mile Coastal Rail Trail.

Corridor Maintenance

RTC also uses Measure D-AT category funding for drainage, vegetation control, maintenance and management of the rail and trail corridor as specified by the Measure D Expenditure Plan. This work extends beyond the boundaries of the coastal rail trail and is expected to continue even after the trail is constructed.

Trail Maintenance Cost Estimates

Once the trail is constructed, there are additional costs associated with maintaining the new trail facility. RTC staff, in coordination with the City of Santa Cruz, County of Santa Cruz and City of Watsonville staff estimated routine trail maintenance costs. Annual trail maintenance costs are estimated for three different periods: 0-4 years, 5-10 years, and 11-20+ years, and range from \$32k - \$44k per mile per year (2022\$).

Although some pavement preservation is anticipated between 11-20+ years after trail operation commences, the cost for trail pavement rehabilitation is not included in the maintenance cost estimates because the need for significant pavement rehabilitation will likely not occur until after the expiration of the Measure D 30-year sales tax in 2046.

Routine trail maintenance cost estimates per mile vary depending on the conditions. For example, Segment 5 between Wilder Ranch State Park and Davenport involves additional maintenance associated with trail sweeping at farm crossings, bathroom, and parking lot maintenance. Trail volunteer programs may assist in reducing some of the direct trail maintenance costs. However, volunteer programs are not expected to significantly offset total costs due to the administrative cost associated with volunteer programs.

The cost of trail maintenance for the 17 miles of trail segments that are either completed (Segments 7-Phase 1 & Segment 18-Phase 1), underdevelopment (Segment 5, 8-12) or in construction (Segment 7-Phase 2) is approximately \$2.8 million FY21-FY28 and \$1 million annually starting in FY29 when the last trail segment under development is scheduled to

complete construction. The total cost of trail maintenance for 17 miles of trail equals approximately \$27.3 million dollars over the life of the Measure (FY46) assuming 3.5% inflation. This doesn't include the maintenance costs of the 15 miles of trail that haven't advanced past the master planning level (Segments 13-20).

Trail Maintenance Agreements

RTC entered into Trail Maintenance Agreements for completed trail segments & segments under construction located within the City of Santa Cruz and City of Watsonville. These agreements specify that the local agency is responsible for trail maintenance. The term of the agreement with the City of Santa Cruz is indefinite and the term of the agreement with the City of Watsonville is 30 years. To help off-set the cost, RTC started programming Measure D-AT funds for trail maintenance as part of Measure D 5-Year programming cycles and agreed to split the cost with the cities 50/50, up to the annual programmed amount in the latest approved Measure D 5- Year Plan. Since these agreements either do not have a defined term or a term that extends beyond the Measure D expiration date (FY46), the agreements will outlast the programmed Measure-D AT category funding. RTC also programmed funding for 7.5 miles of Segment 5 trail maintenance, which is scheduled for construction in FY24, but has not reached an agreement with the County to share in the cost of maintenance. A total of \$1.135 million in Measure D funds is programmed for trail maintenance through FY27.

Approximately 7.5 more miles of trail are under development within County limits (Woods Lagoon/ Harbor to Rio del Mar Boulevard) and are scheduled to complete construction in FY27, pending additional funding. The approved Measure D 5-Year Plan does not include funding for trail maintenance for these trail segments.

RTC met with the City of Santa Cruz, City of Watsonville and County of Santa Cruz to discuss trail maintenance needs and funding options for trail segments under development. Options discussed included:

- funding 100% of trail maintenance with Measure D-AT funds;
- splitting the trail maintenance cost 50/50 between Measure D-AT funds and local jurisdictional funds;
- funding approximately 80% of the cost of trail maintenance from Measure D-AT with local jurisdictions responsible for trash receptacle clearing for segments within its jurisdiction (estimated to be approximately 20% of total early year maintenance costs); and,
- funding 100% of trail maintenance with local jurisdictional funds.

All jurisdictional staff expressed concern in fully funding maintenance within its current resources available for maintaining its various facilities. Nonetheless, the Cities of Santa Cruz and Watsonville staff expressed a

willingness to meet prior agreements which specifies that they are responsible for maintenance of the trail, and RTC shall pay 50% of the cost, up to the Measure D programmed amount, which is updated as part of annual 5-Year programming cycles. Although the County staff expressed a willingness to perform maintenance activities, County staff indicated that it does not have funding available to pay for half the cost to maintain the trail. County staff indicated that it could only fund the cost of trash receptacle clearing services, which is approximately \$7k of the \$32k per mile. County staff also expressed concern about entering into a trail maintenance agreement that is subject to annual programming of funds by RTC and requested that RTC consider a trail maintenance agreement that expires at the termination of Measure D programming. RTC staff does not recommend a maintenance agreement that expires. RTC staff recommends an agreement that specifies that the local jurisdiction is responsible to maintain the trail and that both parties will cooperate in seeking funding for trail maintenance costs.

Strategy for Programming Measure D Active Transportation for Development and Delivery of Trail Segments and Future Maintenance Cost

The Commission continues to maximize its pursuit of State and Federal funding to develop additional portions of the trail. RTC staff assumes a minimum of 20% local match will be needed to leverage State and Federal funds. In some cases, RTC may need to provide a greater match to be competitive for grant funds.

If Measure D-AT funds are programmed to fully fund trail maintenance over the life of the program, less funding will be available for leveraging construction grants. Over time, there may not be enough Measure D-AT funds to leverage the needed grants to fully fund remaining segments. In the event of a Measure D-AT shortfall, the Commission could consider programming discretionary funding (i.e. Measure D-Neighborhood category, STBG/RSTPX, TDA, STIP) or seek a new funding source to complete remaining trail projects and/or fund maintenance.

To not oversubscribe the Measure D-AT category funding, the Commission has programmed the majority of the pre-construction cost and match needed for the application for construction of Segment 12 of the Coastal Rail Trail from Measure D-Highway Corridors funding. The project includes two Highway 1 overcrossings, which is in the Highway Corridors expenditure plan. To further maximize opportunities to fund the trail, the Commission included most of the remaining trail segments in the proposed electric passenger rail transit project RFP for preliminary engineering and environmental services. With the inclusion of most remaining trail sections in passenger rail project, nearly the entire Coastal Rail Trail will be advancing towards construction and well positioned to seek funding grants.

With consideration of the following:

- there is a desire to advance Coastal Rail Trail segments
- local jurisdictions cannot currently fund the full cost of trail maintenance with existing fund sources
- maintenance is an allowable expenditure under Measure D;
- the total annual cost for trail maintenance will increase as new segments are operational and more segments are developed
- funding trail maintenance will decrease available funding for trail development
- Measure D will sunset in 2047
- the Commission cannot commit funding beyond capacity and term,

Staff recommends the Commission:

- 1. continue to advance Coastal Rail Trail projects by strategically investing funds to complete pre-construction activities;**
- 2. continue to strategically program funds to leverage State and Federal grant opportunities;**
- 3. direct staff to negotiate maintenance agreements with local jurisdictions responsible for maintenance and joint responsibilities for seeking funding and return to the Commission for authorization for approval;**
- 4. continue to require that maintenance agreements be in place, prior to advertising for construction bids; and,**
- 5. continue to prudently program funding for corridor and trail maintenance responsibilities on a yearly basis, as part of the Measure D – AT program Five Year Program of Projects.**

FISCAL IMPACT

There is no direct fiscal impact by the proposed actions in this report, but input received may result in recommendations and subsequent action on the future programming of funds. Measure D-AT category currently generates approximately \$4.2 million per year in revenue. Funds are programmed at least annually as part of Five-Year Programs of Projects (5-Year Plans). RTC is next scheduled to adopt 5-Year Plans at its November 2023 meeting.

Next Steps

Staff will be requesting input on updates to the 5-Year Programs of Projects to RTC advisory committees (Bicycle, Elderly & Disabled TAC, and Inter-Agency) in October and the Commission in November. Also in October, the California Transportation Commission (CTC) will be announcing their recommendations for their Active Transportation Program grant awards,

which should inform RTC on the leveraging of funds for Segments 8-11. In November, the RTC will submit its application for SB1 competitive grants, with CTC staff recommendations expected in the spring. Meanwhile, staff will work with local jurisdictions to negotiate maintenance agreements prior to the start of construction.

SUMMARY

Maintenance of Coastal Rail Trail projects is required to preserve capital investments and provide a positive trail user experience. Trail maintenance along with trail construction, operation, management and drainage of the corridor are eligible expenses of Measure D-AT funds. However, RTC and local jurisdictions will need to leverage grant funds to fully fund construction of trail segments and jointly consider new funding sources for trail maintenance to not over subscribe Measure D-AT funds over the life of the Measure. RTC met with the City of Santa Cruz, City of Watsonville and County of Santa Cruz to discuss trail maintenance needs and funding options for trail segments under development. Options discussed ranged from funding 100% of trail maintenance with Measure D-AT funds to funding 100% of trail maintenance with local jurisdictions funds or cost sharing agreements. RTC staff recommends that RTC continue to strategically invest funding to development segments of the coastal rail trail, direct staff to negotiate maintenance agreements with local jurisdictions responsible for maintenance and joint responsibilities for seeking funding, and program funding for corridor and trail maintenance responsibilities on a yearly basis.

\\rtcserv2\shared\rtc\tc2022\10\regular_agenda\mbsst maintenance\final_maintenance-mbsst-sr.docx