

AGENDA: August 6, 2015

TO: Regional Transportation Commission
FROM: George Dondero, Executive Director
RE: Director's Report

THIS ITEM FOR INFORMATION ONLY

Passenger Rail Feasibility Study

Thank you to Commissioners for encouraging participation in the community conversation about the findings of the Draft Passenger Rail Feasibility Study. Over 3000 responses were received, including 2600 via the online survey, 270 through the online comment form, and over 150 emails and letters. Additionally, staff presented and received input on the study at the well-attended June 4 Open House and at numerous community meetings and events. Staff will provide a summary of the comments received and some recommendations regarding preparation of the final Passenger Rail Feasibility Study at the September or October RTC meeting.

In addition to public discussion and feedback on the Draft Study, RTC has received a request to explore the implications of a "trail only" alternative that would involve removing the railroad tracks. While the idea sounds simple in concept, it would in fact entail a process of unknown cost and a very extended time frame to accomplish – if it could indeed be done at all. Staff has provided some information on the subject and is continuing the research. There are multiple actors involved in such a scenario including the private rail operator (Iowa Pacific Holdings), a state funding agency (CTC), Caltrans, and at least one federal regulatory agency (Surface Transportation Board) in addition to the RTC. Staff will provide updates on this discussion at future RTC meetings. At this juncture, some broader concerns have been raised, which I would like to address today.

It has been suggested that RTC staff is biased or playing an advocacy role during the development of the Passenger Rail Feasibility Study. It is true that we have worked to advocate for more and better transportation options in the County, as described in the 2014 Regional Transportation Plan and the MBSST Master Plan. The discussion over passenger rail and its potential benefits and impacts has just begun. The Feasibility Study answers some questions and raises many others – many of which will need to be answered by careful analysis incorporating best practices in urban and regional planning, engineering, experience in other cities and regions where passenger rail was introduced and established principles of good urban design and transportation planning.

We are not close to ending the process of evaluating the benefits rail can provide, and it seems shortsighted to cut off the options for all future generations. If we remove the choice now, it will never come back. If after a meaningful and thoughtful public discourse the voters decide not to fund passenger rail, so be it. But we are not at that point just yet.

The work we are doing now (to complete the Passenger Rail Feasibility Study) builds on the policies and principles incorporated into the RTC's policy documents such as the Regional Transportation Plan. This work is consistent with the project parameters in the Caltrans planning grant, and with direction given to staff by the Commission. The study follows what voters told us when they passed Proposition 116, and is consistent with the growing number of mandates promulgated by the state to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Equally important, the work is consistent with the principle that all people in the county deserve reliable, convenient and safe transportation options.

We – RTC staff and Commissioners - will have to work together to resolve these issues. It will be more constructive to do so with respect and patience, as we work on solutions that might calm the choppy waters of public debate, and keep the region moving toward providing more and better transportation options.

Santa Cruz Branch Rail Line

The Golden Gate Railroad Museum (GGRM) has secured used donated rail, ties, track switches, and signal equipment from Caltrain. Working with the Santa Cruz & Monterey Bay Railway (SC&MB), GGRM is bringing in the donated materials for upgrades and maintenance to the Santa Cruz Branch Rail Line. Most of the materials are being stored on the rail line right-of-way near Natural Bridges Drive and some in the Santa Cruz wye. It is anticipated that GGRM will eventually have a lease with the RTC and materials replaced on the rail line will be used for siding track that will be needed by GGRM for their operation.

At several spots along the rail line there will be work not associated with the railroad. Most of the work is by Pacific Gas and Electric (PG&E) and some is for projects near the rail line that need staging areas. The companies using the rail line right-of-way entered into agreements with the RTC and are paying rent to the RTC to use the right-of-way. The funds generated will be used for vegetation control, clean up and maintenance on the rail line right-of-way.

Aspiring Counties Report

On July 28 the Aspiring Counties met in Sacramento. The informal group is comprised of counties aspiring to pass local transportation funding measures. Here are a few highlights from the meeting.

CTC Executive Director **Will Kempton** addressed the group. He noted that the recently issued TRIP report cites the bad condition of California roads. He encouraged all counties to support the current momentum in the state legislature to adopt a funding program by September 11. He encouraged everyone to talk to legislators about supporting the package. (see agenda item 23 for details).

Legislation – **AB 464** (Mullen) would raise the 2% cap on sales tax available to local jurisdictions. The bill is consistent with the Governor's message that the state funding package should compliment local measures. The bill is enrolled and sitting on the Governor's desk. The Transportation Agency for Monterey County is looking for support on this bill, as under current law TAMC is hitting the cap and could ask for a maximum of a 3/8% sales tax increase.

ACA 4 (Frasier) is currently in Assembly Appropriations. This bill would lower the voter threshold from 2/3 to 55% for transportation measures. It needs 2/3 support in the legislature and thus would need two Republicans in each House and all Democrats to pass. the bill includes a 5% bonus for new self-help counties.

Self-help efforts were reported by Aspiring Counties Executive Directors:

San Luis Obispo County - did a poll that showed 54% support. Their board has not taken action yet, and may ask for continued evaluation of results.

Stanislaus – expects to run a measure; has yet to do a poll. Their Executive Director is retiring August 21st.

Kern – a National Board of Realtors poll showed support in the mid to high 50s. Work on a local measure has been shelved for the time being.

Solano – has held off due to a recent County general tax measure. It failed, so the transportation agency is working on an expenditure plan per board direction. They are looking at a possible June 2016 ballot measure, pending results on a new poll. Recent polls were in the high 50s.

El Dorado – the city of Placerville lost a general tax measure by nine votes, so they are going in Nov. 2016 for a specific measure for transportation and public safety.

Ventura – is polling at 60% for a ½ cent, 30-year measure. Their board will have to decide if they will spend the money for public education, outreach and another poll.

Humboldt – is conducting a workshop with their board to explore possibility of running a measure. No polling done yet.

San Benito – is looking at a measure for November 2016. Poll results were positive with 75% support for a ½ cent at 30 years.

Monterey – has hired consultant and is working with an ad hoc committee on community outreach. Next poll expected in 2016. Board is still debating 3/8% vs. 1/2% but are hoping the Mullen bill will become law.

Santa Cruz – was able to report good results from a May poll showing 73% support for a 1/2 cent measure for 30 years. Expecting to work closely with the board and public to continue education efforts and building support over the next 14 months.

Focus on the Future – November 15-17, Newport Beach. This annual conference sponsored by the Self-Help Counties Coalition has reserved time for a panel of the Aspiring Counties. Four counties will be selected at our next meeting in September. RTC Commissioners are encouraged to attend the event.



703 Pacific Avenue • Santa Cruz, CA 95060
(831) 425-0665 www.bikesantacruzcounty.org

August 5th, 2015

Dear Regional Transportation Commission members,

Please support the staff recommendation for Item 22 on your August 6th agenda, to accept the FLAP grant award and commit an additional \$300K towards the project.

We appreciate RTC staff's diligence in securing grant funding for this segment, which would be difficult to fund through other grant sources. The north coast segment will provide a safe alternative to Highway 1 for cyclists, additional recreational opportunities for residents and visitors and access to the future trail network in Coast Dairies. When completed, it will provide 9 miles of contiguous trail for the public to enjoy.

The FLAP grant award is a tremendous opportunity. Please accept these funds and commit to the \$300K RTC match. Should a private fundraising campaign occur to raise the money, we are happy to spread the word to our 250 members.

Best,

Amelia Conlen, Director