

**From:** [Carey Pico](#)  
**To:** [Regional Transportation Commission](#)  
**Subject:** Comments to RTC meeting Item 29 (Trail setbacks)  
**Date:** Monday, April 29, 2024 2:55:21 PM

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How many years have I been informing the RTC that the planned setbacks between the rails and trail are grossly inadequate???

Carey Pico, Ph.D.  
Aptos

**From:** [J Lighthill](#)  
**To:** [Regional Transportation Commission;](#) [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
**Cc:** [REDACTED]  
**Subject:** Item 29 ZEPRT setback guidelines  
**Date:** Wednesday, May 1, 2024 9:27:49 AM

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Dear Commissioners,

Please:

-do not adopt the cross section guidelines for preferred, constrained and unconstrained scenarios of rail and trail facilities;

-do not to adopt horizontal setback guidelines from the Branch Line right-of-way.

Because the commission did not communicate to trail planners that the RTC wished to preserve the option of passenger rail on the corridor, the trail segments have been designed and constructed too close to the tracks to accommodate the proposed Project. This was poor planning, resulting in wasted Measure D funds. Costs of this error are not yet known.

Staff's report recommends that you approve guidelines based on beliefs and assumptions of CPUC approval, just as trail designers did previously.

Please do not approve setback guidelines before **CPUC specifically confirms** that:

-a 12 ft setback is acceptable for passenger rail speeds up to 60 mph, and freight up to 40 mph; and

-an 11 ft setback is acceptable in constrained areas. If confirmed, please specify how much of the corridor is eligible for this design exception.

Moving forward, please encourage trail planners to coordinate with rail planners, and both with the CPUC. The issue of rail crossings needs to be addressed, too.

Thanks for your consideration.

Johanna Lighthill

**From:** [Michele](#)  
**To:** [Regional Transportation Commission](#)  
**Subject:** Oppose  
**Date:** Tuesday, April 30, 2024 8:21:37 PM

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No railroad until you can show a profit and not take anyone's home!!!  
Sent from my iPhone

## Handout for item 29

May 2, 2024 RTC Meeting

**From:** [Ben Vernazza](#)  
**To:** [Regional Transportation Commission](#)  
**Subject:** RTC meeting 5/1 Item 29  
**Date:** Wednesday, May 1, 2024 9:39:55 AM  
**Attachments:** [Measure D Quick Check 5.4.pdf](#)  
[Measure D Quick Check 5.4.pdf](#)

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Please add the following to item 29 on tomorrows meeting – attached. Ben

J. Ben Vernazza CPA/PFS TEP emeritus  
Aptos CA – [REDACTED]

**SANTA CRUZ TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION (RTC)  
MUST “PLAY BY THE BOOK”  
ORDINANCE NO. 2016-01 (A Quick-Check)  
Submitted May 2, 2024, to RTC meeting by J. Ben Vernazza**

I have written this to be sure that Citizens of Santa Cruz County (SCC) and their Representatives are aware of the financial hazards of over-borrowing to accomplish a “Rail-Trail” project that has now become unachievable and additional funds can only be borrowed or transferred between five expenditure categories by a two-thirds majority in the RTC.

Currently SCC has a shortfall in its budget and is laying off employees and borrowing millions. RTC is also facing lack of funds if it continues with the Ultimate Trail. What I have presented below is a QUICK CHECK of SCC Ordinance No. 2016-01 as amended in 2020. Note that my QUICK-CHECK is only specific applicable sections either entirely or partially. You may obtain more details by this link: <https://sccrtc.org/funding-planning/measured/> and under “Quicklinks” click on the first two choices.

*HERE IS WHAT THE VOTERS SAW ON THEIR BALLOTS Election” Safety, Pothole Repair, Traffic Relief, Transit Improvement Measure. In order to: improve children’s safety around schools; repair potholes; repave streets; improve traffic flow on Highway 1; maintain senior/disabled transit; reduce global warming pollution by providing transportation options like sidewalks, buses, bike lanes, trails; preserve rail options\*; shall Santa Cruz County voters adopt an ordinance establishing a half-cent sales tax for 30 years, raising approximately \$17 million annually, YES \_\_\_ NO \_\_\_” (Comment \*Rail-Banking)*

*Section 8. IMPLEMENTATION B. The Santa Cruz County Regional Transportation Commission, which currently allocates, administers and oversees the expenditures of federal, state and Transportation Development Act funding for local and regional transportation projects and programs, in its role as the Authority shall allocate, administer and oversee the expenditure of all Measure Revenues which are not directly allocated by formula annually to other agencies, consistent with the Expenditure Plan, as it may be amended in accordance with the Act and this Ordinance through an Implementation Plan, which it will be update at least every 5 years, following a public hearing. The implementation Plan may be amended by a majority vote of the Authority; however, amendment of the Implementation Plan shall not serve to amend provisions of the Expenditure Plan.*

*Section 24 AMENDMENTS. Other amendments to this Ordinance shall require a two-thirds (2/3) vote of the total membership of the Authority. AND*

*Section 25. EXPENDITURE PLAN UPDATES AND AMENDMENTS.*

*A. This Ordinance and Expenditure Plan may be amended to provide for the use of additional federal, state, and local revenues, to account for unexpected revenues, or to take into consideration unforeseen circumstances. Should a project implementing agency determine that a planned project has become undeliverable and unfeasible due to circumstances unforeseen at the time this Ordinance and Expenditure Plan were created, or should a project not require all funds programmed for that project or have excess*

*funding, funding set forth at project termination will be reallocated to another project or program of the same type or otherwise serving the same objectives.*

*B. The Ordinance and Expenditure Plan may only be amended, if required, by the following process set forth in Section 180207 of the Public Utilities Code: (1) Initiation of amendments by the Authority reciting findings of necessity; (2) Provision of notice and a copy of the amendments provided to the Board of Supervisors and the City Councils in Santa Cruz County; (3) The proposed amendments shall become effective 45 days after notice is given. Amendments shall require a two-thirds (2/3) vote of the total membership of the Authority.*

*Section 32. TAXPAYER SAFEGUARDS, AUDITS, AND ACCOUNTABILITY. A. Annual Report. B. Annual Audit. C. Independent Oversight Committee. The responsibilities of this Committee include Reviewing Expenditure Plan expenditures on an annual basis to ensure they conform to the Ordinance. Reviewing the annual audit and report prepared by an independent auditor [who must report under NOCLAR (Non-Compliance with Laws and Regulations) with a footnote in their report]. .*

*Exhibit A: Expenditure Plan and Summary of Transportation Investments per cent of funds. 2016 Transportation Improvement Plan - Expenditure Plan as amended 2020.*

*SUMMARY OF TRANSPORTATION INVESTMENT ALLOCATIONS*

*CITIES AND COUNTIES 30%*

*HIGHWAY CORRIDORS 25%*

*METRO & LIFT LINE 20%*

*MONTEREY BAN SCENIC TRAIL 17%*

*RAIL CORRIDOR OPTION STUDIES 8%*

*INFRASTRUCTURE: The Measure Revenues do not include funding for any new train/rail service. If the Regional Transportation Commission determines that the best use of the corridor is an option other than rail transit, funds may be utilized for other transportation improvements along and near the corridor.*

**RECOMMENDATION:** The RTC Grant request to the California Transportation Commission (CTC) included the choice for an alternative Interim Trail which is a Class 1 Bike and Pedestrian Trail (the ultimate trail is NOT). The Interim Trail can be built the entire way from Santa Cruz to Watsonville at a fraction of the cost of the ultimate trial and could be completed along with current available RTC funds in 2 to 2 ½ years, and also substantially reduce tree cutting and preserve the Monarch Butterfly Trees off of Park Avenue. RTC should request CTC to aid financing the Interim Trail from Santa Cruz to Watsonville at a fraction of the cost of the ultimate trail, provide some funds for potholes, other transportation needs, and provide part of the costs for Railbanking while being able to reduce their total \$67 Million commitment.

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MUST “PLAY BY THE BOOK”  
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Submitted May 2, 2024, to RTC meeting by J. Ben Vernazza**

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**From:** [Linda Wilshusen](#)  
**To:** [Regional Transportation Commission](#)  
**Subject:** SCCRTC May 2, 2024 Agenda, Wilshusen Comments on Item #29  
**Date:** Tuesday, April 30, 2024 10:10:49 PM

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April 30, 2024

Regarding Item 29: Zero Emission Passenger Rail and Trail Project Update, Alignment Horizontal Clearances, and Right-of-Way Setbacks

Dear Members of the Regional Transportation Commission:

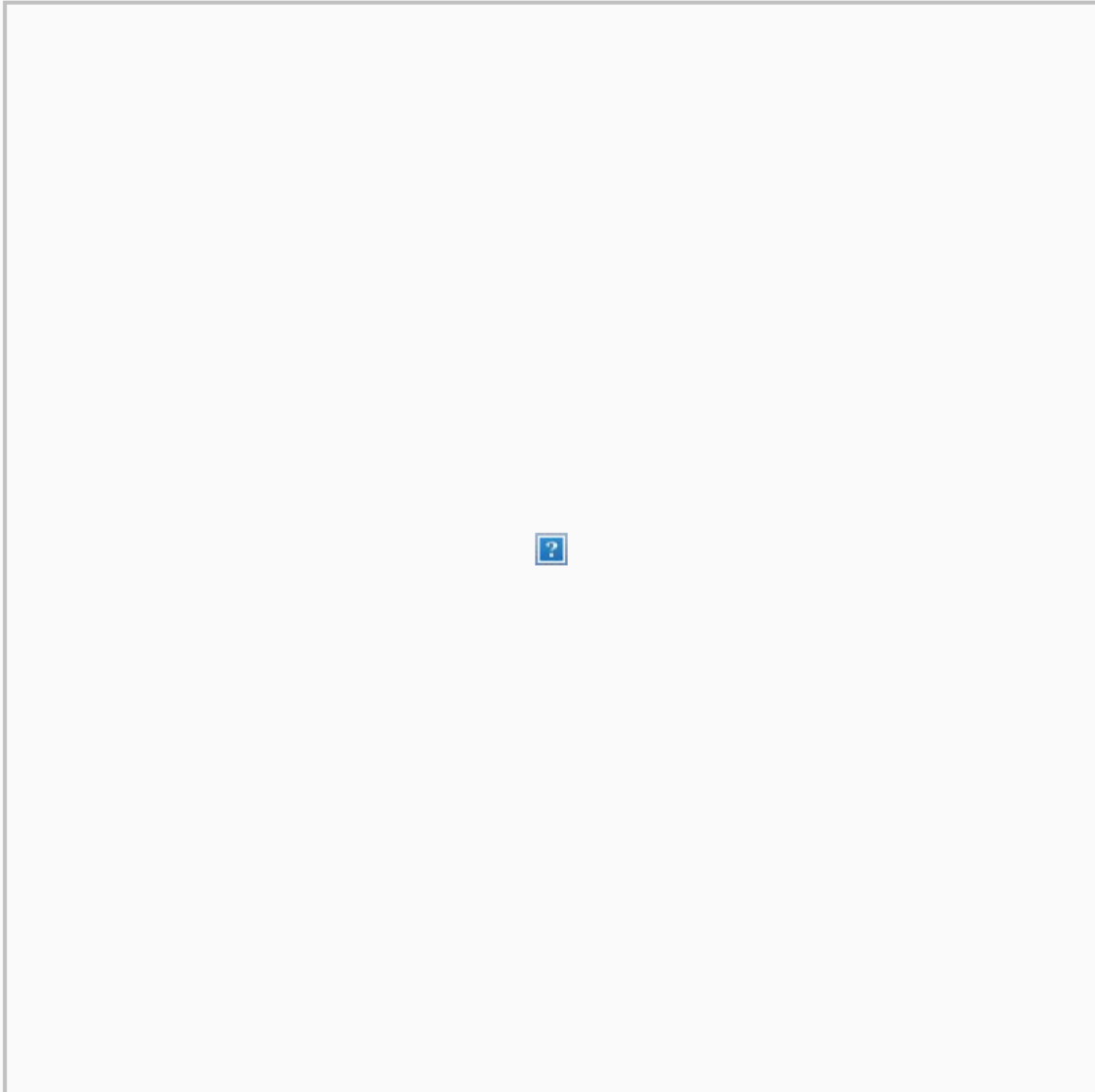
I would like to request that this Agenda item be continued to a future RTC meeting in order to allow for input from the Commission's Interagency Technical Advisory Committee and other RTC advisory committees; to allow for consultation and preliminary review of the various and significant design issues presented herein by Planning and Public Works staff of local jurisdictions along the rail corridor (the County and the Cities of Capitola, Santa Cruz and Watsonville); to allow significant errors in the staff report to be corrected, in particular relating to appropriate rail transit vehicle speeds while traversing various parts of the corridor and the need (or not) for a maintenance road to be added into the design; to allow for consultation and preliminary review with local jurisdictions responsible for overseeing development of the Trail within their jurisdictions (County, Santa Cruz, Watsonville); to allow for consultation with local jurisdictions about appropriate setbacks for new development as may occur in the future along the rail corridor; to allow for consideration of ways to minimize project cost while also accomplishing project objectives; and finally, to allow for appropriate context and background information to be introduced prior to RTC consideration of these significant decisions in the development of the Zero Emission Passenger Rail + Trail Project.

Thank you very much for your consideration of this request.

- Linda Wilshusen  
SCCRTC Executive Director, 1985-2005

**From:** [Trail Now](#)  
**To:** [Regional Transportation Commission](#)  
**Subject:** Setback Requirements close Ultimate Trail  
**Date:** Saturday, April 27, 2024 5:16:24 AM

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**RTC Meeting Agenda #29: Zero Emissions Passenger Rail and Trail Project Update, Alignment Horizontal Clearances, and Right of Way Setbacks**

On Thursday, May 2<sup>nd</sup> (9 am) the Santa Cruz County Regional Transportation Commission (RTC) will be discussing rail and trail setback requirements. Here is the meeting agenda:

[SANTA CRUZ COUNTY REGIONAL TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION \(sccrtc.org\)](https://www.sccrtc.org)

Rail consultants have reported that a new passenger train would require speeds up to 60 MPH to achieve travel time requirements from Watsonville to Santa Cruz. The topographical constraints of the Branch Line pose challenges in achieving the desired passenger rail service speeds while also allowing for a trail. The Project must meet the regulatory requirements of the California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC) which requires a 12-foot minimum horizontal clearance from the railroad centerline to the trail for the proposed passenger rail service. The current Ultimate Trail design has a setback of 8.5 feet from the railroad centerline, making it non-compliant to CPUC requirements, meaning the Ultimate Trail will have to be relocated or permanently closed to accommodate a future passenger rail system. Conclusion is that the Ultimate Trail would only be temporary.

As the rail consultants continue to bring forward design requirements for a future passenger rail system, the facts continue to prove that the most sensible approach to building the Coastal Trail today is to move forward with the Optional Interim Trail.

### **SUPPORT TRAIL NOW**

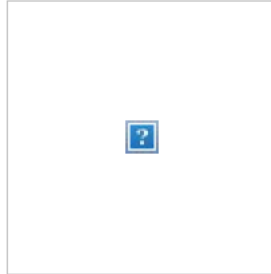
Donations to Trail Now help support our advocacy of building the Coastal Trail in a timely, cost effective and eco-friendly manner. Please consider donating to Trail Now at <https://www.trailnow.org/donate>.



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**From:** [Brian Peoples](#)  
**To:** [Regional Transportation Commission](#)  
**Subject:** Statement for Agenda #29 Thursday May 2 meeting  
**Date:** Monday, April 29, 2024 3:13:59 PM  
**Attachments:** [image.png](#)

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RTC,

Rail consultants have stated that in order to meet the travel time requirements from Watsonville to Santa Cruz, a new passenger train would need to reach speeds of up to 60 MPH. However, the topographical challenges of the Branch Line make it difficult to achieve these desired speeds while also accommodating a trail. The passenger rail must adhere to the regulatory guidelines set by the California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC), which mandates a minimum horizontal clearance of 12 feet from the railroad centerline to the trail for the proposed passenger rail service. Unfortunately, the current design of the Ultimate Trail falls short of meeting this requirement, with a setback of only 8.5 feet from the railroad-centerline. As a result, the Ultimate Trail will either need to be relocated or permanently closed to make way for a future passenger rail system. The RTC/County's planned Ultimate Trail, funded by the CTC Grant, is not intended to be permanent and will have to be closed or relocated to accommodate the future rail service.

The fact is, there are several reasons why a new passenger rail system will never be feasible along the Santa Cruz Branchline. However, our point to CTC Grant fund administrators is, the RTC/County is spending millions more for a substandard and narrow trail (Ultimate Trail) when a wider and more accessible trail (Interim Trail) can be constructed at a fraction of the cost and in a more environmentally friendly manner. Furthermore, it is worth mentioning that some rail advocates falsely claim that the CTC requirements from Prop 116 funding, which was used to purchase the rail line, necessitate the existence of a rail system on the Santa Cruz Branchline. However, a letter from the CTC in 2015 (attached) clarifies that the RTC has the option to return the \$11 million funds (Prop 116 funding) and utilize the Santa Cruz Branchline for any useful purpose.

In addition to the false claims that rail must exist on the Santa Cruz Branchline, rail advocates continue to falsely claim that implementing the federal railbanking process would be blocked by Progressive Rail and Roaring Camp. In 2019, Progressive Rail sent a letter to RTC stating that "their rail operations would not be harmed by tracks west of MP 3.0 being out of service", meaning railbanking from Watsonville to Santa Cruz has no impact on Progressive Rail operations and there would be no justification to block railbanking. Roaring Camp operates an amusement park train ride from Felton to Santa Cruz Boardwalk and has no freight operations along the railline from Watsonville to Felton that would justify keeping the old railroad tracks. In addition, the existing railroad trestles along the Branchline from Watsonville to Santa Cruz have been out of service for years and can not be used for freight without major repairs and replacements of the trestles. As former RTC Executive Director Guy Preston stated multiple times, implementing the federal railbanking process is needed to preserve the Branchline as a transportation resource for the County and would be approved by the Surface Transportation Board.

We are asking the CTC Grant administrators to not allow the RTC/County to misuse CTC funds for the Ultimate Trail that is based on incorrect assumption of how the Santa Cruz Branchline can be used.

Please help us stop this waste of time and tax dollars by Santa Cruz public officials and let's build the Santa Cruz Coastal Trail that can be built in a timely, cost effective and eco-friendly manner.

Best regards,

Brian Peoples

