

AGENDA: April 6, 2006

TO: Regional Transportation Commission/Transportation Policy Workshop
FROM: Luis Pavel Mendez, Deputy Director
RE: Santa Cruz Branch Rail Line Acquisition Project – Status Report

RECOMMENDATIONS

This item is for information only.

BACKGROUND

The Regional Transportation Commission (RTC) has been working on acquisition of the Santa Cruz Branch Rail Line (Branch Line) since March 2001. A number of reports and steps must be completed before the RTC can make a final decision on acquisition of the Branch Line and to obtain the necessary approvals from the relevant funding and regulatory agencies. At its April 6, 2006 meeting, the RTC received a summary status report of the various reports and tasks, considered additional inspections and reports needed, and approved a revised timeline (Attachment 1) for the project.

DISCUSSION

Additional Inspections and Reports

As directed, staff is working with the Rail Acquisition Task Force (RATF) to develop a cost and funding plan for the additional inspection of the Branch Line suggested by Commissioners Pirie and Norton. As directed by the RTC, the suggestion on two letters from members of the public regarding a feasibility study on a bicycle and pedestrian trail along the rail line, will be before the RTC in May along with an overall report on the Coastal Trails project.

Detailed Structural Assessment

As reported orally at the April 6, 2006 RTC meeting, HNTB engineers have completed their field work of the structures included in the detailed structural assessment. On their field work, engineers climbed structures as necessary to take measurements of various structure components and inspected recent repairs. HNTB engineers also inspected some of the structures under load conditions as a train was going past. The load and seismic analyses are currently under way and the final report is expected in June 2006.

Coastal Conservancy Reimbursable Grant

At its December 2005 meeting, the Coastal Conservancy approved a \$10 million reimbursable grant for acquisition of the Branch Line to cover the \$10 million in State Transportation Improvement Program funds programmed to the project and potentially unavailable when the RTC is ready to purchase the Branch Line. Some of the Coastal Conservancy funds must be encumbered in an agreement by June 30, 2006 to ensure that the funds are not lost. Staff received a draft reimbursable grant agreement from the Coastal Conservancy and is currently reviewing it. Staff and consultants will work with the RATF on any potential language changes and present the draft agreement to the RTC with recommendations in May.

Rail Acquisition Task Force

At the April 6, 2006 RTC meeting, Commissioner Keogh suggested that it may not be necessary for the Rail Acquisition Task Force (RATF) to continue. Attachment 2 is a letter from Commissioner Keogh with a recommendation to abandon the RATF. At its April 10, 2006 meeting, the RATF discussed possibilities for accommodating the participation of other members of the RTC or the entire RTC in the RATF. Christopher Cheleden from the County Counsel's office was present at the meeting and the RATF requested that County Counsel provide an analysis on the possibilities discussed. Once the information on the various possibilities is provided, staff will include it with a staff report to the RTC for discussion.

SUMMARY

Staff is working with the RATF to develop a cost and funding plan for an additional inspection of the Branch Line. The load and seismic analysis for structures included in the detailed structural assessment are currently under way. Staff will work with the RATF on the draft Coastal Conservancy reimbursable grant agreement. The RATF requested an analysis from County Counsel on the possibilities for accommodating the participation of other RTC members in the RATF meetings.

Attachment 1: Santa Cruz Branch Rail Line Acquisition Project Timeline

Attachment 2: Letter from Commissioners Keogh Recommending Abandoning the Rail Acquisition Task Force

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