

From: Thomas D. [mailto:tdobrovo@cisco.com]
Sent: Sunday, February 22, 2004 10:21 AM
To: Santa Cruz County Regional Transportation Commission
Cc: ellen.pirie@co.santa-cruz.ca.us
Subject: Public Hearing > Recreational Rail EIR and Use of Proposition 116 Funds

February 22, 2004

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

Dear SCCRTC:

Regarding the Tourist Trolley, branch line rail right-of-way, and rail trail.

I will not be in town to attend the March 4th meeting, but I respectfully request that my comments be made part of the record.

The Tourist Trolley is a foolish waste of money to pursue in any form, and all expenditures of resources toward this issue should be stopped. In addition to spending money on a project that would be better spent on other projects, the Tourist Trolley exposes all the taxpayers of in Santa Cruz County to future liabilities that are risky and potentially expensive.

It amazes me that the State of California does not see the Tourist Trolley for what it is, a smoke-and-mirrors effort to leverage a loophole. It is another case of a few who seek benefit by making the most "noise," without consideration of the burden it places on the rest of those involved.

I do support the desire to acquire the branch line rail right-of-way for use as a rail trail. Ellen Pirie's proposal to include the branch line rail right-of-way acquisition in the Highway One Widening project, paid for by the sales tax increase is reasonable and logical. A tax increase is never welcome, but widening is necessary, the costs would be known in advance, and Santa Cruz County would own the branch rail right-of-way without strings.

I urge you to STOP the Tourist Trolley and find another way to acquire the branch rail right-of-way.

Regards,

Thomas Dobrovolny
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Aptos, CA 95003
831.689.0220
tdobrovo@cisco.com

From: Andrew Horne [mailto:andrew@pricehorne.com]

Sent: Sunday, February 22, 2004 2:01 PM

To: 'Dennis Norton'

Cc: BDS020@co.santa-cruz.ca.us; ereilly@ci.santa-cruz.ca.us; BDS034@co.santa-cruz.ca.us; paspense@charter.net; hubback@msn.com; rdelapaz@ci.watsonville.ca.us; tony.campos@co.sant-cruz.ca.us; linda.wilshusen@co.santa-cruz.ca.us; jan.beautz@co.santa-cruz.ca.us

Subject: RE: Feasibility of rails with trail from a safety perspective

Dennis

Thanks. I am on a trip at the moment but will stop into the RTC office when I get back. Can you clarify whether these are detailed maps on a parcel by parcel basis. All I have been able to see so far is very high level which show the average width over large distances. Anyway, we seem to agree that the range is roughly from 30 feet to 50 feet. I will research the Seacliff area when I get back.

This does not really address my point that the Director of Crossing Safety, Railroad Commission of Texas and member of the Operation Lifesaver Program Development Council recommends "The more separation between the trail and the rails, the better. A minimum distance of 100 feet, heavy vegetation and serious fencing are three good ways to accomplish this."

30 feet to 50 feet width of the whole right of way is only 30% - 50% of the recommended safe distance between the tracks and the bike path.

I think it is also worth noting that there were 10 shippers on the line according to the woodside associates going concern valuation report in 1997 -- there is only one now. In the future, there may be no freight and we could have a bike path without trains if we buy the trail with the highway 1 tax money. If we have the rail project for the next 50 years, it would not be possible to have a pure bike trail.

Regards,

Andrew

From: Dennis Norton [mailto:dnortondesigns@msn.com]

Sent: Sunday, February 22, 2004 12:57 PM

To: andrew@pricehorne.com

Cc: BDS020@co.santa-cruz.ca.us; ereilly@ci.santa-cruz.ca.us; BDS034@co.santa-cruz.ca.us; paspense@charter.net; hubback@msn.com; rdelapaz@ci.watsonville.ca.us; tony.campos@co.sant-cruz.ca.us; linda.wilshusen@co.santa-cruz.ca.us; jan.beautz@co.santa-cruz.ca.us

Subject: Re: Feasibility of rails with trail from a safety perspective

Andrew, There are maps of the Corridor at the RTC office and you can access parcel maps thru any Realtor. There is no place in the Corridor that is narrower than 30 feet, that we could find. The vast majority of the Corridor in the proposed project area (Capitola to Aptos) is 40 feet wide, and thru Capitola it is 50, Aptos Village it is 40-50. There are very few areas that are 30 feet wide.

I have walked that corridor many times, but thanks for the invitation.

Thank You, Dennis Norton

>From: "Andrew Horne"

>To: "Dennis Norton"

>CC: ,,,,,,

>Subject: Re: Feasibility of rails with trail from a safety perspective

>Date: Fri, 20 Feb 2004 11:10:51 -0800

>

>Dennis

>

>Thanks for your quick response.

>

>I don't know how wide the right of way may be in Davenport -- but is definitely not that wide in Aptos. For example, it is only 30 feet wide behind my house in Rio Del Mar and it gets narrower in Seacliff. You are more than welcome to stop by and see for yourself.

>

>Please note that the Director of Crossing Safety, Railroad Commission of Texas and member of the Operation Lifesaver Program Development Council recommends "The more separation between the trail and the rails, the better. A minimum distance of 100 feet, heavy vegetation and serious fencing are three good ways to accomplish this." The 40 or even 50 feet you say comprises the "vast majority" of the corridor is less than half the recommended safe distance of 100 feet.

>

>The point is that there are safety issues regarding construction of a bike path that should be studied by the Commission. If it is possible to safely build a bike path next to the rails, fine. But, please note that a number of local residents have appeared at RTC meetings to say they think it is too narrow. To spend the money without even performing a bike feasibility study is reckless.

>

>Andrew

>

>

> ----- Original Message -----

> From: Dennis Norton

> To: andrew@pricehorne.com

> Cc: jan.beautz@co.santa-cruz.ca.us ; ereilly@ci.santa-cruz.ca.us ; BDS020@co.santa-cruz.ca.us ; Rando@aol.com ; paspence@charter.net ; BDS034@co.santa-cruz.ca.us ; tony.campos@co.santa-cruz.ca.us

> Sent: Friday, February 20, 2004 10:41 AM

> Subject: RE: Feasibility of rails with trail from a safety perspective

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> Andrew,

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> Please check your source!

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> The vast majority of the corridor in the project area is 40 feet wide and some portions are 50.

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> >From: "Andrew Horne"

> >To: ,,,",",","Jan Beautz" ,,

> >CC:

> >Subject: Feasibility of rails with trail from a safety perspective

> >Date: Fri, 20 Feb 2004 07:10:23 -0800

> >

> >Dear RTC Commissioners

> >

> >The risk of possible collisions between trains and potential bikers / pedestrians on the right of way has consistently been dismissed by Ms. Wilshusen. Below, please find a very informative article on the feasibility of rails with trails from a safety perspective. This is published on the American Trails website -- which is an advocate for the creation of trails. This article highlights the fact that numerous safety issues must be addressed in the planning and engineering of any trail in the vicinity of an active railroad line.

> >

> >You will be well aware that there is genuine public interest and support for a bike trail. Please also note that there is no real interest in a rail project other than as a means to buy the right of way to get the bike trail. The RTC has not yet performed any engineering, feasibility or environmental impact studies for a bike trail. The right of way in most of the proposed area for the train service is only 30 feet wide. If it turns out that it is not possible to build a bike trail due to safety concerns, how will you explain to the public why \$20+ million was expended for an unnecessary train service for tourists that we must continue for 50 years which will probably need to be subsidized from the Metro? Please act responsibly and study whether it is even possible to safely construct a bike trail before going any further.

> >

> >Thank you

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> >Andrew Horne

> >

> >Aptos

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> >Rails-With-Trails: A Progress Report

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> >From a rail safety perspective, how feasible are Rails-With-trails?

> >

> >By Carolyn E. Cook, Director of Crossing Safety, Railroad Commission of Texas and member of the Operation Lifesaver Program Development Council

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> >

> >Operation Lifesaver is the nation's only safety program to focus completely on highway-rail safety and railroad trespass prevention. As an employee of the Rail Division

of the Texas Railroad Commission, I also have the perspective of understanding railroad safety and the efforts made by the railroads, the Federal Railroad Administration and the more than 30 state rail safety programs to improve safety on the nation's railroads.

> >

> >Today, as we examine some issues related to establishing trails near active rail lines I would like to share information about the Operation Lifesaver program, and to provide an overview of the problem of railroad trespassing. I also want to include some information about rail safety and then I will only have time to mention a few of the many critical safety issues related to Rails-with-Trails. Finally, I'd like to share with you some thoughts on the potential for planning Rails-with-Trails projects to reduce the incidence of railroad trespassing.

> >

> > "Numerous safety issues must be addressed in the planning and engineering of any trail in the vicinity of an active railroad line."

> >Operation Lifesaver is a federation of 49 state programs under the leadership of Operation Lifesaver Inc. which has established a National Support Center in Alexandria, VA. For 27 years, the program has been educating people about the dangers at highway-rail intersections and on railroad rights-of-way.

> >

> >During that time period, the program has matured and today we have more than 2,000 certified presenters and recently revised print materials and educational videos designed for a variety of audiences. We talk to children, youth and adult audiences including school bus drivers, truckers, Emergency Medical Service personnel and law enforcement officers. Operation Lifesaver even has a web-site you can find at www.oli.org.

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> >Since 1980, the railroad industry has experienced a renaissance due to deregulation. Today, the U.S. has 147,055 miles of railroad track in operation. Rail traffic is booming. In 1997, the U.S. rail industry handled 39 percent of the nation's intercity freight traffic and rail was the predominant mode of transportation for coal, grain and new motor vehicles.

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> >While the number of casualties at railroad crossings has decreased significantly with the help of the public education efforts of Operation Lifesaver, the number of railroad trespassing casualties has steadily increased until in 1997 there were more deaths due to trespassing than due to vehicle-train collisions.

> >

> >In this decade, however, with the increase in train traffic, the trespass casualty rate per one million train miles operated has actually declined from 1.81 in 1990 to 1.54 in 1998.

> >

> >Still, between 1990 and 1998 an average of 1,025 people each year have been killed or seriously injured in railroad trespassing incidents. It certainly appears that far too many children, youth and adults do not know that railroad tracks and railroad bridges are private railroad property nor do they adequately perceive the extreme dangers of walking along tracks, hopping rail cars, crawling over and through stopped trains, and cutting through railroad yards. These activities are not only highly dangerous, they constitute illegal trespassing. According to a study done by the Federal Railroad Administration (April 1998), railroad trespassing is specifically prohibited by state law in about 30 states

with the remaining states and the District of Columbia lacking laws applying specifically to railroad property. All but nine states do have laws specifically prohibiting vandalism of railroad property. However, many of the state laws in effect incorporate weak penalties such as fines of \$10-\$100 for a first offense trespassing charge. Vandalism offenses are often treated as mere traffic infractions though the potential for serious injury and property damage is surely great with the tampering of any railroad property.

> >

> >Though the Operation Lifesaver program has always addressed the dangers of railroad trespassing activities, about three years ago, Operation Lifesaver began to develop additional programming to help deter the growing incidence of railroad trespassing. Three public service announcements created in cooperation with the Association of American railroads have been designed to change railroad trespassing behavior and they are being used in media campaigns in many states.

> >

> >Though we have no information on the actual extent of railroad trespassing, railroads indicate that in many areas, trespassing causes a constant nuisance and stress to train crews who can't possibly know if the trespassers see or hear the train and will move out of the way in time to avoid being hit.

> >

> >Who are these trespassers? Federal Railroad Administration's trespass casualty data does not include gender, age and racial demographics so we don't know for sure, but anecdotal information tells us that it is people from all walks of life, young and old.

> >

> >Between 1995 and 1998, Texas led the nation in trespassing casualties with an average of 128 casualties per year. California ranked second with 120 casualties. These two states had nearly twice as many casualties as the third ranked state of Illinois which had an average of 67 casualties per year. An interesting fact is that in 1997, railroads in the state of Illinois actually hauled 36 percent more carloads than in Texas and 56 percent more carloads than in the state of California . Recently the FRA has been able to provide statewide data with the county location of trespass casualties. Consider that the counties in both of these states with the highest trespass casualties tend to be near the border. The railroads have been dealing with the serious problem of illegal immigrants trespassing on trains for many years now. Last year, six were killed in one incident in South Texas as they slept on the tracks. At railroad border crossings in Texas, the Union Pacific Railroad has had a canine team working to sniff out thousands of illegal stowaways each month.

> >

> >Another serious problem for railroads has been with transients, hobos and felons who use trains for transportation as well as to elude the law. Finally another group that could be driving the trespass casualty numbers up are those who deliberately use trains as a way to commit suicide. If ruled a suicide the incident is not included in the FRA trespass casualty data, but it is often difficult to know a person's intention in such cases.

> >

> >How safe are the railroads in general? In recent years, railroads have certainly become a much safer place for their employees to work. Between 1990 and 1998, train accidents (which include derailments and train-train collisions, explosions and other equipment impacts) declined by 11% in the U.S. and since their peak in 1978 with 11,277 accidents, train accidents, by 1998 (when 2,575 accidents occurred) were down by 77 percent.

> >

> > Yet railroad operations still abound with potential hazards to both employees and anyone who comes too close to a train. On mainline track, an average train today weighs more than 12 million pounds and traveling at 55 mph will take a mile or more to come to a stop once the engineer begins emergency braking. Derailments are always a danger since they can be caused by problems with track or equipment, improper train handling or other human error as well as vandalism to track or equipment. Another cause of derailments is vehicle-train collisions such as the one which resulted in the recent Amtrak derailment in Bourbonnais, IL. This collision, resulting in the death of 11 Amtrak passengers, was caused by a truck driver's failure to yield the right of way to the train at the crossing.

> >

> > From a rail safety perspective, how feasible are Rails-With-trails? Certainly, the mainline track of the large Class I railroads are not a safe environment for a Rail-with-Trail. There is simply too much high speed train traffic on these cross-country routes. Most of the time railroads simply wouldn't want a trail near a mainline due to the numerous safety concerns. There are a few Rails-With-Trails that have been built near mainline track, however, the majority have been built near lighter density lines involving fewer trains and reduced train speeds.

> >

> > Numerous safety issues must be addressed in the planning and engineering of any trail in the vicinity of an active railroad line. Among the most important safety considerations to address is that the shared corridors must have physical barriers for the purposes of (1) preventing trespassers from crossing or putting things on the tracks, or vandalizing signals, switches or other railroad property, (2) to shield trail users from flying debris such as ballast rock or loose cargo straps, chains and other material from the train, (3) to shield train crew and other trail users from flying debris thrown by trail users. The more separation between the trail and the rails, the better. A minimum distance of 100 feet, heavy vegetation and serious fencing are three good ways to accomplish this. Using all three of these would provide the greatest safety.

> >

> > What potential might an adjacent public trail have on reducing trespassing on an active rail line? Between 1995 and 1998, 81 percent of the trespassing casualties have occurred on Class I railroad track. This, however, is not a measure of the incidence of railroad trespassing. Certainly by providing the public a viable alternative route, rail trespassing could be reduced along adjacent tracks. For example, if people are using the tracks to avoid motor vehicle traffic or for recreational pursuits such as jogging or strolling, then a trail would likely be preferable to tracks. A safe trail could be designed to meet many of the needs of people who otherwise would use the tracks as a route to travel. Each case is going to be different as communities and their people are quite culturally diverse.

> >

> > The first step in any Rails-With-Trails planning process ought to be to talk with the railroad involved. They will know a lot about the type of trespassing that is going on in specific areas along their tracks. Remember, they are the experts on their railroad and many of the railroads would welcome community efforts to help reduce trespassing on their tracks. Safety though, must be carefully engineered and planned for, otherwise no railroad is going to be interested in sharing their corridor with a trail.

> >

> > June 25, 1999

From: JUUDY@aol.com [mailto:JUUDY@aol.com]
Sent: Saturday, February 21, 2004 11:00 AM
To: info@sccrtc.org
Subject: Public Hearing

To the Regional Transportation Commission:

When we saw the current Highway One freeway being built in the 60's, many thought that it was a waste of time and would never be used to capacity.

We are now faced with recreational rail expansion and some folks are saying the same thing. I disagree. In fact, I hope this is a first step toward safe, economic and environmentally friendly commuter transportation between Watsonville and Santa Cruz with stops in-between. It is time that we looked at public transportation as the only option available to us if we are to preserve the future of the planet. Any money spent on furthering this project is money well spent.

Sincerely,

Judy Parsons
4453 Fairway Drive
Soquel, CA 95073

From: Sylvia Previtali [mailto:sylvia@ix.netcom.com]
Sent: Saturday, February 21, 2004 3:05 PM
To: ellen.pirie@co.santa-cruz.ca.us; dnortondesigns@msn.com; info@sccrtc.org;
jan.beautz@co.santa-cruz.ca.us; mwormhardt@co.santa-cruz.ca.us; tony.campos@co.santa-cruz.ca.us; keoghs1@pacbell.net; paspence@charter.net; ranndo@aol.com;
rdelapaz@ci.watsonville.ca.us; linda.wilshusen@co.santa-cruz.ca.us; ereilly@ci.santa-cruz.ca.us;
mark.stone@co.santa-cruz.ca.us; ranndo@aol.com
Subject: FYI Article trolley service San Diego

By Jeff Ristine
UNION-TRIBUNE STAFF WRITER
linda.wilshusen@co.santa-cruz.ca.us
February 17, 2004

Toll roads and express bus services would work better to relieve traffic congestion than the San Diego Trolley and other urban rail systems, says a report from a Los Angeles policy group.

The trolley did "almost nothing" to relieve a buildup of congestion in the 1990s, said Randal O'Toole, author of a report released yesterday by the Reason Foundation, a leading voice in the libertarian movement.

"The best way to expand capacity and relieve congestion is through some sort of toll lanes," O'Toole said in an interview. "One mile of freeway lane will carry a lot more people than one mile of a light-rail line . . . and cost far less."

But Gary Gallegos, who heads San Diego's regional planning and transportation agency, said no single solution would work well everywhere.

"I think you have to look at it corridor by corridor and case by case," said Gallegos, executive director of the San Diego Association of Governments. "We need a combination of things."

Titled "Great Rail Disasters: The Impact of Rail Transit on Urban Livability," the Reason Foundation report profiles San Diego and 28 other U.S. cities that have or are planning light-or heavy-rail transit systems. Besides faulting the cost-effectiveness of the systems, the report says the environmental benefits of rail transit have been overblown.

"Rail transit has had negative net impacts on every urban area in which it is located," said the report, whose cover carries an illustration of a train wreck.

The report singled out San Diego for the trolley's low operating cost, compared to buses, and the city got one of the best scores in the group's "rail livability index," which considers factors such as ridership growth and energy costs compared to cars.

But in a backhanded compliment, it added, that "some say (San Diego) has the nation's least disastrous light-rail line."

The report said freeways would be more cost-effective than expanding light rail, but Gallegos said the construction figure used for the comparison \$10 million per freeway lane mile is too low for much of San Diego.

The report said while many voters expect rail transit to reduce congestion, drivers in San Diego and most other cities with rail systems are spending more time in traffic.

Gallegos didn't dispute that traffic has gotten worse in San Diego over the last decade, but he said congestion-relief projects suffered from the statewide recession of the early 1990s and from making costly seismic retrofitting of the state's bridges a transportation priority.

As cost-effective alternatives to rail projects, the Reason Foundation advocates bus rapid transit systems and special high-occupancy/toll freeway lanes, which San Diego either plans to have or already has.

Bus rapid transit is a service placing comfortable, easy-to-board vehicles on dedicated lanes on city streets and highways with enhanced stations replacing nondescript bus stops.

The Metropolitan Transit System had hoped to introduce the concept here by 2006 on a route from San Diego State University to downtown, but cutbacks in state transportation funding have made the timing uncertain.

Bus rapid transit also is being planned as part of an expansion of the Interstate 15 express lanes from Rancho Peñasquitos to Escondido.

The Reason Foundation report hails the San Diego Trolley's downtown-to-San Ysidro route, completed in 1981, as "the most successful U.S. rail transit line built in the last 50 years." Constructed mainly on an existing railroad line, its \$7 million-per-mile cost seems like a bargain today, it said.

It also said operating costs in San Diego are less than half the national average for light rail.

But it noted construction and operating costs for other lines in the trolley system have risen, especially once federal money began to be used, and the lines have attracted fewer riders.

The trolley system is building an extension from Mission Valley to La Mesa, projected to cost \$496 million and open in May 2005. An extension from Old Town to UC San Diego and University City is on the drawing boards and last week was recommended for funding by the U.S. Department of Transportation in fiscal 2005; local officials considered but ultimately rejected bus rapid transit as an alternative for the Interstate 5 corridor.

The North County Transit District plans a light-rail line, the Sprinter, between Oceanside and Escondido, at a projected cost of \$352 million.

The complete text of the foundation's report is online at
<http://www.rppi.org/index.shtml>