Dear Transportation Commissioners,

There are now 104 concerned citizens calling for:

**Truth behind traffic pollution failure needed before approving $5.6 billion transportation plan**


During our first phone call on June 19 Transportation Commissioner Dennis Norton expressed skepticism over who these supporters could be. Dennis: they are real people, and they are really outraged by the traffic pollution reduction efforts of the RTC over the past five years.

Forgot to include this in the last email:

Dennis: from our follow up phone conversation last week you also refused to acknowledge the fact that the RTC program in question achieved 0.16% of the traffic pollution reduction goal, even though I made it very easy for you to verify this fact with SCCRTC Executive Director George Dondero.

Highlighting some of those calling for an independent inquiry:

- Joe Jordan from Santa Cruz: Ecology Action, Board of Directors; teaches solar and renewable energy courses at San Jose State University and Cabrillo College; scientist at NASA
- Sean Tario from Scotts Valley: IT business owner
- Richard Nolthenius from Santa Cruz: Program Chair, Dept. of Astronomy, Cabrillo College
- Isabelle brissac from Santa Cruz: Engineer at Apple, Inc.
- Liz Levy from Soquel: won State Sen. Joe Simitian’s eighth annual “There Ought to be a Law” contest with her proposal that would give businesses tax incentives for succeeding in motivating employees to reduce traffic gridlock. Her work resulted in The Vehicle Trip Reduction Bill, Senate Bill 425.
- Alexander Cershenson from Santa Cruz: Principal, Founder EcoShift Consulting, Ph.D. in Environmental Studies at the University of California, Santa Cruz with a focus on carbon dynamics and climate change policy. Assistant Professor position of Policy and Science at San Jose State University.
- Ian J. Stock from Santa Cruz: business lawyer
- Les Strnad from Corralitos: former Deputy Director -Central District- California Coastal Commission
- Doug Erickson from Santa Cruz: founder Santa Cruz New Tech Meetup
- Patrick Reilly from Aptos: IP lawyer

Total signers so far:
104. Mary Oertmann from Santa Cruz, CA signed this petition on Jun 24, 2014.
103. Richard Gottesman from Santa Cruz, CA signed this petition on Jun 23, 2014.
I strongly support this petition and want to see an independent investigation.

102. David Thiermann from Santa Cruz, CA signed this petition on Jun 23, 2014.
101. Bruce Kosanovic from DAVENPORT, CA signed this petition on Jun 23, 2014.
a no-brainer, this one.

100. Meg Belichick from Half MOon Bay, CA signed this petition on Jun 23, 2014.
Please provide implementation of reducing congestion and pollution now. Time is our greatest concern AND what about the uninsured drivers? They need to be taken off the roads!

98. Chris Wellens from Santa Cruz, CA signed this petition on Jun 22, 2014.
97. Steven Olson from Capitola, CA signed this petition on Jun 22, 2014.
96. Patrick Reilly from Aptos, CA signed this petition on Jun 21, 2014.
The burden of auto traffic is a leadinh limitation of the economic development of the Monterey Bay Area.

95. Kaoru Takahashi from Santa Cruz, CA signed this petition on Jun 21, 2014.

94. Christine Braccini from Scotts Valley, CA signed this petition on Jun 21, 2014.
93. Stephanie Tucker from Santa Cruz, CA signed this petition on Jun 21, 2014.
91. Erik Schmidt from Santa Cruz, CA signed this petition on Jun 20, 2014.
90. Sebastian Frey from Aptos, CA signed this petition on Jun 20, 2014.
We need to wake up and do a double-take on what the SCCRTC is planning for Santa Cruz county.

89. paula cordon from Lompico, CA signed this petition on Jun 19, 2014.
88. Doug Erickson from Santa Cruz, CA signed this petition on Jun 19, 2014.
I confess that I am not knowledgeable of the history, progress or lack of progress. Nonetheless, I have strong confidence in Paul McGrath’s assessment and judgement. Seems that an independent 3rd party investigation is justified.

87. Richard Buddington from Santa Cruz, CA signed this petition on Jun 19, 2014.
86. Nancy E Abrams from Santa Cruz, CA signed this petition on Jun 19, 2014.
85. Laura Ley Va from Corralitos, CA signed this petition on Jun 19, 2014.

84. Lea Strnad from Corralitos, CA signed this petition on Jun 19, 2014:

As the former Deputy Director - Central District- California Coastal Commission I strongly recommend a detailed independent analysis of the effectiveness for the last 5 years of the SCCRTC’s Commute Incentive Program prior to adopting a new budget on June 26th. It is the responsibility of every local government to implement the most effective greenhouse gas emission reduction program. Prior to your budget vote it appears, in my professional opinion, that the Commission should have such an analysis to make appropriate program adjustments to assure public confidence in the Commute Incentive Program. I am available to discuss with your staff the formulation of an oversight review committee to assure effective program implementation and monitoring. Sincerely, Lea Strnad, CZMA 831-419-2632

83. Fred Antaki from Santa Cruz, CA signed this petition on Jun 19, 2014.
Very important issue and one government needs to be held accountable on. Appreciate bringing this to our attention.

82. Suzanne Schrag from Ben Lomond, CA signed this petition on Jun 19, 2014.
The SCCRTC needs to be researching and embracing successful methods and programs rather than "competing" with them. We're all in this together - systems with proven successes should be made part of the county's transportation plan and expanded rather than shut down!

81. Jeremy Chatwin from Scotts Valley, CA signed this petition on Jun 18, 2014.
80. Ian J. Stock from Santa Cruz, CA signed this petition on Jun 18, 2014.
If it's broke, fix it!

79. Patrick D Hendry from San Jose, CA signed this petition on Jun 18, 2014.
78. Sheryl Loomis from Santa Cruz, CA signed this petition on Jun 18, 2014.
77. paulina borsook from Scotts Valley, CA signed this petition on Jun 18, 2014.
76. Alexander Gershenson from Santa Cruz, CA signed this petition on Jun 18, 2014.
75. brian clarke from santa cruz, CA signed this petition on Jun 18, 2014.

74. Paul King from Scotts Valley, CA signed this petition on Jun 18, 2014.

73. Catherine O'Kelly from Scotts Valley, CA signed this petition on Jun 18, 2014.
Traffic on the Highway 1 corridor is worse than ever. It takes me almost a whole hour to get from Scotts Valley to Aptos at 5:00pm any weekday. Where are the shuttles? Where are the plans for Light Rail? Where's the Sunset Special train to the from San Jose on weekends in the summer? Exactly what DOES the RTC do? I don't see any evidence of your existence.

72. Anne Hayden from Aptos, CA signed this petition on Jun 18, 2014.
We live within a mile of Cabrillo College. The amount of traffic, and the resulting pollution, associated with the college is appalling and needs to be remedied.

71. Steve Carlson from santa cruz, CA signed this petition on Jun 17, 2014.
Please listen....this time

70. Gail Jack from Santa Cruz, CA signed this petition on Jun 17, 2014.
69. Joya Birns from Santa Cruz, CA signed this petition on Jun 17, 2014.
68. Thomas Onan from SANTA CRUZ, CA signed this petition on Jun 17, 2014.
67. emy fehmi from Scotts Valley, CA signed this petition on Jun 17, 2014.
66. Joe Rigney from Santa Cruz, CA signed this petition on Jun 17, 2014.
65. kathy gusewelle from aptos, CA signed this petition on Jun 17, 2014.
64. Tamara Henry from Scotts Valley, CA signed this petition on Jun 17, 2014.
63. Stephanie Valys from Scotts Valley, CA signed this petition on Jun 17, 2014.
62. Lindsay Black from Santa Cruz, CA signed this petition on Jun 17, 2014.
The SCCRTC needs to show accountability for the previous money spent, and demonstrate why the outcomes have been poor so far, with a reduction of only 0.16%. Please be responsible with the money and demonstrate a plan before moving forward to improve these outcomes before continuing funding for this costly, but important project. An independent investigation is called for and perhaps new management if needed, based on the results of the investigation.

61. Keith Kellogg from Scotts Valley, CA signed this petition on Jun 17, 2014.
Santa Cruz continues to be burdened with more and more traffic pollution. Let's get a real plan to save the sacredness of our environment. Thank you

60. Lisa Moats from Santa Cruz, CA signed this petition on Jun 17, 2014.
59. Melinda Lundgren from Santa Cruz, CA signed this petition on Jun 17, 2014.
I have been following this issue and strongly support an independent investigation of the SCCRTC's management of the funds they were trusted with for the commute incentive program and the reasons behind the way they chose to misrepresent the program's progress. Based on the SCCRTC's actions I believe we can not place confidence in their abilities, integrity, and honest professionalism until an independent investigation has been conducted and the issues in question addressed. Thank you for listening to taxpayers' concerns and keeping them in mind on June 26.

58. Helen from Santa Cruz, CA signed this petition on Jun 17, 2014.
57. Francois from Santa Cruz, CA signed this petition on Jun 17, 2014.
56. William Houston from Scotts Valley, CA signed this petition on Jun 17, 2014.
55. Cheryl Potter from Santa Cruz, CA signed this petition on Jun 17, 2014.
If these claims are true, heads need to roll. This was a huge waste of public funds.

54. Rey Diego from Santa Cruz, CA signed this petition on Jun 17, 2014.
53. Ashley Soria from Watsonville, CA signed this petition on Jun 17, 2014.
52. Kristen Petersen from Santa Cruz, CA signed this petition on Jun 16, 2014.
51. Marina C Chichurel from Santa Cruz, CA signed this petition on Jun 16, 2014.
50. Linda kimball from santa cruz, CA signed this petition on Jun 16, 2014.
49. Beth Love from Santa Cruz, CA signed this petition on Jun 16, 2014.
48. George Todd from Santa Cruz, CA signed this petition on Jun 16, 2014.
47. Hans Dohrn from Santa Cruz, CA signed this petition on Jun 16, 2014.
46. Doug from Scotts Valley, CA signed this petition on Jun 16, 2014.
Misle of funds, intentional or no, is cause for concern and deserves a full review. The SCCRTC needs to step up and deliver on its promises.

45. Arjuna Duryea from Santa Cruz, CA signed this petition on Jun 16, 2014.
I don't any business that, upon failing miserably to implement a program, decides that the best way to fix it is to spend twenty-five thousand times more. Is this an indication of the way government does not work? Major FAIL!

44. Craig Drizin from Santa Cruz, CA signed this petition on Jun 16, 2014.
43. Derek Anderson from Morgan Hill, CA signed this petition on Jun 16, 2014.
42. Michael Aber from Santa Cruz, CA signed this petition on Jun 16, 2014.
41. Anita bonno Bernard from Santa Clara, CA signed this petition on Jun 16, 2014.
Given those that are accountable and paid a salary by tax payers dollars dismissed this in 2012, they have had 2 years to take the initiative, research the public concerns and address the public with their solutions. This has not happened demonstrating incompetence in leadership and a lack of interest in public concerns. It is time to take this to the next level and fire those that choose to waste our money.

38. Holland Barry from Scotts Valley, CA signed this petition on Jun 15, 2014.
37. Julie from Santa Cruz, CA signed this petition on Jun 15, 2014.
It is important that our tax dollars are spent of effective programs for reducing greenhouse gasses.

36. Diane Kipnis from Santa Cruz, CA signed this petition on Jun 15, 2014.
35. Hristina Le Blanc from Watsonville, CA signed this petition on Jun 15, 2014.
34. Rabbi Philip Posner from Santa Cruz, CA signed this petition on Jun 15, 2014.

33. Quentin Hancock from Santa Cruz, CA signed this petition on Jun 14, 2014.
32. ky er wilshtere from santa cruz, HI signed this petition on Jun 14, 2014.
31. David Field from Santa Cruz, CA signed this petition on Jun 14, 2014.
30. KC McKay from Santa Cruz, CA signed this petition on Jun 14, 2014.
29. Jeanne Faulkner from Santa Cruz, CA signed this petition on Jun 14, 2014.
At the very least, an investigation needs to be done to determine what's what.

28. Chris Pratorius from Scotts Valley, CA signed this petition on Jun 14, 2014.
27. Peter Rovegno from Santa Cruz, CA signed this petition on Jun 14, 2014.
Ridespring has a proven track record of successfully reducing VMTs with both the City and County of Santa Cruz, as well as with law firms and corporations in Silicon Valley. It is a shame that the Air Board Directors chose the RTC's untested program over Ridesspring in trying to reduce car trips to/from Cabrillo College, and within the County, but to stonewall the truth of their poor performance is unacceptable, and to request a 20-year extension of funding for the failed Commute Solutions is beyond ridiculous.

25. Susan Schuefele from Santa Cruz, CA signed this petition on Jun 14, 2014.
Why aren't they looking at car pool lanes and bike lanes first?

24. Isabelle brissac from Santa cruz, CA signed this petition on Jun 13, 2014.

23. David wicker from Slo, CA signed this petition on Jun 13, 2014.
If any private firm had such miserable results everyone would be fired if not prosecuted. Public agencies will not be immune going forward and this petition is just a first step in that process.
22. Arbor from Santa Cruz, CA signed this petition on Jun 13, 2014. 
The transportation agency has deceived us and this needs to be investigated now!!!!

20. Jennie Duscheck from Santa Cruz, CA signed this petition on Jun 13, 2014.
Whoa. Let's take a hard look at this program before spending more money on approaches that aren't working. I haven't seen any changes in Santa Cruz County that would help reduce VMT.

Cyclists need better alternatives than Soquel Drive and clogged freeways! And we need to encourage people OUT of their cars and INTO healthier alternatives.

18. Lauren Jones from Santa Cruz, CA signed this petition on Jun 13, 2014.
Paul's program works!

17. Sean Tiario from Scotts Valley, CA signed this petition on Jun 13, 2014.
16. David Perry from Santa Cruz, CA signed this petition on Jun 13, 2014.
15. Edward Brauhnht from Santa Cruz, CA signed this petition on Jun 12, 2014.

13. Alicia Beard from Watsonville, CA signed this petition on Jun 12, 2014.
What a failure, this program only lasted 6 months!

12. Robert Myklan from Capitola, CA signed this petition on Jun 12, 2014.
11. Devonie Johnson from Santa Cruz, CA signed this petition on Jun 12, 2014.
It it important to understand fully what positive results will come from such substantial funding and I fully support a thorough investigation.

10. John Kae from Santa Cruz, CA signed this petition on Jun 12, 2014.
9. Bernadine ROSSO from Felton, CA signed this petition on Jun 12, 2014.
More options for travel just like the blue recycle bins provided for us at our homes. If there are no alternatives and incentives for alternative travel, people will stick with their same habits because they're in a hurry and they have other priorities like paying bills and taking care of their families. I hope more focus can go into the planning and setting up of transportation alternatives especially in small cities like Santa Cruz. That money can go to transform things in a positive way so was don't have to have "indoor days" like they do in southern California! Thanks

8. Andrea from Sedona, AZ signed this petition on Jun 12, 2014.
7. David Apple from Santa Cruz, CA signed this petition on Jun 12, 2014.
6. tim murphy from great barrington, MA signed this petition on Jun 12, 2014.
5. Hans Phillips from Santa Cruz, CA signed this petition on Jun 12, 2014.
Please take this seriously and deal with the consequences of the previous failure before funding more programs. Thank you.

4. Joe Jordan from Santa Cruz, CA, CA signed this petition on Jun 11, 2014.

3. Kendra Dorfan from Santa Cruz, CA signed this petition on Jun 11, 2014.
This issue needs to be looked at and evaluated before implementing. As a tax payer in SC Co. I need more information before a commitiment is put in place. I also bike commute and bike for recreation and want my needs as a bicyclist to be considered.

2. Elizabeth Knacke from Aptos, CA signed this petition on Jun 10, 2014.

Dear Transportation Commissioner,

As a citizen concerned about traffic congestion, air pollution and climate change, I urge you to launch an independent investigation into the Santa Cruz County Regional Transportation Commission (SCCRTC) commute incentive program failure from 2008-2014.

Intended to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by reducing vehicle miles traveled (VMT), the SCCRTC commute incentive program achieved well under 1% of the expected results. This unacceptable outcome was confirmed with the Stop Work Order issued by the Monterey Bay Unified Air Pollution Control District in January 2014. Final result: 0.16% of projected VMT / pollution reduction was achieved.

Do not ignore this second call for an independent investigation.

The first call for an independent investigation was in 2012. The SCCRTC avoided scrutiny at that time by dismissing the concerns raised as premature, and re-iterating confidence in the program. The program continued for another two years - with performance of the program dropping even further.

Questions over this failure are now more than important than ever with the SCCRTC scheduled to approve a ten-year $5.6 billion regional transportation plan (RTP) on June 26. From page 13 of the plan:

‘Much effort on this 2014 RTP and the 2035 Metropolitan Transportation Plan has been focused on prioritizing projects that will reduce greenhouse gas emissions primarily from a reduction in vehicle miles traveled (VMT).’

How can the public have confidence in, and be expected to pay for the SCCRTC’s $5.6 billion plan to ‘reduce greenhouse gas emissions primarily
from a reduction in vehicle miles traveled (VMT)’, if the SCCRTC failed so abysmally at VMT/pollution reduction over the past five years?

Reasons for this failure need to be fully understood, and appropriate actions taken, before the public can be expected to entrust the SCCRTC with a $5.6 billion budget and transportation planning over the next 10 years.

As a Transportation Commissioner you are responsible for serving the public by providing oversight of the SCCRTC. On June 26 I strongly urge you to postpone approval of the 2014 Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) until completion of an independent investigation of the SCCRTC’s commute incentive program failure from 2008-2014.

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Paul McGrath
Commute Consultant
https://twitter.com/RideSpring
RideSpring
www.ridespring.com
831.278.0312
Blog: www.greenstartupstory.com

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Luis,

Not to keep harping, but the topic of “impact to overall transportation systems” came up because I quoted Les Whites’ comment in the Santa Cruz Sentinel where he said “focus on the train is preventing County from getting other funding opportunities for express buses”. The simple fact is that the train is preventing Express Buses and Metro doesn’t seem to be supporting RTC’s strategy.

Brian

Luis,

It was at the Capitola Council meeting where the original discussions of the rail study were discussed. Commissioner Friend ask it to be a “feasibility study” and not a plan to see how a rail can work, then the commission also recognized the public request to include how rail passenger investment would impact other transportation services. I believe the METRO Commissioners were the ones who emphasized the need to show how rail passenger investment could impact the future of highway 1 widening, HOV lanes and express buses. That was a very common concern with the Master Plan.

Can you please look at RTC meeting when it was at Capitola Chambers?

Brian

Hello Brian,

The past meeting of the RTC was on Thursday, June 5, 2014 at the Watsonville City Council Chambers. I do not remember any direction from the RTC Commissioners to include in the passenger rail study an analysis “of how a rail would impact other transportation services, such as future HOV lanes/Express Buses on Highway 1 due to limited resources and increased cost to widen Highway 1 as a result of maintaining Aptos Train Trestles.” However, to verify, I reviewed the recording of the meeting and at no point during the meeting did the RTC Commissioners provide any direction to RTC staff with regards to the passenger rail study. Your assertion is incorrect.

The passenger rail study is a feasibility study and the draft scope of work for the study was presented to the RTC in public meeting. The tasks included in the study reflect the draft scope provided to the RTC and the direction provided by the RTC.
From: Peoples, Brian C [mailto:brian.c.peoples@lmco.com]  
Sent: Monday, June 23, 2014 10:10 PM  
To: Regional Transportation Commission  
Cc: Zach Friend (BDS022@co.santa-cruz.ca.us); patrick.mulhearn@co.santa-cruz.ca.us; Luis Mendez; Karena Pushnik  
Subject: Rail Passenger Study

The passenger rail study does not include the criteria of how a rail would impact other transportation services, such as future HOV lanes / Express Buses on Highway 1 due to limited resources and increased cost to widen Highway 1 as a result of maintaining Aptos Train Trestles. At the past RTC meeting, it was requested by RTC Commissioners to include such analysis.

More importantly, the study was to be a “feasibility study” not a design to build a rail type service. Clearly, this proposed plan is primarily focused designing a rail system rather than a simple feasibility study. One only has to look at the project schedule to see where the feasibility study shifts to a design to build plan. Once Task 5 is complete, the feasibility study will be complete (Oct, 2014). Task 5 should include impact cost of rail to other county transportation systems, such as increased cost of widening Highway 1 and HOV/Express Buses.

Task 6 and 7 are not feasibility studies, but are design to build concepts and should only be performed if the rail service is economically viable based on Task 5 results.

Thanks,

Brian Peoples
From: Marilyn O'Rourke [mailto:marilyn-orourke@comcast.net]
Sent: Wednesday, June 25, 2014 2:06 PM
To: bds031@co.santa-cruz.ca.us; john.leopold@co.santa-cruz.ca.us; bruce.mcpherson@co.santa-cruz.ca.us; rjt12@comcast.net; dlane@cityofsantacruz.com; lrobinson@cityofsantacruz.com; tim.gubbins@dot.ca.gov; zach.friend@co.santa-cruz.ca.us; greg.caput@co.santa-cruz.ca.us; emontesino@ci.watsonville.ca.us; dportondesigns@msn.com; dene@bustichi.com; fishsweetheart@netzero.com; Regional Transportation Commission
Subject: Passenger Rail Study - July 26, 2014 Transportation Policy Workshop

SCCRTC Commissioners,
I have been following the Passenger Rail project in its various iterations for at least a dozen years. I commented on problems with Initial Study for the previous Recreational Rail Project, submitted 38 pages of questions and comments to the 2004 Draft EIR and 24 pages of questions and comments to the 2005 Revised Draft EIR, commented on the 2004 Business Plan and the activities of the Transportation Funding Task Force. I have frequently spoken before the Commission in opposition to the Passenger Rail projects.

Estimates have ranged that more than $500,000 in consultant and study costs has already been spent on various passenger rail plan scenarios. Now the SCCRTC intends to spend another $180,000 to again study passenger rail. We taxpayers deserve to know what has been the actual total cost to date of all of the studies and consultant fees attributable to these proposed rail projects.

EIR Requirement:

Here we are presented with yet another passenger rail scenario. The staff report makes no mention of when an EIR will be conducted on this proposed new plan. The 2001 Santa Cruz Regional Transportation Plan Policy (2001 RTP, Policy 2.4.6) requires an EIR for any rail-associated project. As quoted by SCCRTC in the 10/16/2003 Initial Study for the previously proposed passenger rail project, this policy makes it quite clear that that passenger rail service will only be considered an option when "it is financially feasible, acceptable to the community, and only after the completion of an EIR that concludes that all the significant impacts can be satisfactorily mitigated."

The Santa Cruz General Plan Policy also requires an environmental review of all proposed transportation projects that may increase average day/night noise levels — including any increased or new uses of the Santa Cruz Branch Rail Line. Since there has been virtually no rail traffic on the vast majority of the Rail Line for a number of years now, the potential increased noise and additional negative impacts would be profound.

Among other financial issues of concern raised 10 years ago in the Passenger Rail Business Plan conducted by Systra, they warned that 52% of the track has less than 10% remaining useful life (Page 7) — and that 52% of the rail line included the tourist train projected route. Additionally, there is the issue of the dilapidated and deteriorating trestles and bridges that would cost millions to upgrade to passenger rail standards.

Clearly a new EIR must be undertaken on this new and expanded proposed use of the rail line to conform with SCCRTC policy and to comply with Santa Cruz County policies.

Transport of Hazardous materials:

The Commissioners and the community need to be aware of the fact that if the tracks are upgraded from FRA Excepted Track to Class 1 to accommodate passenger rail, then hazardous materials can then be transported on the tracks and rail cars containing crude oil and gasoline products can also be transported on these tracks (CFR 213.4) that run adjacent to homes, through business areas, spanning waterways, and near schools. Has this been considered by the SCCRTC and will that very real potential hazard be part of the study and required EIR conducted on this latest passenger rail proposal?

Sumner Woods Home Owners Association:

The Sumner Woods HOA has previously requested to be included in any committee, advisory board, stakeholder group, task force or study group that concerns the rail line. We have never been granted that participation. On behalf of the HOA, I respectfully request that we are accorded that membership by the Commission.

Thank you for your consideration of my comments,

Marilyn O'Rourke
marilyn-orourke@comcast.net

From: General Info [mailto:info@sccrtc.org]
Sent: Wednesday, June 25, 2014 4:02 PM
To: 'Marilyn O'Rourke'
Subject: RE: Passenger Rail Study - July 26, 2014 Transportation Policy Workshop

Thank you for your comments. They will be made available to the Commission for their review.

Please visit the SCCRTC website at www.sccrtc.org for information on the Commission and its activities.
ITEM #11

TO: Regional Transportation Commission (RTC)
FROM: Luis Pavel Mendez, Deputy Director
RE: Rail Motorcar Excursion on the Santa Cruz Branch Rail Line

RECOMMENDATIONS

Staff recommends that the Regional Transportation Commission (RTC) approve a rail motorcar excursion on the Santa Cruz Branch Rail Line for July 19, 2014 organized by the North American Railcar Operators Association (NARCOA) with the Santa Cruz & Monterey Bay (SC&MB) Railway for a fee of $500.00.

BACKGROUND

In April 2013, the Regional Transportation Commission (RTC) provided a temporary license to the North American Railcar Operators Association (NARCOA) for a rail motorcar excursion on the Santa Cruz Branch Rail Line for May 4 and 5, 2013. The excursion began each day in Felton at Roaring Camp traveled to Watsonville via the Boardwalk and then back to Felton. The event attracted participation of rail motorcar enthusiasts from across the country. Santa Cruz & Monterey Bay (SC&MB) Railway worked with NARCOA to ensure a safe event. NARCOA would like to do a motorcar event again before the La Selva Beach trestle is dismantled.

NARCOA is a non-profit organization dedicated to the preservation and safe, legal operation of railroad equipment historically used for maintenance of way. NARCOA has about 1,800 members who own rail motorcars and run them in organized NARCOA excursions. Excursions can be as short as 10 miles and as long as 800 miles. According to the NARCOA website, rail motorcars generally weigh 600 to 1,000 pounds and have small 1 or 2 cylinder engines. However, a few motorcars can be between 1,500 and 5,000 pounds and have 4, 6 or 8 cylinder engines. NARCOA carries a $10 million railroad liability policy for these excursions and provides safety training and certification for their operations.

DISCUSSION

For 2014, NARCOA has asked SC&MB Railway and Roaring Camp Railroads to host the same excursion event as in 2013 but only for one day, July 19th. It is anticipated that 30 to 40 individual motorcars will participate in the excursion. The rail motorcars would be brought to Felton on trailers by their owners. SC&MB Railway and Roaring Camp will work with the participants to unload the cars and place them on the track in Felton. The group would run from Felton to Watsonville on July 19th and return on the same day. SC&MB Railway staff would be along with the excursion to help ensure safety.
In 2013, the RTC did not charge NARCOA for the license to operate the motorcar excursion. RTC staff has done more research on these types of licenses and it is typical for NARCOA to pay for these licenses. Based on this research, which included conversations with the Santa Cruz County Real Property Division, $500.00 would be a fair fee for this license. In addition, NARCOA will pay SC&MB Railway to help ensure safety of the event.

The proposed NARCOA excursion will add visitors to Santa Cruz County’s visitor economy. Based on research done by RTC staff, NARCOA excursion participants are very conscientious visitors who have a high regard for safety. Therefore, staff recommends that the RTC approve a NARCOA rail motorcar excursion on the Santa Cruz Branch Rail Line for July 19, 2014 for a fee of $500.00.

As was the case in 2013, the temporary license for the NARCOA excursion will include indemnification of the RTC and insurance requirements. Attachment 1 is a list of frequently asked questions about NARCOA and their excursions. Additional information about NARCOA and their excursions is available at www.narcoa.org.

SUMMARY

The North American Railcar Operators Association (NARCOA) ran rail motorcar excursion on the Santa Cruz Branch Rail Line. NARCOA is requesting to run the same excursion on July 19, 2014. RTC staff recommends that the RTC approve a NARCOA excursion on the Santa Cruz Branch Rail Line for July 19, 2014 for a fee of $500.00.

Attachments:
1. NARCOA Frequently Asked Questions about the Motorcar Hobby
Frequently Asked Questions
About the Motorcar Hobby
1. **What is that “thing” on your trailer?**

That is a Railroad Motorcar, sometimes called a “Speeder”. Smaller models, like this one, were used routinely to inspect the many miles of track for defects. Larger versions would carry half a dozen workers and pull a few trailers loaded with spikes and tools, to handle track maintenance. Use of motorcars has been phased out over the past couple decades in favor of Hy-Rail vehicles, which are standard road vehicles with retractable guide wheels that can operate on road or rail. Although these “speeders” have a top speed of only about 30 m.p.h., they were so nicknamed because compared to the manually powered pump cars they replaced, they were much faster.

2. **What do you do with it?**

Motorcar owners belong to several clubs which obtain permission from railroads to operate on their tracks. These clubs are under the organizational umbrella of the North American Rail Car Operators Association (NARCOA). With permission of the railroads, members operate their motorcars on excursions ranging from one day to over a week in almost all parts of the U.S. and Canada. Many of these excursions are in remote and very scenic areas that are impossible to see from the highway and thus provide an experience not available by other means of transportation.

3. **How do you get permission to use your motorcar on a railroad track?**

We rent the tracks for our outings from the many small railroad companies which have taken over former branch lines of the major carriers (as well as some large railroads in the U.S. and Canada). Often smaller railroads operate trains only on weekdays, so a group of motorcars on a Saturday or Sunday does not cause the coordination problems the larger lines would have. We have developed an excellent reputation within the rail industry for our attention to safety through operator training, self-imposed safety rules and mechanical standards for our motorcars. We know that our operation must be viewed as a positive experience for the railroad to invite us back year after year.

4. **Do you need any special training to be able to operate a motorcar?**

Yes. NARCOA members who desire to operate motorcars must become “licensed”. They must first obtain and learn the NARCOA rule book which prescribes procedures for safe operation and mechanical standards to which all motorcars must be maintained. A written test must be passed on the contents of the rule book. New operators must then be “Mentored” on their first excursions by an experienced operator who has been designated to act as an instructor. Only after passing these written and practical tests is a new operator allowed to operate a motorcar in a NARCOA sanctioned event. Each motorcar is inspected by a NARCOA qualified safety inspector prior to each excursion to be sure it meets mechanical standards.
5. What happens when you meet a train?
Train meets are never accidental, but always planned events. On smaller railroads we operate on days when there are no trains. Our groups are always led by a specially qualified NARCOA “Excursion Coordinator”. In addition, many railroads provide Hy-rail vehicles with railroad staff at the front and rear of our group. On busier railroads where train meets occur, our group leaders maintain radio contact with the railroad dispatcher and the crews of all trains we are scheduled to meet. We generally proceed into a siding or passing track and wait for the train. All operators and passengers are required to leave their motorcars and stand on the side away from the passing train for safety reasons. From the railroad’s perspective, we are treated the same as a train.

6. What happens when you come to a busy highway crossing?
We always yield the right-of-way to automotive traffic. In addition to brake lights, each car carries a red flag that is lowered by the operator to warn the following motor car that he is approaching a road crossing and stopping or slowing to check for traffic. If traffic is encountered, we stop, wait for the automobile to cross and then proceed. When we cross busy multi lane highways, we stop, wait for the rest of the group to catch up, and send trained personnel in safety vests with red flags ahead to stop all highway traffic before crossing the road as a group.

7. How safe is the hobby?
NARCOA members pride themselves in maintaining an extremely high level of safety. Although no statistics are available, it is possible that a motorcar participating in a NARCOA sanctioned excursion is the safest form of any type of recreational vehicle travel in the world. Due to our strict attention to safety, any type of mishap is rare and usually limited to a minor incident.

8. How many horsepower is the engine?
Most of the two and four person motorcars commonly operated on our excursions have a 20 horsepower Onan 4 cycle engine. Some restored older motorcars use the original 2 cycle 5 horsepower engine. Since we travel at low speeds, more power is not required or even desirable.
10. Is it possible for members to operate Hy-rail vehicles?
At the discretion of the excursion coordinator, privately owned hy-rail vehicles can be permitted to operate. They can be very useful for carrying spare parts, extra baggage or running into town if something is needed.

11. How far apart do the motorcars travel during an excursion?
We keep close enough to each other to maintain visual contact with the car in front, never getting closer than a safe distance that will allow for stopping should the car ahead come to a sudden halt.

12. What is the role of the NARCOA Excursion Coordinator?
The Excursion Coordinator is the excursion leader, liaison with the railroad and person in charge of the operation. He assumes responsibility for and has the authority to be certain each participant is in compliance with all NARCOA and railroad rules. He is the ultimate authority on any decisions made for situations not covered by published rules.

13. What type of people participate in the hobby?
The motorcar fraternity is a very mixed and friendly group. There are professors and programmers, farmers and physicians, teachers and truckers, as well as police officers, engineers, firemen, plumbers, and many retired people. Almost all of them have good mechanical skills for restoring and repairing motorcars. Many of them travel, with their motorcars on towed trailers, in pickups, SUVs, and motor homes; others have family sedans or station wagons. Although certainly much less expensive than flying or boating, it is still not a hobby for the financially challenged.

14. What is traveling in a motorcar like?
Riding in a motorcar provides a perspective on rail travel that most people never experience. One is seated perhaps only two feet above the top of the rail and can see directly ahead and to both sides, similar to the view a locomotive engineer has, but even better. Travel is relatively slow, generally averaging less than 20 miles per hour. Every culvert, bridge, road crossing, tunnel, and building along the rails is seen from an uncommon vantage point. Because motorcars are so uncommon, they attract much attention from people along the track. When we pause for lunch or other extended periods of time in populated areas small crowds often gather to look and ask questions.

Most motorcars have a windshield and roof for protection from the wind and rain. Most also have sides and backs (sometimes made of canvas) with doors (or opening flaps) and windows. Many are fully enclosed with metal or fiberglass bodies. These are the most desirable for rain or cold weather.

Most excursions cover 50 to 120 miles in a day. The average hobbyist uses his motorcar 500 to 1,000 miles a year. A very few, mostly those participating in the longer trips, run as much as 2,500 to 3,000 miles a year.

15. How can I get more information on the motorcar hobby and NARCOA?
Visit the NARCOA Web Site at: http://www.narcoa.org