



*Santa Cruz County Regional Transportation Commission
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Santa Cruz County Regional Transportation Commission (RTC) Sept. 5, 2024 Meeting Highlights

Sarah Christensen selected as next Executive Director

The Commission hired Sarah Christensen to serve as the new Executive Director of the RTC. Christensen, who has been working as a senior transportation engineer with the RTC, brings over 19 years of experience implementing major capital projects along the Central Coast and the Bay Area to the position. The RTC approved a three-year contract with Christensen starting on September 9. She will report directly to the RTC Board.

North Coast Transportation Demand Management Plan Contract

The Commission selected transportation planning consultant firm, Fehr & Peers, to prepare the North Coast Transportation Demand Management Plan. The RTC was awarded a Caltrans Sustainable Transportation Planning Grant to develop the Santa Cruz County North Coast Transportation Demand Management Plan (TDM Plan) for 22 miles of coastal highway from the City of Santa Cruz northern city-limits to the Santa Cruz/San Mateo County line. The TDM Plan will identify alternatives and strategies that address visitor transportation needs, safety and operational challenges on Highway 1 created by visitor demand and behaviors. The project aims to identify options to reduce vehicles miles traveled and emissions, while improving safety.

Fiscal Year 2024-25 Senate Bill 1 Transit State of Good Repair funds

The Commission approved \$770,000 for the Santa Cruz METRO Hydrogen Fuel Cell Zero Emissions Bus project and \$116,000 to Community Bridges Lift Line for its Solar Canopy project. These projects will help reduce emissions from buses and paratransit vehicles and services. The funds are made available for public transit and community transportation services from the California Senate Bill 1-State of Good Repair (SGR) Program, which is funded from a portion of the Transportation Improvement Fee on vehicle registrations.

Highway 1 41st Avenue to Soquel Drive Auxiliary Lanes and Bus-on-Shoulder Project – Caltrans request for additional funding to cover cost overruns on the Construction Capital component of the project

The RTC in partnership with Caltrans is currently constructing the Highway 1 auxiliary lanes and bus-on-shoulder project between the Soquel Avenue/Drive and 41st Avenue interchanges, which includes the new “whale bridge” bicycle and pedestrian overcrossing over Highway 1 at Chanticleer Avenue. The RTC is the project sponsor, and Caltrans is the implementing agency for construction. As the project sponsor, the RTC is responsible for cost overruns on the construction and construction support components of the project.

In June of 2024, Caltrans requested \$3 million in funds from the Commission in order to cover cost overruns from staff time and consultant services needed to administer the construction contract. In August 2024, Caltrans requested an additional \$5 million to cover cost overruns on the construction capital component of the project. The Commission approved taking a phased approach by programming \$2.5 million of Measure D-Highway Corridors funds to partially cover Caltrans’ request, and staff may return to the Commission in the future if additional needs arise. The Measure D-Highway Corridors program is constrained by the multiple program needs, and there is limited availability of funding for cost overruns on projects. To mitigate this on the two Highway 1 projects under construction, staff has requested value engineering to manage construction capital costs, and more detailed reporting on the construction support work in order to foresee budget challenges in time to take corrective action.

Climate Adaptation Vulnerability Assessment and Priorities Report (CAVA) – Draft Prioritization

The Commission provided input on and approved the Milestone 2: Draft Asset Prioritization for the Climate Adaptation Vulnerability Assessment and Priorities Report (CAVA). The CAVA report is being developed for county roads, Santa Cruz Branch Rail Line, bridges, culverts, and other transportation assets owned by Santa Cruz County and the Santa Cruz County Regional Transportation Commission. The Draft Asset Prioritization determines the order in which these assets should undergo more detailed analysis for climate adaptation and resiliency.

Throughout June and early July, the CAVA project team conducted outreach to gather community feedback on the draft prioritization and considered it throughout the process to determine what modifications to metric weighting or other framework or analysis components were needed.

For next steps, the project team will write a draft report of the findings of the CAVA study. Included in the draft report will be a thorough explanation of the goals and objectives of the CAVA study, an in-depth discussion of the modelling techniques employed to determine the draft prioritization of assets, a detailed review of survey and outreach feedback, a walkthrough of the calibration methods employed in the CAVA model, and a summary of the final outcomes of the modelling and prioritization process. The draft report will be brought before the RTC for approval in early 2025.

Zero Emission Passenger Rail and Trail Project Milestone 2 Engagement and California Public Utilities Commission Coordination Efforts Update

The Commission received an update on the Zero Emission Passenger Rail and Trail Project's concept development, including an overview of the recently-completed Milestone 2 public engagement activities as well as coordination efforts with the California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC).

During June and July, staff hosted several public engagement opportunities as well as several partner agency and stakeholder briefings focused on providing information and seeking input on the initial conceptual alignment for rail & trail, and on the initial analysis of rail transit vehicle types. Staff also hosted two in-person public open houses and a virtual open house. Approximately 150 community members attended the in-person open houses, and more than 1,200 total users visited the virtual open house. More than 500 comments and feedback notes were collected during the public engagement period relating to the rail vehicle types and initial conceptual alignment. Additionally, more than 130 general comments were received via the virtual open house and more than 35 received via email.

In June, the Commission directed staff to return at a later date with more discussion on horizontal clearances and regulatory requirements of the CPUC. The Project team developed a draft memorandum outlining the CPUC Rail Safety Division Roles and Responsibilities for Rail Transit Project Oversight to address the Commission's request. Coordination with the CPUC is ongoing, and the Project team will continue to engage with CPUC staff for additional details and to clarify requirements as project development progresses.

For next steps, the project team is continuing to refine the conceptual alignment as well as advancing other project elements. The Project team is currently developing ridership and operations projections and, over the coming months as operational modeling progresses, will begin refining station and siding locations and geometries as well as locations of layover and maintenance facilities in preparation for Milestone 3. Public and partner agency engagement for Milestone 3 is anticipated for the fall of 2024. The Project Concept Report is Milestone 4 and is expected to be completed in spring 2025.

Coastal Rail Trail – Segment 18 Update & City of Watsonville Priority Bicycle and Pedestrian Projects

The Commission received information about Coastal Rail Trail Segment 18 and priority bicycle and pedestrian projects for the City of Watsonville, and provided input on options for advancing development of Coastal Rail Trail Segment 18. The Commission considered future allocations of RTC discretionary funds to the City of Watsonville's priority bicycle and pedestrian projects and/or Coastal Rail Trail segments within and around the City of Watsonville as part of the Fall 2025 Consolidated Grants Program, and directed RTC staff to work with City of Watsonville staff on developing their grant applications. The Commission also directed staff to draft a plan for funding of preliminary design and environmental work for Segment 18 as part of the Measure D 5-Year Plan update, which will be presented to the Commission in November.

The Monterey Bay Sanctuary Scenic Trail Master Plan aligns Segment 18 along the Santa Cruz Branch Rail Line right-of-way between Lee Road and Walker Street in the City of Watsonville. A portion of Segment 18 was constructed along the Santa Cruz Branch Rail Line in 2020. Alternative alignments for Segment 18 are being considered as part of the development of the Zero Emission Passenger Rail and Trail Project.

New RTC Staff Positions

The RTC completed an Organizational Assessment which indicated that the RTC is understaffed and recommended adding or reclassifying several positions to align the organizational structure and staffing allocations to support several essential functions. The Commission approved adding five new job descriptions and updating the salary schedule accordingly. The new job descriptions are Supervising Transportation Planner, Real Property Specialist, Real Property Technician, Contract Specialist, and Accountant 1.

Upcoming RTC and Committee Meetings

Regional Transportation Commission Meeting

Thursday, Oct. 3, 2024, 9:00 a.m.

Safe on 17 Advisory Committee

Wednesday, Sept. 18, 2024, 10:00 a.m.

Interagency Technical Advisory Committee

Thursday, Sept. 19, 2024, 1:30 p.m.

Bicycle Advisory Committee

Monday, Oct. 7, 2024, 5:30 p.m.

Elderly & Disabled Transportation Advisory Committee

Tuesday, Oct. 8, 2024, 1:30 p.m.

Budget, Administration & Personnel Committee

Thursday, Oct. 10, 2024, 1:30 p.m.

RTC and committee meetings are now being held in person. Non-voting members of the Commission and its committees, as well as members of the public and staff, will have the option to participate in person or remotely, provided equipment is available at the meeting location to allow remote participation. If there are technical difficulties during a meeting that prevent remote participation, the meeting will continue. Please check the RTC website [<https://scrtc.org/meetings/calendar/>] or call 460-3200 to confirm meeting and video conference information for future meetings. Agendas are posted to the website at least 3 days before the meeting and will also include attendance information. Meetings may be canceled if there are no action items to be considered by the committee.

The RTC is committed to its compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Please contact the RTC at least 3 days in advance of a meeting if special accommodations are needed. If any document, webpage, meeting, or recording is inaccessible to you, kindly notify us at info@sccrtc.org or by calling 831-460-3200.

Public input on transportation issues is welcomed and encouraged. For more information, visit the SCCRTC website at www.sccrtc.org or call 460-3200. Some Regional Transportation Commission meetings are televised countywide by Community TV of Santa Cruz. Consult www.communitytv.org or call 831-425-8848 for schedule and station information.