



Santa Cruz County Regional Transportation Commission Santa Cruz Branch Rail Line Acquisition

Fact Sheet

August 2009

Based on a multi-year analysis of the Watsonville to Santa Cruz corridor, the Santa Cruz County Regional Transportation Commission (RTC) decided to pursue the acquisition of the Santa Cruz Branch Rail Line right-of-way for preservation and future transportation uses. Future transportation uses could include bicycle and pedestrian facilities and passenger service (rail, bus). Freight rail service will continue on the line under any scenario.

Right-of Way Description

The rail right-of-way parallels Highway 1 and extends 31.8 miles from the town of Pajaro in Monterey County, to Davenport in north Santa Cruz County (map on reverse). The right-of-way is generally 50 to 60 feet wide. There are 37 bridges and trestles along the right-of-way, including major crossings of the Pajaro River, Highway 1, Soquel Creek, the Santa Cruz Yacht Harbor and the San Lorenzo River. Land uses adjacent to the rail line include residential, commercial, industrial, agricultural and park land/open space. The right-of-way links major tourism and activity centers as it traverses downtown Watsonville, Aptos Village, Capitola Village and the Santa Cruz Beach area near downtown Santa Cruz. Also adjacent to the rail right-of-way are many state/local parks and recreational facilities, including: Manresa State Beach, Seacliff State Beach, New Brighton State Park, Sompkins Swim Center, Santa Cruz Yacht Harbor, Natural Bridges State Park and Wilder Ranch State Park. The rail line provides access to the Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary at several key locations.

Cost of Acquisition and Funding

In December 2004, Union Pacific (UP) and the RTC agreed on a tentative purchase price of \$19 million for the entire right-of-way. In August 2008, after completing some due diligence work, the RTC and UP agreed on a new purchase price of \$14.2 million with a requirement that the RTC make some improvements to the rail line. The final purchase price, terms and conditions will depend on both the completed assessment of the condition of the line and negotiations with Union Pacific.

The RTC plans to use \$10 million in State Transportation Improvement Program (STIP) funds and \$11 million in Proposition 116 funds for pre-acquisition activities, the purchase, and improvements to the rail right-of-way. The California Transportation Commission (CTC) will consider allocation of these funds in the fall of 2009. In addition to STIP and Proposition 116 funds, Congressman Sam Farr obtained a \$1.5 million federal earmark for the project in 2003 and the RTC has been using local funds for the pre-acquisition work.

Status of Activities

The RTC, with the aid of a consultant, is engaged in active negotiations with Union Pacific. The final purchase price, terms and conditions will depend on many factors including the cost of repairs and improvements necessary to continue freight operations within the available funds.

Over the past few years, the RTC has been conducting pre-acquisition activities including appraisals, structures assessments, title review, and hazardous materials assessments. In April 2002 the RTC completed environmental review for the acquisition with a negative declaration and a categorical exemption in accordance with state and federal environmental laws. In August 2004, the RTC released a draft business plan which includes scenarios for a short line operator to take over freight service. In May 2005, the RTC released the preliminary title report for all parcels that compose the rail line right-of-way. In August 2005 and June 2006, the RTC released structural assessment reports of all the structures on the rail line. The RTC is currently conducting appraisals of the right-of-way and improvements, completing the hazardous materials assessment, negotiating legal agreements, and investigating insurance requirements and operating arrangements. Once all of this information is completed, the RTC and the community will decide whether to purchase the rail line.

For more information: Please visit the RTC web site: www.sccrtc.org or call (831) 460-3200

