

AGENDA: January 20, 2005

TO: SCCRTC – Transportation Policy Workshop
FROM: Karena Pushnik, Senior Transportation Planner
RE: Information on Recreational Rail Service Options

RECOMMENDATIONS:

This item is for information only.

BACKGROUND

At the January 6, 2005 Regional Transportation Commission (RTC) meeting, some Commissioners expressed interest in holding a Transportation Policy Workshop (TPW) meeting on January 20, 2005 to discuss the recreational rail service between Capitola and Aptos with an extension to Seascapes project and other previously identified passenger rail options. At the end of the January 6, 2005 meeting, the Chair said that she would work with staff to develop the agenda for the January 20, TPW meeting. RTC staff worked with the chair to develop the agenda for the meeting.

DISCUSSION

Over the last two years the Regional Transportation Commission (RTC) has prepared a number of analyses and made a series of decisions about the Recreational Rail project, including allocating funds to the project. Many of these analyses and decisions were specific to the Capitola to Aptos/Seascapes segment. Attachment 1 is a history of the project. Key milestones include March 2003 when the Commission released the *Santa Cruz Branch Line Intra-County Recreational Rail Options Preliminary Analysis* report (see Attachment 2). At an evening public hearing in May 2003, the Commission approved the preparation of a Proposition 116 application with an operating plan for recreational rail service between Capitola and Aptos with an extension to Seascapes and the initiation of an environmental impact report for the same project. In May 2004, the Commission released the *Draft Environmental Impact Report* for a 60-day public review period. A draft *Business Plan* for acquisition of the Santa Cruz Branch Rail Line was released in August 2004. The RTC decided to revise the DEIR for recreational rail service for the Capitola/Seascapes segment based on information from the draft *Business Plan*, revised noise impacts and to incorporate responses to issues raised. The Revised DEIR is due to be released for a 60-day comment period in February.

Over the last fifteen years, the RTC has directed staff and consultants to analyze the feasibility of various passenger rail options. A list of completed and pending reports regarding passenger rail service options as well as acquisition reports was included as Appendix B of the *Draft Business Plan* released in August 2004. A copy is attached (Attachment 3). Copies of past passenger rail reports will be available for review at the Policy Workshop.

SUMMARY

At its January 6, 2005 meeting, the Regional Transportation Commission expressed interest in holding a January 20, 2005 TPW meeting to discuss Recreational Rail for the segment between Capitola and Aptos with an extension to Seascapes and to review previously identified passenger rail options. Historical information about the RTC decisions regarding recreational rail service thus far is provided ([Attachment 1](#)). The *Santa Cruz Branch Line Intra-County Recreational Rail Options Preliminary Analysis* report analyzing four recreational rail service options is included as [Attachment 2](#) and [Attachment 3](#) includes the summary of completed rail analyses included in the August 2004 *Business Plan*.

Attachment 1 History of the Recreational Rail Service Project

Attachment 2 *Santa Cruz Branch Line Intra-County Recreational Rail Options Preliminary Analysis* report – March 2003

Attachment 3 Summary of Completed and Pending Rail Reports included in the *Draft Business Plan*, August 2004

Attachment 1

History of the Recreational Rail Service Project

January 2005

October 2001 - Approved the 2001 Regional Transportation Plan which included the following policies related to recreational rail:

- Prohibit use of existing railroad rights-of-way which would prevent their use for rail or transit purposes in the future
- Retain the option of future in-county passenger rail service for when it is financially feasible, acceptable to the community, and only after completion of an environmental impact report that concludes that all the significant impacts can be satisfactorily mitigated. (*there is no similar policy for other transportation modes in the RTP*)
- Encourage private transit service for visitor-serving trips.
- Use the existing rail line for recreational/coastal access to minimize visitor impact on local streets and highways

March 2003 – Released the *Santa Cruz Branch Line Intra-County Recreational Rail Options Preliminary Analysis* report (Attachment 2). This report -- prepared by consultants at the direction of the RTC --evaluated the following four Recreational Rail scenarios for their potential operating characteristics, economic analysis (revenues/expenses) and ridership:

- Capitola Village - Aptos Village
- Santa Cruz – Capitola Village
- Santa Cruz – Davenport
- Santa Cruz – Junction of Highway 1 and Highway 9

April 2003 – The RTC authorized staff to develop a draft Proposition 116 application for acquisition of the Santa Cruz Branch Rail Line and including an operations plan for recreational rail service, selected the segment between Capitola and Aptos with an extension to Seascapes for recreational rail service as the preferred option for the Proposition 116 application, directed staff to develop a draft scope of work for an environmental impact report (EIR) for the Capitola-Aptos/Seascapes recreational rail service, and set an evening public hearing for May 1, 2003 to obtain input on submitting a Proposition 116 application.

May 2003 - At an advertised Public Hearing the RTC determined:

“the Capitola to Aptos recreational passenger rail service option is to be included in the rail-operating plan of the draft Uniform Transit Application for Proposition 116 funds for acquisition of the Santa Cruz Branch Rail Line ROW and associated capital costs of establishing limited recreational rail service and to be included in the environmental impact report/environmental review process and to authorize staff to release the Request for Proposals for the Environmental Impact Report (EIR).”

June 2003 – A pre-proposal conference for the recreational rail service EIR was held and proposals were submitted. The RTC designated an evaluation committee and directed the

Committee to review proposals, interview consultants and make a recommendation to the RTC. RTC initiated work on a Project Study Report by RTC consultant, Bob Scott for the proposed Capitola-Aptos recreational rail service to better define the project and aid the EIR development. RTC was also informed that new appraisals for the acquisition were required by Caltrans.

August 2003 – RTC approved a resolution authorizing the Executive Director to submit a Proposition 116 application for pre-acquisition activities. RTC reviewed and approved a draft Proposition 116 application for submittal with an operating plan for recreational rail service between Capitola and Aptos with an extension to Seascap. The CTC approved the RTC's Proposition 116 application. RTC directed staff to revise the draft *Preliminary Project Report for Passenger Platforms and Related Improvements to the Santa Cruz Branch Line for Recreational Rail Service*. RTC authorized the negotiation of a contract with Public Affairs Management to prepare an EIR for the Capitola-Aptos/Seascap Recreational Rail Service for \$85,000.

September 2003 – RTC accepted the revised *Preliminary Project Report for Passenger Platforms and Related Improvements to the Santa Cruz Branch Line for Recreational Rail Service*. This report – prepared by the RTC's technical engineering consultant, Robert Scott, Registered Civil Engineer – included preliminary engineering and cost estimates for the segment between Capitola and Aptos with an extension to Seascap. The report outlined the standard platform design, maintenance and storage facilities, specific detailed platform descriptions for six stations (Cliff Drive, Capitola, New Brighton, Seacliff, Aptos Village and Seascap), type of train vehicle proposed, crossing information and costs. RTC approved a public notification strategy for the RTC's two major projects: the Highway 1 Widening/HOV Lane and the Santa Cruz Branch Rail Line right-of-Way Acquisition, Recreational Rail, Coastal Rail Trail projects. The strategy includes mailing over 10,000 letters on the rail projects with a notice for the Recreational Rail EIR scoping meeting.

October 2003 – RTC reviewed and released the Initial Study and Notice of Preparation for the Capitola to Seascap Recreational Rail Service EIR for a 30 day public review period. RTC mailed Scoping Meeting notices for the Capitola to Seascap Recreational Rail Service EIR to everyone living within 500 feet of the rail line and ¼ mile of the proposed stations on the Capitola-Aptos/Seascap segment.

November 2003 – RTC held a public scoping meeting on the evening of November 6, 2003 at the Seacliff Inn. It was attended by about 200 people.

December 2003 – RTC received comments submitted on the Capitola- Aptos/Seascap Recreational Rail Service EIR Initial Study and Notice of Preparation. RTC confirmed the project alternatives for the EIR and approved using \$6,000 for visual simulations for a demonstration train.

January 2004 – RTC accepted a summary of the comments on the Initial Study and Notice of Preparation for an EIR for the Capitola-Aptos/Seascap Recreational Rail Service, and decided to hold a public hearing on whether or not to proceed with the EIR for the Capitola to Seascap Recreational Rail Service and the intended application for Proposition 116 funding.

February 2004 – RTC adopted a resolution confirming that the RTC is prohibited from using Transportation Development Act (TDA) funds to subsidize or fund ongoing operation of recreational rail service. The RTC also approved \$5,250 to make all the necessary arrangements for a rail diesel car demonstration, contingent on the demo running in the Capitola/Aptos corridor.

March 2004 – RTC held an evening public hearing and confirmed its intent to proceed with the EIR for the Capitola -Aptos/Seascape Recreational Rail Service and the application for Proposition 116 funding for the rail line acquisition.

April 2004 – RTC received a report about the infeasibility of pursuing a demonstration train at that time and decided not to pursue visual simulations for the DEIR on Recreational Rail between Capitola and Aptos with an Extension to Seascape.

May 2004 – RTC released the *Draft Environmental Impact Report* (DEIR) for a 60-day review period.

June 2004 – RTC Held a Public Hearing on the DEIR.

July 2004 – Comments were due on the DEIR. RTC received 66 comments totaling over 300 pages. A number of the comment letters are detailed; some 35 or more pages in length, and threaten legal action.

August 2004 – RTC released the draft *Santa Cruz Branch Line Business Plan* with operations information specific to recreational rail service for the segment between Capitola and Aptos with an extension to Seascape.

December 2004 – RTC approved a plan to release a revised DEIR for the Capitola-Aptos/Seascape segment to include the draft *Santa Cruz Branch Line Business Plan* option and a revised noise section.