



Santa Cruz Branch Rail Line

Project Description

The 32-mile Santa Cruz Branch Rail Line is a continuous transportation corridor offering tremendous potential for new mobility options for residents and visitors alike. In October 2012, the RTC completed acquisition of this 135-year old transportation resource bringing it into public ownership with the objective of increasing transportation options and opportunities. The rail corridor spans the county from Davenport to Watsonville, runs parallel to the Highway 1 corridor, and connects to regional and state rail lines. This important transportation corridor is within one mile of more than 80 parks, 25 schools, approximately half of the county's population, and provides access to the Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary at several key locations.

Potential uses include the following:

- ◇ Increased freight rail service
- ◇ Seasonal or recreational passenger rail service
- ◇ High-capacity public transit
- ◇ Bicycle & pedestrian path in conjunction with rail services (see Coastal Rail Trail fact sheet)



Rail Improvement Efforts

As owner of the Santa Cruz Branch Rail Line, the RTC entered into an Administration, Coordination and License Agreement with St. Paul & Pacific Railroad Co. LLC, a subsidiary of Progressive Rail Incorporated, to operate freight service and maintain the rail infrastructure within the railroad easement.

- ▶ **Rail Structure Upgrades & Repairs** - With over \$5 million in State Transportation Improvement Program (STIP) funds, the RTC reconstructed the La Selva Beach trestle and completed improvements to three other bridges in 2015. A new structures assessment is underway to help determine the next phase of structure upgrades. In addition, the RTC is working to repair damages caused by the storms of 2017.
- ▶ **Freight Rail Service** - Freight rail service is currently provided by St. Paul & Pacific Railroad to a number of companies for commodities such as construction materials, agricultural products, beverages, and biofuels. Freight rail service helps to reduce traffic and greenhouse gases as one rail car load generally removes four truck trips from roadways and freeways.
- ▶ **Passenger Operations** - Big Trees Railroad currently operates seasonal and special event recreational rail service on the Santa Cruz Branch Rail Line. St. Paul & Pacific Railroad also plans to operate some recreational rail service. In January 2019, the RTC unanimously approved keeping the track in place and conducting an alternatives analysis for high-capacity public transit that could be implemented in the future. St. Paul & Pacific Railroad is required to submit a plan for recreational rail service by March 15, 2020.



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Project Costs and Funding

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| Acquisition Costs for Rail Line | \$ | 14.2M |
| Funding Sources to Purchase and Improve the Rail Line | | |
| Voter-approved Prop 116 funds | \$ | 11M |
| State Transportation Improvement Program funds | \$ | 10M |
| Federal funds obtained by Congressman Farr in 2003 | \$ | 1.5M |



Preventative Maintenance Program

The RTC is responsible for maintaining the portion of the ROW outside of the railroad easement, which is defined as a 10-foot lateral width in each direction from the railroad centerline. The Federal Railroad Administration imposes safety requirements for any activity within 25 feet of the centerline of track.

The RTC has a Preventative Maintenance Program that outlines procedures for RTC staff to carry out maintenance operations, with individual inquiries being tracked using ArcGIS, a mapping and analytics platform. Regular inspections and repairs to the infrastructure within the ROW will maintain the corridor for future use and limit impacts to adjacent jurisdictions and private property.



Alternatives Analysis

An outcome of the Final Unified Corridor Investment Study, which was adopted by the RTC in January 2019, was to work with Santa Cruz Metro to perform an alternatives analysis for high-capacity transit options on the rail ROW. RTC and Metro staff are working together to determine the scope of work, schedule, and budget for the project. The tentative project schedule is to release the request for proposals in June 2019 for consultants to perform this analysis and complete the project by January 2021.

The RTC received a Caltrans State Highway Account Grant for \$100,000 which will go toward the Alternatives Analysis.