

November 25, 2024

Dear ZEPRT consultants and RTC ~

The following are comments about the latest presentation of materials (11/13) the expressed goal apparently being to see what the public wants in terms of a passenger rail project.

We realize that you cannot provide more cost details until you know exactly what the public wants in regard to specifics (stations, benches, bike racks, etc.). We also understand that the detail costs of a passenger rail project will not be available until early 2025. It will be at that point that the RTC itself (not staff), informed of the true costs of a passenger rail type, will vote to proceed or not with a rail project and authorize the beginning of the EIR process on such a project.

Basically, there is nothing new presented that we haven't already seen in previous studies completed by the RTC, including the Rail Transit Feasibility Study in 2015, 2016 Santa Cruz County Travel Demand Model, and the Transit Corridor Alternatives Analysis & Rail Network Integration Study in 2021, which identified a locally preferred alternative for Electric Passenger Rail."

Our Comments and/or Questions

1. Station Placement and Facilities

- No details about station placement and facilities.
- Parking, free or not?
- Will there be covered and secure bicycle storage facilities, and how much will that cost to set up and maintain? Free or not?
- Restrooms, water fountains. How much will they cost to install, maintain and regularly clean?
- Will there be Wi-Fi available? How much will that cost to install and maintain?
- Will there be interactive train timetable announcements, online and at the station. How much will that cost to develop and maintain?
- Will there be information made available on integration of train schedules with METRO bus schedules. How much will that cost and will METRO share the costs?

2. Ridership Modeling deficiencies:

- Two examples given: Boardwalk and University, both of which to be directly served by the planned ROW. There are no stations indicated for the Boardwalk, and the route does not come near the University
- Future rail use is based on developing travel patterns, which are unpredictable, based on external changes in energy and technology development.

3 There is no way to accurately know how many people will use the train. Ridership with actual existing SMART ridership data. We believe that SMART has about four times the population from which draw to draw ridership.

4. Apparently, are now included proposed diversions of the trail outside of the corridor. How will those costs be estimated? Will those changes go off the radar of the cost of a passenger train?
5. Not providing parking near the train stations discriminates against those who live in an area with no METRO routes. How will you resolve this?
6. How much will it cost to build and to operate the train?
 - a. How will both of these costs be paid for?
 - b. What kind of local tax will be needed for maintenance and operation?
 - c. Is it true that a tax will have to be passed through a ballot initiative prior to requesting Federal grants?
7. Who pays for Quiet Zones infrastructure installation and maintenance and what will that cost?
8. What is the cost of an elevated track at the Boardwalk? Will there be an elevated station and, if so, what will that cost?

Finally, we close with the wise words of Supervisor McPherson, as stated in a May 5, 2024 OpEd in the Sentinel:

*"Controlling costs and ensuring adequate resources to maintain the entire corridor are necessary to being responsible stewards of public dollars and demonstrating that we take social equity seriously. **Continuously evaluating the financial feasibility of enormous infrastructure projects is not obstructionism – it's a hallmark of good governance.**"*

Sincerely,
Jean Brocklebank
Michael Lewis



Santa Cruz County Regional Transportation Commission
1101 Pacific Avenue, Suite 250
Santa Cruz, CA 95060

Re: Agenda of December 5, 2024, Item 22: Public Hearing on Zero Emission Passenger Rail and Trail Project, Milestone 3

Dear Commissioners:

As you know, the Santa Cruz, Big Trees & Pacific Railway is the owner and operator of the rail line between Felton and Downtown Santa Cruz. Since 1986, it has held trackage rights over the rails that connect its line to the Santa Cruz Branch Line ("Branch Line"), including the portion of the Branch Line that runs in front of the Santa Cruz Beach Boardwalk, which it uses to load and unload rail passengers. Our ability to operate in close proximity to the Boardwalk is a critical part of our business model as the vast majority of our passengers either originate from or travel to the Boardwalk.

We strongly support the Zero Emission Passenger Rail and Trail Project ("Project") and its mission to reopen the Branch Line to rail service once again. We have therefore participated with great interest in recent talks with RTC staff concerning various alignment alternatives for the Project, particularly those impacting the Boardwalk and depot areas. We write to express our concerns to the Commission as a whole.

Obviously, our paramount concern is that our ability to operate to the Boardwalk not be impaired, either during construction or permanently. We hold trackage rights, which are within the regulatory ambit of the federal Surface Transportation Board and allow us to provide both passenger and freight service from our line and onto a portion of the Branch Line. Actions that would impair or terminate the exercise of those rights would be subject to STB review and may result in financial consequences to the RTC. Therefore, regardless of the track configuration adopted for the Project, RTC's existing easement rights, as well as our existing trackage rights, we believe the area in front of the Boardwalk needs to remain intact.

As RTC's designs become more certain (conceptual designs have only been revealed in the last week or two), we would be happy to provide our technical assessment of the proposed design. At this early stage, our reaction is that the aerial structures, while apparently avoiding conflicts with the tracks at the Boardwalk, are likely to have significant impacts in the area.

Provided it can be constructed in a manner that avoids conflicts with the use of our tracks at the Boardwalk and their connection to the Branch Line, a surface route appears to be more feasible. We are concerned, however, regarding the specifics of how a relocated line will connect with the proposed station in the vicinity of the former depot and the manner in which the connection to the existing track serving the Boardwalk will be preserved.

Sincerely,

Melani Clark
CEO

From: [Jack Brown](#)
To: [Regional Transportation Commission](#)
Subject: A Day in the Life: Commuting to Santa Cruz by Train Without a Car
Date: Monday, December 2, 2024 1:28:06 PM

To conclude my essays, let's look at what happens if we do not question the current plan and let everything proceed. Let's imagine that the stars align and we get the go ahead and \$5 billion magically appears to proceed with a train from Watsonville to Santa Cruz. This is not an overnight implementation. Some say it will take over four decades to complete, but let's be optimistic, let's say we roll up our sleeves and get it done in just under 30 years.

What would a day look like for a Watsonville commuter to get to work in Santa Cruz by 8 AM?

The morning alarm blares at 4:45 AM, signaling the start of another long day. For those reliant on public transportation to get to work in Santa Cruz, an early start is non-negotiable, especially for our commuter who lives in the Crissara neighborhood of Watsonville near Green Valley and Freedom Blvd where a majority of the Watsonville population is centered. Today's journey will involve navigating the train system—a developing transit option touted as a sustainable alternative for car-free commuters.

Early Morning Preparation

Rising before dawn, the commuter prepares for the day ahead. Time is of the essence; missing the train could mean delays of an hour or more. It's the year 2056 and the train has finally been running for a year after finally completing the promised arrival and connection in Pajaro. After quickly getting dressed, eating a light breakfast, and double-checking that everything is packed for work, it's time to leave the house by 5:30 AM. Walking or biking to the nearest train station is the first step, as connecting bus routes may not yet be running in the early hours.

Arriving at the Watsonville station with ten minutes to spare, the commuter notes that the train platform is sparsely populated as the crowds died down over initial curiosity from just a year prior of taking a train to work, the occasional glow of a smartphone lighting the faces of other early risers. The train arrives promptly at 6:00 AM, its sleek, zero-emission design a point of pride for the county's transportation planners. Boarding is efficient, though finding a seat requires some maneuvering as the train has filled with others heading toward the city. People have learned if you don't want to stand for the entire 75 minute journey, it's best to hitch a ride to the route's starting point or drive a car and pay to park at the Pajaro station. Unfortunately, our commuter does not have this luxury. She sarcastically smirks thinking about how her grandmother told her that the journey would only take 45 minutes when she voted for the train and 20% sales tax hike way back in 2030.

The Train Ride

The train begins its journey, gliding through the picturesque landscape of Santa Cruz County. Despite the early hour, the ride isn't entirely peaceful. The train must sound its horn at each crossing, a jarring reminder of the compromises between infrastructure and community impact. While some passengers scroll through their phones or sip coffee from travel mugs, others try to catch a few more minutes of sleep before their day begins.

The commute is longer than expected due to a brief delay at a crossing where traffic is unusually heavy. Although the train was sold with the impression that it will alleviate traffic, it has only made matters worse. Traffic still backs up on the highway and commuters still cut through neighborhoods to try to find a shortcut. Today, the backup is not allowing the crossing gates to lower at one of the intersections. By the time the train arrives in downtown Santa Cruz, it's 7:25 AM. The commuter's destination is still several miles away, requiring an additional mode of transportation.

Last-Mile Challenges

Public transit options for completing the final stretch of the journey are limited and infrequent. The next bus isn't due for another 20 minutes, so the commuter decides to rent an e-bike from a nearby docking station. This option is both faster and more flexible than waiting, but it adds to the overall cost of the commute.

Riding the e-bike through the early morning traffic, the commuter finally reaches work at 8:00 AM, just in time to clock in. While the journey was successful, it required careful planning and relied on multiple transit systems to bridge gaps in the county's infrastructure.

The Return Trip

The workday concludes at 5:00 PM, and the commuter faces the same series of challenges in reverse. Timing the journey to align with train schedules means rushing to leave work promptly. Any delays in the transit network could result in a missed connection and a late arrival home. Finishing the day's work is not possible on the train even though there is free WiFi as seats are harder to come by in the evening.

By the time the commuter steps through their front door at 7:30 PM, exhaustion has set in. The day was dominated by navigating a patchwork of public transportation systems, leaving little time or energy for other pursuits.

A Need for Improvement

This hypothetical day highlights the significant hurdles faced by those relying on public transportation in Santa Cruz County. This was actually a positive scenario where the commuter lived within proximity of a station. This did not go into the perils

of someone living in Soquel trying to commute to Felton. Someone in Happy Valley trying to get to UCSC or someone in Bonny Doon trying to get well.... anywhere. While a train system is questionably touted at reducing environmental impact and an alternative to traffic, its effectiveness depends on seamless connections, reliable schedules, and affordable fares. Without addressing these challenges, the vision of a sustainable, accessible transit system remains out of reach for many residents.

The rail corridor could be simply, inexpensively and quickly converted to an active transportation corridor, Metro could be improved with better routes, more frequency, traffic signal priority and exclusive highway lanes. ParaCruz and Lift Ride could be made into a free on-demand service for our physically challenged and elderly residents, giving them transportation freedom most of us take for granted and all of this substantially faster and less expensive than a suburban commuter rail system.

We are nearing the point of no return, let's not make a series of flawed mistakes based on RTC consultants focusing on the wrong aspects of the transit system. Let's answer the basic questions first to scope what people are willing to pay for and put up with, then talk about what the impacts would be regarding how many stops and track alignments.

From: [Dianne](#)
To: [Regional Transportation Commission](#)
Cc: [Dianne D](#)
Subject: Comment on Rail Milestone 3
Date: Tuesday, December 3, 2024 11:28:31 AM

Hello Commissioners.

Watsonville needs rail stops in places where people will use them! Like downtown and Ohlone Parkway for commuters and visitors. Residents in Watsonville desperately need rail transit. I have often wanted to go to downtown Watsonville from Live Oak, but traffic congestion has stopped me.

Thousands of people live in Westside Santa Cruz! They should not be excluded from rail transit service. Local workers, shoppers, students, restaurant & theater customers and people who don't drive would use the service. Every time I go to or from the Westside from Live Oak, I encounter heavy traffic on Hwy 1, Mission Street and side streets.

I urge you to **ensure future transit needs** for our growing population!

Dianne Dryer
Live Oak

From: [John Danforth](#)
To: [Regional Transportation Commission](#)
Subject: Comments on the three proposed options for alignment of proposed pedestrian/bike trail in Segment 10
Date: Monday, December 2, 2024 9:37:48 AM

Dear SCCRTC.

I am writing to respond to your request for comments for the three different potential bike/pedestrian trail “options” depicted in the Segment 10 maps (“Jade Street Park Alignment Options”) to be found here: <https://www.zeprt.com/online-meeting.html>.

I have lived in this area for over seven years. I have a dog and so I walk the local streets (down to Capitola, over to 41st, and/or down to the beach) multiple times daily. I also bike the local streets multiple times a week. I live on Nova Drive, right next to Jade Park and the RTC ROW.

My comments here are highly preliminary. There is missing information about the three proposed options. And I only learned of these proposals two days ago. My street has received no formal notice of these proposals, although these three options (especially Options 2 and 3) will have profound, likely irreversible impacts on those of us who live here.

Option 1. This is overwhelmingly the best option. By running the trail up to Brommer St., then along Jade St. and then back through Jade Park you avoid dislocating the significant number of people (mostly elderly) whose manufactured homes are now being called “encroachments” on the existing train right of way.

You also avoid having to move the train tracks closer to the back of my house and the houses of my immediate Nova Drive neighbors. My house on Nova backs onto Jade Park. (There is already only a 8-10 foot space there, so Option 3 brings the tracks to within about 2 feet of the back of my lot, and many others.)

And with Option 1 you avoid what will almost certainly be litigation from those of us on Nova and in the mobile home parks whose homes and/or home values are threatened by Options 2 and 3.

Option 1 also affords a measure of safety to trail users (significant distance for bikes and pedestrians from trains, if there ever are any) and it voids other negative impacts of other options as discussed below.

Option 2. It is unclear to me if Option 2 (running the bike/pedestrian trail down Nova Drive)

is at all feasible. In any event, it is certainly unwise.

Option 2 runs into the following serious problems:

- Nova Drive (about three blocks long, running from 41st to near where Portola intersects with 47th) is, at its beginning and end, a narrow, crowded, winding street with limited visibility in critical spots. Visibility is especially problematic near Portola/47th and, at the other end, in the block of Nova closest to 41st. Those are spots on Nova where it is even now tough for two cars to get by one another.

- Nova is often used by cars as a quick shortcut between Portola and 41st. So the traffic is often considerable and there is significant danger from cars that drive too fast. The right turn onto Nova from Portola is a particular problem. There are traffic pylons affixed to the street there to try to slow down cars making this turn onto Nova. These traffic pylons are frequently broken -- knocked over by cars taking the turn too tightly, or too fast, or both.

- A trail running down Nova poses another problem. It would join Portola right where cars are accelerating uphill on a curve, just after they leave the stop sign at the top of Cliff (where many cars fail to stop) and just before they head into the Portola "straightaway" between 47th and 41st. That is already a dangerous area. Cars taking that curve frequently veer toward the outer part of the lane, threatening pedestrians and cyclists. Option 1 increases the risks at this spot.

- Street parking is very important on Nova. (This may be because of the relatively large number of secondary units and backyard ADUs in the neighborhood.). Most of the empty parking spots on Nova and on adjacent streets are filled most of the time. A bike lane that took out all parking on one side of Nova would therefore cause significant hardships.

- There are other reasons why Option 2 is dangerous (and would not provide a good experience, in any event, for bike riders and pedestrians). There are at least 38 driveways on my side of Nova (the North side). Many of them are double width. So putting a bike/pedestrian trail there would put its users at significant risk, with well-over 50 cars potentially pulling in and out of driveways and across the trail. Also, as electric bikes -- which tend to speed and often have very young riders -- become more prevalent on the trail, this Option 2 also poses risks to those entering and exiting their homes on Nova.

Option 3. The option to run the trail straight along the tracks for all of segment 10 is a problem on multiple levels:

■ A number of residents will be forced to leave their long-standing homes. Many of these folks are elderly. Laches or other equitable defenses may make it difficult for the RTC to prevail in litigation against these people (even if their homes encroach on the ROW).

■ The existing ROW is, apparently, too narrow in any event to accommodate both a train and a trail. It is unclear what specifically the RTC means when it says it may need to seek to widen its ROW. But, in any event, such efforts will likely cause added hardship and generate added litigation. And the narrow space here, even if more room is somehow added to the ROW, certainly increases risks if and when pedestrians, bikes and trains are all in this area at the same time.

■ A trail running in a straight line along the existing tracks for all of Segment 10 will also require moving the tracks much closer to (perhaps within 2 feet of) the back of a number of lots on Nova Drive. One of those lots is mine. Moving the tracks closer to my home is unnecessarily disruptive and poses an unnecessary, wasteful expense (no matter who pays it). It too can be expected to produce litigation.

■ The burdens this Option 3 will place on some residents are far out of proportion to the likely public good to be served. On the one hand, the burdens will be immediate and severe. On the other hand, rail service along the ROW is expected to be many years away (if it ever really occurs) and will likely, in any event, always be limited, impractical, and economically infeasible. I greatly admire the hope and aspirations of those who have promoted this rail service. But those hopes and aspirations need to be viewed realistically, and should not blindly overcome real-world, immediate hardships.

Thank you for your attention to these issues. **I urge you to please select Option 1.**

John Danforth

From: [Brian Peoples](#)
To: [Regional Transportation Commission](#)
Subject: Comments to Dec 5th Agenda Items
Date: Tuesday, December 3, 2024 12:21:55 PM
Attachments: [image.png](#)

RTC,

Statements to agenda items for December 5th RTC meeting:

Item #21 Update on Repairs to the Santa Cruz Branch Rail Line Damaged by Previous Severe Winter Storms in Santa Cruz County:

We agree with FEMA that providing funding to repair the old railroad tracks for freight is not justifiable. At the end of the day, this is another great example of poor public policy by RTC Commissioners who wasted time and resources on an infeasible rail plan.

Item #22 Public Hearing (no earlier than 10:30 a.m.): Zero Emission Passenger Rail and Trail Project Milestone:

The RTC Rail Study continues to illustrate how a new passenger rail system will is not feasible on the Santa Cruz Coastal Corridor. The real issue is that the rail plan is delaying the construction of the Santa Cruz Coastal Trail in a timely, cost-effective and eco-friendly manner. The delay in opening the Santa Cruz Coastal Trail from Watsonville to Santa Cruz due to the unrealistic rail plan is a burden to our community. Ultimately, the ongoing delays in the opening of the Coastal Trail from Watsonville to Davenport are detrimentally affecting the quality of life for county residents.

Best,

Brian Peoples



From: [Joe Martinez](#)
To: [Regional Transportation Commission](#)
Subject: Dec 5th SCCRTC Meeting - Item 21 and Item22
Date: Monday, December 2, 2024 1:33:09 PM

Commissioners and RTC Staff,

Item 21 - FEMA's decision to not fund repairs appears to be a clear signal that the railroad corridor is a bad investment. The commissioners and RTC staff should have recognized the problem with the corridor long ago.

Item 22 - Commissioners and RTC should stop all work on the unsafe trail being constructed next to the unusable tracks and stop the continued waste of taxpayers' money on the ZEPRT project. Especially, since it has not yet been established that a train is feasible.

Jose Martinez

From: [ROBERT STEPHENS](#)
To: [Regional Transportation Commission](#)
Subject: Enough Studies
Date: Monday, December 2, 2024 5:12:25 PM

Please answer some very basic questions before you do any more studies. How much will a train cost to build and operate? What are the ridership numbers, please ground truth these numbers with existing rail lines? How much of a local tax will be needed for the train? When will this tax be on the ballot? Where will the rest of the funding for the train come from and when can we expect to actually see a train operating. If these answers are not in an executive summary in your latest study, the study is a failure.

Please stop asking people what they want (train car types, train stops etc), as this just feeds into the belief that a "train is coming soon". You need to answer some very basic questions first, then figure out stops and train color.

Please don't build any trail type until you know, if a train is actually going to work in our rail line. The Ultimate trail is an environmental disaster. Our community is getting very tired of all the crazy politics. No more studies and kicking the can down the road! Our local train is starting to feel a lot like the California High Speed Rail project, a costly pipe dream.

Peoples lives and livelihood are being adversely affected by all this train planning, time to actually see if it is cost effective and doable.

Thank you for your time,

Robert Stephens
Aptos, CA

From: [Andrea Ratto](#)
To: [Regional Transportation Commission](#)
Subject: Fwd: Train meetings not reflective of community needs
Date: Tuesday, December 3, 2024 7:56:14 AM

Sent from my iPhone

Begin forwarded message:

From: ANDREA RATTO [REDACTED]
Date: November 24, 2024 at 8:58:32 AM PST
To: [REDACTED]
Subject: Train meetings not reflective of community needs

We are south county residents and former north county residents for many years, now currently victims of highway 1 gridlock often in both directions and attended the recent Rail Trail meeting in Watsonville. We are not and never have been in favor of the proposed tourist train which will not offer an affordable, convenient and practical alternative to carmageddon. We have used public transportation only when living in cities and traveling in foreign countries where there is a robust public transportation network. There are many obstacles to creating a viable passenger train on the current rail line(multiple bridges needing retrofit, encroachment on private property, noise pollution with horns going through city proper, no available service from train to population hubs, probable significantly increased time needed to get to destination, exorbitant building costs and ongoing financial subsidy to keep the service going). Measure D was to improve roads and transportation and EXPLORE the possibility of rail service. So much money has been wasted on moving ahead with this option without looking realistically at the many obstacles. It is difficult to get public input from all sectors of the community but from what I've observed on Next Door south county residents are not in favor of the train with few exceptions. Perhaps a more accurate assessment would be to poll every household in the community and ask who would take the train on a regular basis and what they would be willing to pay for the service as well as commenting on the time they would be willing to spend getting to their destination. I suspect you would find very few people who will be on board with the train option. Watsonville is a growing population and services are better spent developing jobs that support affordable living in this community and alleviate the need for more commuting to a work site elsewhere.

Andrea Ratto
Corralitos
Sent from my iPad

From: [Eva Holt-Rusmore](#)
To: [Regional Transportation Commission](#)
Subject: IMPORTANT Rail Stops
Date: Tuesday, December 3, 2024 1:19:34 PM

Hi RTC Commissioners,

I am writing to request that you recommend the following:

1. Two rail stops in Watsonville (downtown AND Ohlone Prkw)
2. Include a Westside rail stop

Thanks!

--


Eva Holt-Rusmore
(she/ her/ hers/ ella)



From: [Buzz Anderson](#)
To: [Regional Transportation Commission](#)
Subject: Input Dec 5th Meeting
Date: Monday, December 2, 2024 3:44:56 PM

To the SCCRTC,

It seems that a certain faction is attempting to conclude that a future passenger train is a given in Santa Cruz County. Talking about stations, sidings, quiet zones and locomotives is a bit premature due to the fact that no funding exists for a train. In fact, by assuming a train will come, the trail is now underfunded, fragmented and not conforming to required widths in many places. The RTC and the commissioners need to re-visit rail banking, which has been done to great effect in hundreds of communities. Rail banking is the compromise that is needed. The RTC is off the hook for any easement and ROW lawsuits. A wide, continuous, safe, active transportation corridor can come to fruition, and at the same time a future passenger train can still be studied and implemented later. The reality is that there will be no train for decades, and it's quite likely that when that time comes trains will be obsolete, replaced by more efficient technologies. Rail bank the corridor now for a much needed superior trail and save the train (or something like it) for later. Commissioners, please re-read the SCCRTC FAQ sheet on rail banking that was done a couple years ago.

Cordially,
Frank Anderson

Santa Cruz, ca. 95062

From: [J Lighthill](#)
To: [Riley Gerbrandt](#); [Rail Study](#)
Cc: [Regional Transportation Commission](#)
Subject: Milestone 3 comments
Date: Tuesday, December 3, 2024 4:58:58 PM

Hi Riley,

Thank you for posting the Milestone 3 revised conceptual maps online. One week (with a holiday included) doesn't seem like enough time for the public to digest the information and submit comments, so I hope that you will present the rest of the comments you receive (up to the 20th) to the Commissioners for consideration.

I have a couple of questions about the alignments. Details are difficult to see. I hope you can clarify.

Jade St. Park alignment, option 3: the legend says that red indicates areas where existing width is not sufficient to accommodate both passenger rail and trail between 30th and 47th. Would the corridor need to be widened? If so, does this alignment identify specifically from which side of the tracks the additional right-of-way would be acquired (inland side of tracks, ocean side of tracks, or both)? It's hard to see in the map. It stands to reason that several homeowners would be affected with this option.

At the La Selva bluff, the map indicates that moving the track inland requires building a retaining wall. Would the track remain at the current/existing elevation? If so, the retaining wall would be very high! Has the ZEPRT team consulted with the Ca Coastal Commission about this?

With the elevated rail option through Seacliff, can you specify at what point the rail begins to ascend/descend? And how would the condos on Estates Dr (105+00) be impacted by this proposed alignment?

Thanks for your consideration and work.

Kindly,
Johanna Lighthill

From: [RTC Staff](#)
To: [Regional Transportation Commission](#)
Subject: New Contact Us submission from Frank Rimicci
Date: Tuesday, December 3, 2024 10:27:26 AM

Name
Frank Rimicci
Email
[REDACTED]
Subject
rail stops
Your Message
<p>I am writing to urge the commission to plan rail stops for the Westside of Santa Cruz and an additional stop near the Ohlone Parkway site. These stops are key for riders that want to use rail for transit across the county. Even if rail stops are less frequent, locations of these stops make them an important link. Thanks for bringing the rail trail to fruition!</p>

From: [Regional Transportation Commission](#)
To: [Jack Brown](#)
Subject: RE: 10 Basic Questions That the RTC Needs to Answer About the ZEPRT Project
Date: Monday, November 25, 2024 10:45:00 AM
Attachments: [image002.png](#)
[image003.png](#)
[image004.png](#)
[image005.png](#)

Hi Jack,

Thank you for your interest in RTC projects. Your comments have been recorded.

Regards,
Krista



Krista Corwin [she/her] Administrative Assistant II
[Santa Cruz County Regional Transportation Commission](#)
 1101 Pacific Avenue, Suite 250 | Santa Cruz, CA 95060
 Main Office 831.460.3200 | Website www.sccrtc.org



Follow our social networks for the latest RTC news

From: Jack Brown [REDACTED]
Sent: Friday, November 22, 2024 7:27 PM
To: Regional Transportation Commission <info@sccrtc.org>
Subject: 10 Basic Questions That the RTC Needs to Answer About the ZEPRT Project

I attended the public meeting (or as I like to refer to it as a live-action email since they were very aggressive about not having a townhall style meeting). I came away highly disappointed. Voters did not approve the rail trail project and voters have never directly voted for rail in Santa Cruz County. The vote in 2022 was to change verbiage in the County's General Plan to remove rail and promote railbanking as a faster and much less expensive way to construct the trail as there is no funding whatsoever for a train. There has been no official estimate published yet by the RTC, or even a scoping estimate, but the last study put the cost at \$1.3 Billion (pre-pandemic, inflation) and one consultant for the RTC, Robert Yeates of HDR, blurted out that cost may be higher than \$5 Billion (Source: [<https://youtu.be/HgpESpdaB6c?si=SwKRys3OC0fMKe9b&t=3382>] (<https://youtu.be/HgpESpdaB6c?si=SwKRys3OC0fMKe9b&t=3382>)). Not only are there issues with mobile home owners being forced out of their homes, businesses may have to close in Aptos

Village with this plan. It is a horrible idea and people should ask ten very serious questions about the project at the website [zeprt.com](<http://zeprt.com/>) like

1. How much will the overall project cost?
2. How long will it take to start construction?
3. How long will it take to complete construction?
4. What will be the maximum capacity of a train?
5. How many people could use the train vs. how many people use the highway?
6. How much of the cost will be paid for by local taxpayers?
7. Will it be a sales tax? Will it be a property tax? How much will they go up? For how long?
8. What will be the subsidy taxpayers will be expected to pay per trip? (Metro costs taxpayers \$12-\$20 per every \$0-\$2 fare)
9. How many 140db horn blasts will occur for a train going one direction to another? How many times a day? What will the hours be?
10. How much does a quiet zone study cost? How many will be submitted? What will be the cost for the additional infrastructure required to support quiet zones and possible liability for accidents. (38 people were killed by trains in California in 2023)

The RTC has yet to answer these questions (and many more that should be answered) as they are very difficult questions that don't have good answers. However, these are some very fundamental questions that should have been scoped for the project before committing \$9 million for this multi-year study that confuse people into thinking that we are much further down the tracks than we actually are.

Please get back to the basics and come to the realization that this is a very poor project that is ill fitting for our community.

Respectfully
Jack Brown
Executive Director
Santa Cruz County Coastal Trail Conservancy

From: [Regional Transportation Commission](#)
To: [Jack Brown](#)
Subject: RE: The Santa Cruz County Rail Trail – A Costly Mistake We Can't Afford
Date: Monday, November 25, 2024 10:26:00 AM
Attachments: [image002.png](#)
[image003.png](#)
[image004.png](#)
[image005.png](#)

Hi Jack,

Thank you for your interest in RTC projects. Your comments have been recorded.

Krista



Krista Corwin [she/her] Administrative Assistant II
Santa Cruz County Regional Transportation Commission
1101 Pacific Avenue, Suite 250 | Santa Cruz, CA 95060
Main Office 831.460.3200 | Website www.sccrtc.org



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From: Jack Brown [REDACTED]
Sent: Monday, November 25, 2024 8:37 AM
To: Regional Transportation Commission <info@sccrtc.org>
Subject: The Santa Cruz County Rail Trail – A Costly Mistake We Can't Afford

The Santa Cruz County Rail Trail project, often hailed as a transformative vision for our region's future, has spiraled into a financial black hole, leaving many residents questioning whether it's worth the cost. With projected expenditures now climbing into the hundreds of millions, it's time for the Santa Cruz County Regional Transportation Commission and the public to take a hard look at whether this plan is truly the best path forward—or a misguided investment with limited benefits. A Dream or a Financial Nightmare? At its core, the Rail Trail project promises a 32-mile corridor blending transportation and recreation, connecting communities across the county. But what began as an exciting prospect has become emblematic of ballooning public works costs. Current estimates suggest the partially funded trail project could exceed \$450 million and the unfunded train project could exceed \$5 billion—a staggering amount for a county of this size, especially given its other pressing needs. These costs aren't just abstract figures. Every dollar poured into this project is a dollar unavailable for affordable housing, wildfire prevention, road repairs, or public transit

upgrades—all issues that demand immediate attention. Moreover, the funding for the Rail Trail relies heavily on state and federal grants, which often come with strings attached and long-term fiscal responsibilities. Taxpayers will inevitably bear the brunt of overruns and future maintenance costs. Questionable Utility Supporters argue that the Rail Trail in its current form will provide a seamless, eco-friendly transportation corridor. However, critics point out that its actual utility is limited. The trail’s design prioritizes rail over practical recreation and commuting, with narrow sections, detours with inconsistent connectivity, and many accessibility and safety issues. Additionally, the assumption that the goal of a train which is the foundation of the trail design will significantly reduce car dependency is dubious, given the county’s sprawling geography and lack of integration with other transit systems. Worse, the rail component—which adds significantly to the cost—is riddled with issues. The proposed passenger rail service, long touted as a solution to traffic congestion, has faced scrutiny for its impracticality. The line would require massive upgrades to accommodate modern trains, and ridership projections remain speculative at best. In an era where flexible transit solutions are paramount, doubling down on rail seems like clinging to outdated infrastructure. Environmental Irony Ironically, the Rail Trail’s environmental credentials are also suspect. Construction will disrupt sensitive ecosystems and could take over a century to yield any measurable reduction in greenhouse gas emissions. Meanwhile, less glamorous but more impactful initiatives, such as electric bus fleets or expanded bike lanes, remain underfunded. The Rail Trail diverts resources from projects that could deliver greater environmental and social returns at a fraction of the cost. A Better Path Forward Santa Cruz County deserves better. Instead of stubbornly pressing forward with a flawed and exorbitantly expensive plan, we should pivot to more sustainable, scalable, and cost-effective alternatives: Invest in Modern Transit Solutions: Expand electric bus services, create dedicated bus lanes, and incentivize carpooling. These measures can have an immediate impact on congestion and emissions without the multi-decade wait. Design a more cost effective continuous trail: A typical trail over rail costs under \$3 million per mile to produce, the current design has an average estimated cost of over \$25 million per mile and actual construction costs have wildly exceeded estimates. Allocate funds to improve and expand existing bike and pedestrian infrastructure, creating a network of paths that serve both commuters and recreational users. Community-Driven Planning: Engage residents in reimagining how these funds can address our most pressing challenges, ensuring accountability and better alignment with local priorities.

The Santa Cruz County Rail Trail has become a cautionary tale of good intentions gone awry. Let’s learn from this misstep and chart a smarter, more equitable course for our community. The future of Santa Cruz County deserves careful stewardship, not reckless spending.

Respectfully,
Jack Brown
Executive Director
Santa Cruz County Coastal Trail Conservancy

From: [J Lighthill](#)
To: [Rail Study](#); [Riley Gerbrandt](#); [Regional Transportation Commission](#)
Subject: RTC's previous noise study and Quiet Zone application
Date: Wednesday, December 4, 2024 8:58:48 AM

Hello RTC and ZEPRT team,

The RTC has previously studied train noise and it even began the process of establishing a Quiet Zone on the SCBRL. This information is from the RTC's website.

In 2005, a noise assessment study was performed as part of an EIR draft for a recreational rail project the RTC was then considering (from Capitola to Aptos/Seascape). The RTC met with the FRA to discuss Quiet Zones.

From the study, page 27 (of 28): <https://scrtc.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/07/050131-RecRail-NoiseVibraAsses.pdf>

“In accordance with the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) guidance, the SCCRTC has taken the following steps towards creation of a community quiet zone:

On February 2, 2005, SCCRTC staff conducted a site visit of all proposed crossings with FRA representatives and staff from other affected local jurisdictions: Capitola, Aptos, Santa Cruz County, and California State Parks. The SCCRTC will submit an application to the Federal Railroad Administration for the establishment of a quiet zone in the project corridor. The Final EIR will include an update on the progress towards creation of the community quiet zone.”

The Draft EIR Chapter III-Noise suggests that a quiet zone application was to be submitted regardless of whether or not the project was to be approved. P. 19

<https://scrtc.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/06/050204-RecRail-EIR-Ch3-SecC.pdf>

“In anticipation of possible project approval, and in order to obtain information that could affect the SCCRTC's decision whether to approve the Original Project, the Business Plan Project Alternative, or another alternative or whether, instead, not to approve any recreational rail project, the SCCRTC staff will submit an application to the Federal Railroad Administration for the establishment of a quiet zone in the project corridor.”

So what happened next? There was no Final EIR and, of course, the project was abandoned. Please look back to RTC or FRA records and see what was discussed at that meeting and whether the RTC submitted an application for a Quiet Zone as was planned. This information relates directly to the ZEPRT Project and its potential impacts on the community. Could the challenges associated with establishing a Quiet Zone have contributed to the recreational rail project's abandonment? Please include this research as part of the ZEPRT Report.

Additionally, please address the following:

- Specify the number of grade crossings that will be impacted by the ZEPRT project and how many of those may be included as part of one or more Quiet Zones.
- Describe the Quiet Zone application process and what mitigation measures may be required for passenger rail.
- Describe what a FRA Quiet Zone Calculator is and whether it can be used to determine the risk index for the proposed Quiet Zone corridor, and if so, as what point in the planning process this could occur. Before environmental?

- Specify who holds liability for rail and/or trail accidents on the SCBRL.
- Specify who is responsible for maintenance of the crossings (and cost estimates).
- Explain that quiet zones are not quiet and are better described as “reduced train horn noise” zones and that bell noise is unavoidable. How loud are the bells?
- Describe how Quiet Zones are typically funded.

Finally, please explain how a Quiet Zone on the SCBRL as part of the ZEPRT Project might compare to that of the OC Metrolink, which this video claims to be the single largest safety quiet zone in the nation with 34 crossings at a total cost of \$90 million (avg. \$1.6M/crossing, with a range of \$37K to \$3.7M each). 88% of the costs were paid by a Public transportation tax.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7LGHdZbUJqM>

<https://metrolinktrains.com/community-main/quiet-zones/>

Thanks for your consideration.

Johanna Lighthill

From: [Naomi](#)
To: [Regional Transportation Commission](#)
Subject: Rail Trail - a money pit!
Date: Tuesday, November 26, 2024 8:12:51 AM

Dear RTC,

I am a homeowner in the county writing to express my concern over the exponential expenditure that the rail trail will continue to reap on this county's taxpayers.

The budget of this keeps growing into the hundreds of millions with no end in sight. Worse, it's very unlikely that will really use this trail, like the new and unused walkway bridge in Soquel.

Please, no more Millions of dollars flushed down the toilet when what we really need is affordable housing and Diverts funding from many other viable environmental options, that would actually be used.

I know I stand amongst thousands in this community when we say, stop this nonsense and insanity.

.Concerned in Happy Valley,
Naomi wilder

From: [Joel Isaacson](#)
To: [Regional Transportation Commission](#)
Subject: Rail stations
Date: Tuesday, December 3, 2024 12:20:10 AM

Dear Commissioners

Please provide passenger stations on the West Side in Santa Cruz and in Watsonville downtown and at Ohlone Parkway.

Sincerely

Joel Isaacson

West side

Santa Cruz

Sent from my iPhone

From: [Jan McGirk](#)
To: [Regional Transportation Commission](#)
Subject: Rail stops necessary
Date: Monday, December 2, 2024 5:31:16 PM

Dear commissioners,

Watsonville needs at least two passenger rail stops: one near downtown and the other at Ohlone Parkway, where thousands of people commute from. Putting a sole passenger rail stop in an inconvenient warehouse zone is neither good planning nor good service.

Likewise, Westside Santa Cruz, where tens of thousands of people live within 1 mile of the tracks, must be included in the plan for passenger rail service. If the line ends at Depot Park, many Westside residents, employees, and students would be left out.

Let the entire community be well served!

Sincerely,
Jan McGirk
Live Oak resident

From: [Kaki Rusmore](#)
To: [Regional Transportation Commission](#)
Subject: Rail stops!
Date: Tuesday, December 3, 2024 8:08:52 AM

Dear Commissioners,

I'm writing to encourage you to place rail stops where the greatest number of passengers will be able to use them. I understand that we can't have 50 rail stops, so let's prioritize the places where there's concentrations of people living/working within a close distance.

Three such stops are: Ohlone Parkway and as close to downtown as possible in Watsonville, in at least one in the west side close to the concentration of businesses.

It would be lovely to have stops in places like beaches, but perhaps those can be weekend only. Let's make this rail line functional for carrying our neighbors to and from work and school.

Thanks so much,
Kaki Rusmore
Aptos



she/her/ella

From: [Nate Villaume](#)
To: [Regional Transportation Commission](#)
Subject: Rail stops
Date: Tuesday, December 3, 2024 7:56:33 PM

It would be great if the new rail system have stops that provide good access to the communities it will serve, from the west side of Santa Cruz to Watsonville. The stops should be near where people live. In Watsonville there should be two stops, one near downtown and the other near Ohlone parkway, to be more accessible to commuters.

I'd really appreciate a stop in Aptos! Then I could bike to the train and head into Santa Cruz.

Thank you for your consideration!

From: [REDACTED] on behalf of [jeremy](#)
To: [Regional Transportation Commission](#)
Subject: Rail/trail
Date: Monday, November 25, 2024 1:30:24 PM

RTC members-

My name is Dr. Jeremy Orvik, I am a local Emergency Physician, father, surfer, and long-time Santa Cruzian.

I am deeply concerned by what appears to be the RTC's commitment to funding and building a rail system in our corridor despite what appears to be growing evidence that the costs are out of control, the timeline in the 20+ year range, and the community benefit dubious at best.

To many of us, the RTC has an incredibly poor track record of communication and decision making. You are public servants, and your public expects a CLEAR/CONSCIE and unbiased analysis of the exact costs, timeline, and ridership benefit of this project.

Answer, publically, these questions:

- 1) How much will this project cost?
- 2) Where EXACTLY will these funds be obtained?
- 3) What is projected start date of construction and when would it be completed?
- 4) Under best and worst circumstances, how long would it take a rider to travel from Aptos to New Leaf on the west side?
- 5) How many riders can be moved in one direction at one time?
- 6) What is the RTC's plan for the federally mandated horn-blowing at every grade level crossing?
- 7) Why can we not build a safe, contiguous trail on the available corridor for public use NOW while ongoing study of train viability continues?

Please answer your constituents,
Thank you.

Dr. Jeremy Orvik
Sent from my iPhone

From: [ROBERT STEPHENS](#)
To: [Regional Transportation Commission](#)
Subject: Re: Enough Studies
Date: Tuesday, December 3, 2024 1:15:27 PM

Dear Folks:

One more thought on the rail line issue:

Why do most of the proposed stations have no parking and no buses meeting trains? This seems like a disaster. Have you looked into how this will affect ridership? Why is there no stations being proposed for the west side of the city of Santa Cruz?

The basic problem with all this is our old freight line was developed for freight and is now trying to be used for passenger rail. So the line misses all the places people in our county need to go, it is close but not there. So the first mile and last mile issues become huge. Also there is no space left for stations and it is a single line.

Even more important is the fact that trains are very restrictive in what can be built: they need an even grade and very gentle turns. This is one reason they have failed in the past. Every canyon needs a trestle. Trestles are very expensive to build and maintain. Just look at Capitola, cars and buses can drive up and down into the village, not trains. No matter how much you try, I don't think you can cost effectively make passenger trains work on an old freight line. Ridership will be too low for the cost to build and operate.

Also, how are you going to resolve the issue of Roaring Camp and passenger rail using the same line in front of the Boardwalk?

Sincerely,

Robert Stephens
Aptos CA

> On Dec 3, 2024, at 8:45 AM, Regional Transportation Commission <info@sccrtc.org> wrote:

>

> Hi Robert,

>

> Thank you for your interest in RTC projects. Your comments have been recorded.

>

> Regards,

> Krista

>

>

>

> Krista Corwin [she/her] Administrative Assistant II

>

> Santa Cruz County Regional Transportation Commission

>

> 1101 Pacific Avenue, Suite 250 | Santa Cruz, CA 95060

>

> Main Office 831.460.3200 | Website www.sccrtc.org

>

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> Follow our social networks for the latest RTC news

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> -----Original Message-----
> From: ROBERT STEPHENS [REDACTED]
> Sent: Monday, December 2, 2024 5:12 PM
> To: Regional Transportation Commission <info@sccrtc.org>
> Subject: Enough Studies
>
> Please answer some very basic questions before you do any more studies. How much will a train cost to build and operate? What are the ridership numbers, please ground truth these numbers with existing rail lines? How much of a local tax will be needed for the train? When will this tax be on the ballot? Where will the rest of the funding for the train come from and when can we expect to actually see a train operating. If these answers are not in an executive summary in your latest study, the study is a failure.
>
> Please stop asking people what they want (train car types, train stopes etc), as this just feeds into the belief that a "train is coming soon". You need to answer some very basic questions first, then figure out stops and train color.
>
> Please don't build any trail type until you know, if a train is actually going to work in our rail line. The Ultimate trail is an environmental disaster. Our community is getting very tired of all the crazy politics. No more studies and kicking the can down the road! Our local train is starting to feel a lot like the California High Speed Rail project, a costly pipe dream.
>
> Peoples lives and livelihood are being adversely affected by all this train planning, time to actually see if it is cost effective and doable.
>
> Thank you for your time,
>
> Robert Stephens
> Aptos, CA
>

From: [royce fincher](#)
To: [Regional Transportation Commission](#)
Subject: Re: Milestone 3 Updates for the Zero Emission Passenger Rail and Trail Project!
Date: Tuesday, November 26, 2024 3:11:05 PM

Zero emissions my ass.

On Tue, Nov 26, 2024 at 3:08 PM Regional Transportation Commission
<info@sccrtc.ccsend.com> wrote:

RTC logo



**Milestone 3 Updates for the Zero
Emission Passenger Rail and Trail
Project!**

From: [Bob F](#)
To: [Regional Transportation Commission](#)
Subject: Re: The Car Convenience Factor (revisited from 11/6/24)
Date: Tuesday, December 3, 2024 5:44:17 PM
Attachments: [image002.png](#)
[image003.png](#)
[image004.png](#)
[image005.png](#)

On 11/6/24, I was very pleased to note that the Santa Cruz Sentinel had edited down and printed my lengthy "The Car Convenience Factor" as "Interim Trail: Safe solutions to congestion". I then sent the following "The Car Convenience Factor" to info@sccrtc.org .

It was my understanding that this would be recorded on the RTC website, but I can't find it. (Perhaps I should have included my full name and address which I have now indicated in red.)

It is important, please re-post it or at least post the following summary:

<> Most everyone is aware that the trail is not a simple path in the woods. The most vocal "Expert" train lobbyist who supposedly supported Rail AND Trail recently partially exposed his facade by noting that "The Trail can go anywhere..." No one who couldn't walk for days after being hit by a car while walking in a supposedly safe crosswalk would say that! The trail is a means for tourists and residents to get safely across much of our county upon a level surface at a speed of their choosing 24/7 without the risk of becoming the next victim on a distracted driver's bumper! It clearly gives bicyclists of all ages a better means to feel safe that doesn't involve riding upon the sidewalk.

<> Consider that with all the road space that is becoming available for an auxiliary lane/BOS over on Highway 1 (where higher-speed transportation belongs) that experts in transportation are so adamant that it is not being implemented properly that they are filing a lawsuit! If a pair of railroad tracks can't now fit in the middle of Highway 1 in the same manner that a safe two-track BART system has been implemented within HWY580 in the Pleasanton area, then ONE dedicated bus lane may want to be strategically considered to directly alleviate traffic.

Since a bus is flexible, a dedicated bus lane can favor passenger routing and then allow safe return loops via the actual Highway 1, always making use of the lesser congested direction on Highway 1. Morning+ bus drivers could be responsible for travel upon the one dedicated bus lane in the Watsonville to Santa Cruz direction (to ease the morning commute) then upon Highway 1 in the reverse direction for repeated safe loops. After a

break to switch drivers, buses could reverse direction. Afternoon+ bus drivers could then be responsible for travel upon the same bus lane but now in the Santa Cruz to Watsonville direction then returning via the less congested direction on Highway 1. (If there is not enough room to provide separate lanes, this would improve car congestion far better than any single-track train system on the narrow corridor that takes a very indirect path to get between Watsonville and the rest of where most want to be. Squeezing in a single track to appease a slow-moving train organization would make so much of our county so unsafe for people of all ages and would disappoint so many who want to believe that it would solve their commute.)

Bob Fifield
Aptos

From: Regional Transportation Commission <info@scrtc.org>
Sent: Wednesday, November 6, 2024 10:35 AM
To: Bob F [REDACTED]
Subject: RE: The Car Convenience Factor

Hi Bob,

Thank you for your interest in the RTC. Your comments have been recorded.

Regards,
Krista



Krista Corwin [she/her] Administrative Assistant II
Santa Cruz County Regional Transportation Commission
1101 Pacific Avenue, Suite 250 | Santa Cruz, CA 95060

Main Office 831.460.3200 | Website www.scrtc.org



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From: Bob F [REDACTED]
Sent: Wednesday, November 6, 2024 8:49 AM
To: Regional Transportation Commission <info@sccrtc.org>
Cc: [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

Subject: The Car Convenience Factor

The following has been compressed and is in today's Santa Cruz Sentinel. Please help to circulate commonsense.

(On an additional note, despite an inappropriate president, let's get past the next four years with finally providing an improvement in our community by implementing The Interim Trail that can benefit so many more than just ourselves!)

The Car Convenience Factor

No one can deny Car Convenience. This includes the ideal of transporting anyone to virtually anywhere at any time. This not only provides for daily commuting but provides for the entire family (including those about to be born as well as the most elderly) to be where they need to be at the appropriate times. (This has already been proven for generations as has a bonus of accommodating transporting of reasonably sized loads when needed.)

No one can deny Car CONVENIENCE has led to Car CONGESTION. Despite congestion, car convenience continues to be so desirable that it now frequently leads to saturated roadways where one can jog faster than the "progress" of traffic. Rather than continuing to tolerate further saturation of traffic on Highway 1 for at least another 10 years, why not encourage the saturation of families and tourists to bicycle at their preferred pace upon the transportation corridor that runs across much of Santa Cruz County and has been mostly unused for the past 10+ years? By offloading local traffic from cars to even more flexible and environmentally favorable bicycles, more roadways will regain some of that car convenience that will improve traffic flow for those who have no other choice. (Being part of

the solution rather than part of the problem should be appreciated by realizing the possibility that for every active bike, trike or those seen on foot or buses, there could be one less car on the nearby roadways.)

Over 40 years ago, while traveling around Europe upon a variety of means (including both EXPRESS and LOCAL trains throughout Germany), I developed a concept that combines the best of EXPRESS and LOCAL functions within the same train at the same time. (Years later, I made that into a patent.) I viewed this concept as priceless within our county until realizing the local corridor application is limited to resuscitating a known very-expensive already-defunct very-primitive linear-single-track that was intended over a century ago for only slow-moving freight and tourist trains. Re-introducing implementation of such inefficiency would send our county back 100 years AND NOW taxpayers would have to pay for upgrading the foundation to support suspect for-profit ventures, yet it wouldn't even favor tourism!

Unfortunately, years ago deceitful train opportunists feeding upon impatient commuters saturated our county with half-truths. I circulated "Freight Train to Nowhere" by 11/16/18 to note misinformation (that still continues).

Not everyone is being fooled by unscrupulous opportunists! (Greedy billionaire Theranos founders found themselves in prison after the real world exposed their scam.) Rather than repeating commonsense that has been circulated in numerous newspapers and websites, consider even if allowed limitless "miracle sidings" **what would BART be if it were downgraded to only a single track? How long before the next 57 passengers are in the wrong place at the wrong time and lose their lives?** Why trust an irresponsible implementation promoted by an "expert" train lobbyist focused upon diverting taxpayer funds into his own pocket? I wouldn't risk riding upon such an implementation during rush hours even if it offered no-cost ridership! Just the single-track aspect has more known flaws than the "unsinkable" Titanic or the more recent Challenger disaster that eventually blew up with all passengers aboard.

More than one train going in opposite directions on the same track at the same time is not a favorable foundation for an active commuter system trying to safely accommodate impatient passengers! With relatively short distances between stations, it endlessly requires precisely timed switching to avoid head-on train collisions and won't be half as efficient as an inherently safe double-track configuration. (A suspect system in San Diego has been pressured to upgrade to double-tracking.)

Meanwhile, significant roadway space has become available over on Highway 1. Despite all the effort (and major costs) taking place to provide a supposed Bus-On-Shoulder, experienced experts are so displeased with improper implementation that they have filed a lawsuit!

If a pair of railroad tracks can't now fit in the middle of Highway 1 (where higher-speed transportation belongs) in the same manner that a safe two-track BART system has been implemented within HWY580 in the Pleasanton area, then one dedicated bus lane (down the middle) may want to be strategically considered to directly alleviate traffic. (If our county ever considers getting railroaded, it is important to factor in that even though BART has been established for years, it is presently \$35 million short of meeting annual expenses so don't be surprised when fares double.)

Since a bus is flexible, it can accommodate the same "risky siding" concept intended for the supposed single-track commuter train or better yet, a dedicated bus lane can favor passenger routing and then allow safe return loops via the actual Highway 1, making use of the lesser congested direction on Highway 1 during the morning commute, then (after reversing the bus lane direction in the evening) again making use of the lesser congested direction in the opposite direction (avoiding involvement with "miracle sidings" that in our real world cannot always be guaranteed to properly switch).

Morning+ bus drivers could be responsible for travel upon the one dedicated bus lane in the Watsonville to Santa Cruz direction (to ease the morning commute) then upon Highway 1 in the reverse direction for repeated safe loops. After a break to switch drivers, buses could reverse direction. Afternoon+ bus drivers could then be responsible for travel upon the bus lane in the Santa Cruz to Watsonville direction then returning via the less congested direction on Highway 1. If there is not enough room to provide separate lanes, this would improve car congestion better than any single-track system.

As an engineer ("retired") with decades of experience designing and developing a variety of robust computer systems in our real world (and having walked the entire corridor), I am 100% certain that squeezing in the Trail PLUS Rail within the limited width corridor would be a mistake!

It was revealing that the most vocal "expert" train lobbyist who supposedly supports Rail AND Trail, recently even partially exposed his facade noting that if there wasn't room for both ... "the trail could go anywhere". (There is no safe elsewhere!) The "Trail" is not a

“simple path in the woods”! It has the potential to FINALLY provide a safe level means without obstacles for all ages (and it invites tourism) to traverse much of Santa Cruz County without concern of being the next victim on a distracted driver’s bumper!!! It needs to be emphasized:

<> cars have exclusive use of freeways

<> pedestrians should have exclusive use of sidewalks

Bicyclists of all ages should not have to choose between riding upon sidewalks or risk their life trying to share a roadway with cars.

A safe trail upon the corridor is vital! We need to accommodate people, not freight trains. Implementing a freight train or “wannabe bus” that may look sleek standing still but forever tethered to a railroad track requires all passengers to switch to alternative means to complete what should have been a simple trek to a popular tourist attraction (Capitola Village), only serves special interests!

What benefits the most, costs the least, is the safest and most expeditious as well as most flexible, is being unnecessarily delayed for years!

The RTC Engineering staff is under the direction of Supervisors, some of whom are at the mercy of suspect organizations who funded their election. Supervisors who don’t understand the necessity for guaranteed safe passenger return loops should excuse themselves from voting on mass transportation matters!

The purpose of government is to reasonably serve those within its borders. Outrageous taxpayer investment bringing in insignificant revenue that will not benefit Quality of Life for those within its borders is not appropriate government. Our local government can save taxpayers endless millions (and lives as well as improving Quality of Life for so many beyond just ourselves) by implementing the Interim Trail now! The Interim Trail is the best way to achieve a safe BikeWay, WalkWay, and RunWay/JogWay 24/7 as well as allow ANY mass transportation means in ANY future. Perhaps this real-world implementation can be the best use of the Transportation Corridor that runs across much of Santa Cruz County until a means is found to safely transport people from where they are to where they want to be at the speed of light at any time of any day at no cost!

Bob Fifield



Aptos, Ca. 95003

From: [Eliece Horton](#)
To: [Regional Transportation Commission](#)
Subject: SUPPORT High capacity commuter rail, dedicated BIKE cars, integrated bikeways, state rail system
Date: Saturday, November 30, 2024 9:27:03 AM

I am in support of high capacity commuter rail with dedicated BIKE cars, connecting to integrated bikeways and the state rail system.

R E C Y C L E: Ride your Bike again Today!
Eliece Horton

From: [Jack Brown](#)
To: [Regional Transportation Commission](#)
Subject: Santa Cruz County Deserves Better Than a Single-Track Passenger Rail with Limited Capacity
Date: Thursday, November 28, 2024 10:10:36 AM

I recently posted 10 questions the RTC really needs to answer about the plans for a trail that prioritizes rail on the unusable train tracks that stretch through Santa Cruz County. I wanted to focus on the fourth and fifth question, How many people could fit on a train and how many people could a train serve?

Santa Cruz County is known for its innovative spirit and commitment to environmental sustainability. The Zero Emission Passenger Rail Transit project promises to align with these values, proposing clean and green public transportation along our scenic coastline. However, when we look beyond the glossy brochures, slick consultant presentations and idealistic visions, the realities of a single-track rail system make it a poor investment for our community.

Capacity Constraints

The fundamental flaw lies in capacity. A single-track rail inherently limits the number of trains that can operate simultaneously. The current plan calls for only 3 places for trains to pass in opposite directions called sidings. With only 3 sidings, this means only 4 trains could operate at any one time going both directions. The length of these sidings and station locations will limit the size of the rail vehicles that can operate as well. In an area with high commuter demand, especially during peak hours, this bottleneck drastically reduces the number of people the system can serve. Even if the rail vehicles are maximized in size, the physical constraints of a single track mean only a few trips per day in each direction. This is woefully inadequate for a county where over 100,000 trips happen daily on Highway 1, yet a train could only handle a couple of thousand trips at best. One of our closest examples of suburban commuter rail, SMART in Sonoma and Marin County have a population almost triple that of Santa Cruz County. Their highest month of total daily boardings was 3,300 (1,650 round trips) that equates 0.2% of their population using the train. Their Environmental Impact Report stated they would achieve an average of 5,500 daily boardings. If 0.2% of Santa Cruz County 261,000 residents rode the train, that would equate to 574 people a day (1,150 daily boardings). Yikes!

So What Can Scale?

Consider the alternative: robust bus rapid transit (BRT) systems or expanded electric shuttle services. These options provide more flexibility, greater coverage, and higher passenger capacity than a single-track rail ever could. Buses and shuttles can adapt to real-time demand, serve more neighborhoods, and run on schedules that match our

community's needs. The E-bike revolution is also booming, from being practically non-existent less than a decade ago, they are one of the preferred modes of biking by our younger generations and the basis of bike share. A train stuck on a single track is limited in its reach and effectiveness.

Another glaring issue is cost. Rail projects are notoriously expensive to construct and maintain, particularly in a region with challenging geography like Santa Cruz County. Every dollar spent on a single-track rail system is a dollar not spent on more efficient, scalable, and adaptable transit solutions. And if the rail system underperforms—highly likely given its limited capacity—it risks becoming a taxpayer-funded boondoggle, a monument to poor planning rather than a practical transit solution.

Where is the County Wide Equity?

Finally, there's the question of equity. Rail systems, especially those confined to single tracks, serve a narrow corridor. What about residents in Watsonville, Live Oak, or the Santa Cruz Mountains? A single-track rail system that is looking to cost taxpayers over \$5 billion fails to connect the broader community, leaving many dependent on cars and private transport yet all will be required to subsidize it. A truly sustainable transit solution at this scale must meet the needs of the entire county, not just a privileged 574.

Santa Cruz County deserves a transit system that is not only zero-emission but also accessible, efficient, and future-proof. A single-track rail system fails on all these fronts. We must demand better, rejecting shortsighted solutions in favor of a vision that truly serves everyone in our community. Let's invest in a transit future that moves us all forward.

From: [Russell Weisz](#)
To: [Regional Transportation Commission](#)
Subject: Save Our Rail Stops
Date: Monday, December 2, 2024 12:40:14 PM

Dear RTC Commissioners,

Watsonville should have at least two passenger rail stops, one near downtown and the other at Ohlone Parkway, where thousands of people commute from. Also Santa Cruz Westside needs to have a passenger rail stop. Many thousands of people live within a mile of the rail on the Westside and the train should be easy to access for them.

thanks,

Russell Weisz



Santa Cruz

From: [nadene thorne](#)
To: [Regional Transportation Commission](#)
Subject: Sentinel Guest Commentary for Your Consideration
Date: Tuesday, December 3, 2024 12:09:00 PM

Commissioners and Staff,
I sent the below as a guest commentary to the Sentinel.
Nadene Thorne

I've attended the several community workshops put on by the consultants hired by the Regional Transportation Commission to provide us Santa Cruz County residents with the definitive "Zero Emission Passenger Rail and Trail Project Concept Report" (zeprt.com). These events are siloed, meaning that there's no group Q&A where we can all hear the questions and answers, only posters and maps, sticky notes for your questions, and team members available for one-on-one questions (plus, of course, email, online surveys, etc.). They want lots of community input on various aspects of the study, but so far have presented little actual data which somehow I thought was the original objective.

I'm beginning to sense that they're not actually intending to tell us IF passenger rail is feasible here, but only to line out some "considerations which will be explored further in the environmental phase." What? More studies?

It seems plain to me without any study whatsoever, that if you have enough money you can do anything - which, presumably, is the underlying principle of the state bullet train (CAHSR) and Elon Musk. But that wasn't what I thought was the point of this "definitive" study.

Discussing quiet zones, alternatives for rail in front of the Boardwalk, the modality of passenger counts, and station amenities seems a lot to me like shopping for furniture for a house that you don't know if you can afford to build, or if you can even get permits for.

“Feasible” to me means how many passengers will ride it, whether it will make Highway 1 and local street traffic better or worse, how much will it cost me - fares, sales tax increases - and how will we support it once it’s built? - with county tax subsidies? How much? A list of possible sources to apply for competitive federal and state construction funding is not “funding.” How much funding would we need? What are the chances we’d get any when competing against cities with millions of residents?

Deciding where the stations will be won’t move them any closer to my house, to shopping, or to our largest employers - UCSC, Cabrillo, Dominican Hospital. I don’t care how long the train ride to Watsonville is on our single one-lane track - I care how long my whole trip will take - home to bus stop to train station to another bus stop to destination, and wait times in between. How far will I have to carry my groceries?

This report is supposed to be released in early 2025. No previous study has indicated that there will be enough passengers, or that we will be able to afford such a massive undertaking, but I’m willing to see what the consultants say. It’s unknown at this time whether voters will approve increasing our sales taxes again just for rail, especially when Metro is already planning a sales tax measure for the next ballot. Unfortunately, I’m not feeling as though the ZEPRT report is getting us any closer to the answers we need - but I hope I’m wrong.

Because in the meantime, rail-adjacent trail planning is cooking along, at great expense - possibly the most expensive and still not completely funded trail in the nation. Aren’t we putting the cart before the horse in building a trail without answers about rail? If passenger rail is far from certain, and years away, perhaps we could hold off spending untold millions building railroad weight bridges, massive retaining walls,

lengthy safety fences, and so much tree removal, not to mention dispossessing numerous adjacent mobile home dwellers. We could pull up the tracks now, which previous studies tell us will need to be entirely replaced due to their age anyway. We could build a trail that is wider, cheaper, faster, and makes more sense. Just a thought.

From: [Tom Kellogg](#)
To: [Regional Transportation Commission](#)
Cc: [Tom Kellogg](#)
Subject: Support Coastal Trail
Date: Sunday, December 1, 2024 7:50:22 AM

RTC,

I fully support Trail Now and Greenway SCC. Below is a portion of the recent Trail Now newsletter . Please stop wasting money and improve the quality of life, focus on building the coastal trail now.

Tom Kellogg
Aptos

The proposed Rail System continues to illustrate how a new passenger rail system will never exist on the Santa Cruz Coastal Corridor. The real issue is that the rail plan is delaying the construction of the Santa Cruz Coastal Trail in a timely, cost-effective and eco-friendly manner.

[OPENING COASTAL TRAIL WILL SIGNIFICANTLY IMPROVE MOBILITY ACROSS COUNTY](#)

Based on actual peak hour usage of the existing 1-mile section of Santa Cruz Coastal Trail, the Coastal Trail from Watsonville to Davenport can have over 2000 people an hour utilizing the corridor. A single highway lane has a capacity of 2000 people an hour, so adding this additional thruway across Santa Cruz County will significantly improve mobility for the community.

The fact is the continued delays in opening the Coastal Trail from Watsonville to Davenport is reducing the quality of life for our community.

Sent from my iPhone

From: [Jack Brown](#)
To: [Regional Transportation Commission](#)
Subject: The Financial Reality of Taxation for Santa Cruz's Zero-Emission Train
Date: Saturday, November 30, 2024 10:11:21 AM

I recently posted 10 questions the RTC really needs to answer about the plans for a trail that prioritizes rail on the unusable train tracks that stretch through Santa Cruz County. I wanted to focus on the sixth, seventh and eighth questions: How much of the cost will be paid for by local taxpayers? Where will the tax increase be applied and how much will it be? And what will the subsidy per trip cost?

The idea of a zero-emission train running along Santa Cruz County's scenic coastline sounds appealing—a vision of sustainable transit that aligns with California's green future. However, the financial reality of such a project paints a much different picture, one that could burden taxpayers for decades with sky-high subsidies and operational costs.

Estimated Costs are Going Sky High

Santa Cruz County taxpayers are being asked to support a rail system that lacks clear funding for construction, let alone the massive subsidies required to operate it. The original estimate for rail and trail placed the project cost at \$120 million and it has taken off like a rocket since then. Speculation is that the costs for the project are staggering. A pre-pandemic study placed the price tag at \$1.3 billion, and experts now caution it could soar past \$5 billion due to inflation and the complexities of implementing a zero-emission system. Yet, there's no confirmed source for these billions, leaving local taxpayers as the likely financiers through new taxes or bonds. Will this be a sales tax increase? We are near the state limit of 10.25% for sales tax rates already, yet a realistic revenue match would require around a 20-25% increase in the tax rate to cover local costs which would fall hardest on our low-income communities.

Costs are More than a Fare

Beyond construction, the operational costs are an even greater concern. Public transit systems do not and should not operate at a profit, and rail systems are among the most expensive to maintain and operate. The County's existing Metro bus service provides a sobering comparison: taxpayers subsidize Metro rides at \$12 to \$20 per trip for fares that range from free to \$2. While challenging, it is something that Metro and Santa Cruz County have been able to make work. A zero-emission train, with its entirely new specialized infrastructure, maintenance requirements, and relatively limited capacity, will require significantly higher subsidies per passenger in the range

of \$150-\$250 per trip.

Who will use this train, and will its ridership justify the cost? Santa Cruz County is home to just over 270,000 residents, and the proposed train's capacity will never rival the volume of highway traffic. If we were to see a similar ratio of riders to population as SMART in Sonoma and Marin County, we are looking at around 570 daily users. A significant portion of local commuters already depend on personal vehicles, making the train more likely to serve as a niche alternative rather than a transformative solution. Yet, every trip will still demand substantial taxpayer contributions to keep it running.

We Need to Learn From Our Mistakes

California's high-speed rail project offers a cautionary tale. It began with lofty promises of low costs and high utility, but has since ballooned into a multibillion-dollar quagmire with uncertain completion. Santa Cruz County risks falling into a similar trap unless it carefully evaluates the true costs and long-term implications of a zero-emission train up front and is transparent to the public before asking questions like "Do you want 10 stops or 20 stops?".

Before asking taxpayers to foot the bill for this ambitious project, local officials must provide clear answers to pressing questions that are usually provided up front for any major project plan. What will be the total construction and operational costs? How much of that burden will fall on local taxpayers? What will the per-trip subsidy be, and how does that compare to alternative solutions like enhanced bus systems or dedicated bike and pedestrian trails?

A zero-emission train should not become a zero-accountability project. Santa Cruz County deserves a transportation plan that balances environmental goals with fiscal responsibility. Without transparency and viable financial planning, this train could derail our county's budget long before it ever leaves the station.

From: [Jack Brown](#)
To: [Regional Transportation Commission](#)
Subject: The Never-Ending Wait for Santa Cruz County's Zero Emission Rail and Trail: A Dream Deferred?
Date: Tuesday, November 26, 2024 11:06:06 AM

I will be writing a series of essays in regards to ten basic questions the public should be asking about the Santa Cruz County Zero Emission Rail and Trail project that are not getting answered. I am including my second essay below regarding project completion. Please contact me if you are interested in publishing or reporting on these topics.

The Never-Ending Wait for Santa Cruz County's Zero Emission Rail and Trail: A Dream Deferred?

I recently posted 10 questions the RTC really needs to answer about the plans for a trail that prioritizes rail on the unusable train tracks that stretch through Santa Cruz County. I wanted to focus on the second question, When will we have it?

"We choose to go to the moon. We choose to go to the moon in this decade and do the other things, not because they are easy, but because they are hard..." - John F. Kennedy, September 12, 1962

Massive Projects. President Kennedy at his famous address at Rice University set in motion one of the largest most revolutionary engineering projects ever. To travel to the moon. And the very first sentence after his proclamation of WHAT we were going to do, he defined WHEN the project would be completed.

Santa Cruz County's ambitious Zero Emission Passenger Rail and Trail project promises to revolutionize local transportation, offering a greener, more sustainable alternative to car-centric commuting. Yet, beneath the visionary rhetoric lies a troubling reality: the project is not fully funded, and its timeline feels more like a pipe dream than a concrete plan. While its intentions are noble, the execution—or lack thereof—is a glaring reminder of how big ideas can falter under the weight of bureaucratic inertia and fiscal uncertainty.

The Funding Gap: A Plan Without a Wallet

The project's proponents tout its transformative potential, but the financial backbone needed to support it remains elusive. Initial estimates place the total cost, from what little we know, is in the billions, yet funding secured so far is only a fraction of that only a portion of the trail estimate and none of the rail estimate has been funded. Relying on state and federal grants, along with potential local sales tax initiatives (with many of the communities in the county at the maximum amount allowed by the state), introduces layers of unpredictability. Economic downturns, political shifts, natural disasters or competing priorities could derail the funding pipeline, leaving the project

perpetually half-baked.

Meanwhile, inflation and rising construction costs are only making the funding shortfall more pronounced. Every year the project has been “in the hands of consultants”, the price tag swells, further complicating the RTC’s ability to deliver on its promises.

The Timeline That Stretches Into Infinity

Having a commuter train in Santa Cruz is not just a flip of a switch. Even with funding secured, the estimated completion timeline for the rail and trail stretches into decades. Recent projections indicate that some sections of the trail may not be usable until the 2030s, while the passenger rail might not come online until the 2040s—or later. By the time the project is complete, the needs of Santa Cruz County could have drastically changed, rendering its utility questionable.

This protracted timeline also undermines public confidence. Residents who were initially excited about the project are now skeptical that it will ever materialize, especially with the options presented in the most recent public meetings. Detouring trail users onto busy and high speed streets, limited stops, no stops planned with coordination with Metro bus lines and lack of amenities and safety features at proposed stations. The longer the county takes to deliver results, the more likely voters are to abandon support for future funding measures.

Paralysis by Analysis

The endless studies, reports, and public forums required to keep the project moving forward are emblematic of a larger issue: decision-making paralysis. While public input is essential, the drawn-out process of gathering consensus and lack of town-hall type forums has slowed the project to a crawl. Every delay for another feasibility study or environmental impact report is time and money lost.

The Risk of Becoming Obsolete

Technology and transportation trends are evolving rapidly. By the time Santa Cruz’s zero-emission rail and trail are operational, they may already be outpaced by innovations like E-Bikes, zero emission bus service, advanced ride-sharing platforms, or even more flexible transit systems. Without agility in its planning, the project risks being an expensive relic before it even opens.

What Needs to Change

If Santa Cruz County is serious about delivering on the promise of the Zero Emission Passenger Rail and Trail, it must act with realistic expectations. This starts with simply scoping the magnitude of this project in a transparent fashion to see if continuing to throw money and resources at this project really makes sense. A clear, accountable project management structure with transparent milestones is essential to regain public trust. It's OK, and actually much better for the community if we accept this is not the right solution for our community now, rather than after we build it and realized what a stress it puts on our public infrastructure.

County leaders must be prepared to make tough choices: Is the dual rail-and-trail vision feasible, or should resources be redirected to prioritize one over the other? Is there any successful example in the western United States of a suburban commuter rail transit system that does not go to a major city without a transfer? I can't seem to find one. A scaled-down project leveraging our existing resources to scale would be infinitely more impactful than an ambitious vision that never leaves the drawing board.

Santa Cruz County cannot afford to continue to go down this fixed rail path. We have real transit and environmental issues that need to be solved now, not decades from now. The dream of a zero-emission transportation system is worth pursuing, but with urgency. Continuing to try to justify a train without realistic planning and a target end date, it will remain just that—a dream.

From: [Jack Brown](#)
To: [Regional Transportation Commission](#)
Subject: The True Cost of Noise—Santa Cruz Passenger Train Horns and Community Impact
Date: Sunday, December 1, 2024 6:27:48 PM

I recently posted 10 questions the RTC really needs to answer about the plans for a trail that prioritizes rail on the unusable train tracks that stretch through Santa Cruz County. This essay focuses on the 9th set of questions: How many 110db horn blasts will occur for a train going one direction to another? How many times a day? What will the hours be? And the 10th set of questions: How much does a quiet zone study cost? How many will be submitted? What will be the cost for the additional infrastructure required to support quiet zones and possible liability for accidents?

As Santa Cruz County continues its long-debated journey toward implementing a passenger train system, the conversation must expand beyond environmental benefits and traffic relief. One issue looms large: the noise generated by train horns, which, at a staggering 110 decibels (dB), can disrupt neighborhoods, damage public tranquility, and raise broader questions about costs and community well-being.

The Noise Reality: Horns and Decibels

Federal regulations mandate that trains sound their horns as they approach and pass through public crossings, with each blast reaching up to 110 dB—louder than a rock concert or jet engine at close range. A single train traveling from Watsonville to Santa Cruz, a route dotted with approximately three dozen crossings, would sound its horn in two long blasts, a short blast and another long blast of its horn at each of the three dozen intersections, or 288 blasts per trip. With projections of multiple daily routes, each direction could involve several thousand horn blasts echoing across neighborhoods from dawn until late at night.

Hours of Operation: The Day Never Ends

Train schedules aim to accommodate commuters, which typically means operating from early morning to late evening. If service runs from 6:00 AM to 9:00 PM, communities near the tracks could endure more than 15 hours of intermittent 110 dB noise just from commuter trains (freight trains running overnight could have horns blasting even later!). For those living nearby, this isn't just an inconvenience—it's a public health concern. Chronic exposure to high-decibel sounds is linked to stress, sleep disturbances, and even cardiovascular issues.

The Quiet Zone Dilemma

"Quiet zones" offer a potential solution, allowing communities to mitigate train noise by implementing safety measures that eliminate the need for mandatory horn use. Establishing a quiet zone, however, is neither simple nor cheap. Studies to assess feasibility typically cost between \$30,000 and \$50,000 per crossing. Given the number of crossings on the Watsonville-Santa Cruz line, costs for studies alone could quickly escalate into the millions.

Once studies are complete, implementing the necessary infrastructure—like upgraded gates, advanced signaling systems, and pedestrian safety barriers—adds substantially to the bill. These improvements can cost \$250,000 to \$1 million per crossing. For a route with 3 dozen crossings, the price tag could exceed \$20 million, an amount unlikely to be fully covered by state or federal grants. Local taxpayers may ultimately foot the bill. In the end, not every community will get the quiet zones. Will they be equitably distributed? Or will they only be provided to the more affluent neighborhoods?

Liability and Safety Risks

Quiet zones also bring increased liability. Without mandatory horn blasts, accidents at crossings can rise, as pedestrians and vehicles rely solely on visual and structural warnings. In 2023, 38 people lost their lives in train-related incidents across California, a grim reminder of the stakes. Any resulting lawsuits could place additional financial strain on cities and counties, potentially dwarfing the initial investment in quiet zone infrastructure.

Striking the Right Balance

The prospect of passenger trains in Santa Cruz County on the surface appear to provide social benefits, from reducing car emissions to providing an alternative to highway congestion. However, these benefits must be weighed against the noise impact and the financial and safety costs of mitigating that impact. A comprehensive approach is needed, one that ensures community well-being while addressing the realities of funding and safety.

Santa Cruz County deserves transparency and accountability as these decisions unfold. How will the noise affect residents' quality of life? Who will bear the financial burden of quiet zones? And, crucially, how will safety be prioritized in a system that seeks to eliminate horns? The answers to these questions will determine if the train system becomes a noisy burden for our otherwise tranquil county.

From: [Gary Sultana](#)
To: [Regional Transportation Commission](#)
Subject: Trail Now. Stop wasting precious resources on an impossible rail project. Build the trail now and improve our existing metro bus system.
Date: Sunday, December 1, 2024 9:47:54 PM

Gary Sultana, concerned Santa Cruz County resident.

From: [Tom Livingston](#)
To: [Regional Transportation Commission](#)
Subject: Trail Now
Date: Tuesday, December 3, 2024 12:33:39 PM

Come on RTC, build the trail in my life time. Trains are old technology. Build the trail and get some traffic on the Coastal Corridor, and off of Highway 1.

Tom Livingston
Aptos, CA

From: [Ann Carr](#)
To: [Regional Transportation Commission](#)
Subject: Trail now
Date: Thursday, November 28, 2024 9:44:03 AM

We need a bike/ pedestrian trail from Watsonville to Santa Cruz. No train . This is crazy. It's been 30 years of delay and surveys. There is no room for a train on these tracks ! Ann Carr

Sent from my iPhone

From: [micheal saint](#)
To: [Regional Transportation Commission](#)
Subject: ZEPRT Agenda item #22 12-5-2024
Date: Monday, December 2, 2024 2:57:06 PM

Dear commissioners

After delving into the feasibility of a Commuter train or light rail on the rail corridor, plus the changes needed to bring the corridor up to a class 1 freight rail line, I have concluded that the county should pursue a much lighter form of mass transit.

The amount of freight rail infrastructure and speeds the commuter train has to run at to maintain an acceptable commute time is very expensive.

Getting responses from other advocacy groups and their ideas about what makes a good affordable mass transit system seemed to always describe a PRT type system.

Here are my comments to the virtual ZEPRT meetings in November.

Dear Santa Cruz County Regional Transportation Commission,

With regard to the ZEPRT planning, first of all, thank you for your forward vision to create a mass transit system within our county. We travel internationally occasionally and enjoy the mass transit, biking and pedestrian systems many European countries have and are continuing to refine in their cities.

The price tag on this proposed system will be massive, and may be impacted by current political/economic priorities. We think that exploring a more cost effective way to create a mass transit system would be in our best interest. As a county, to ask residents to be saddled with the potential bond burden to create this proposed ZEPRT system would likely mean that all your planning is for naught.

Instead, I ask that you consider a more flexible, less expensive alternative that makes us less reliant on political whims and priorities; not to mention that it may very well save the Santa Cruz county residents a lot of money. Here is an example of what I am referring to. <https://www.glydways.com/>.

The above Glydways example has been adopted by San Jose and Contra Costa County. As they are doing, if we build out this system in sections we would be able to stay within our means as a small county with a small tax base. Additionally, this Personal Rapid Transit system can be built by partnering with both public and private monetary participation. We need a system that can have the ability to carry thousands of passengers a day and offer non stop service. We also need a system that pays for operation and maintenance costs with farebox revenues. If we pare down the transportation system in size and eliminate the space this system needs I believe we can save billions of dollars in construction and operational costs. Just a few examples of savings include eliminating the need for a Quiet Zone, as the Personal Rapid Transit system can be elevated above road crossings. The space needed for Personal Rapid Transit stations would also likely be much smaller, allowing the building of more stops to draw from more areas of our community. The wait times for transportation would also be greatly reduced (3 to 5 minutes), making this a more attractive option for public transportation.

We should focus on a transportation system that is as close in convenience to the automobile as possible if we are going to persuade people to use it and help traffic congestion. In my opinion, the studies from 2015 and 2021 are outdated. Technology is increasing rapidly. Personal Rapid Transit is a more convenient and faster method of travel versus other mass transit options, and should be included in any future mass transportation system studies as an alternative. It more closely aligns with the way Americans prefer to travel, convenient, non-stop and personal. Here is the link to the Glydways presentation in March of 2024, a review of this presentation may be helpful and necessary for those not in attendance at the March meeting, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vIXrskCpBIE&list=PLo9N9AsVOVvRZ52uJW8KW1xLX7iizMk85&t=2276s>

Sincerely,
Mike and Elizabeth Saint
Aptos residents

From: [Steven Plumb](#)
To: [Regional Transportation Commission](#)
Cc: [Jack Brown](#)
Subject: ZEPRT feasibility study
Date: Friday, November 29, 2024 5:40:04 PM

Dear Fellow Lovers of Santa Cruz County,

Please consider the time frame and barriers to implementing a successful local train/tram system in Santa Cruz. Please recognize the damage you have already recommended by deviating off of the safe and automobile-free path that has been gifted to us. Please consider the lives lost and to be lost of our neighbors riding bikes on city streets. Please consider the dramatic growth in commuters and school children on E-bikes and scooters. Please consider the funds that won't be available to repair our crumbling roadways. Please consider the legal battles and their cost as you displace people from their homes or place a train station someone's house. Please learn from the failed experiences of other communities larger than ours.

Don't ask me where I want the stations or whether they should have bathrooms. Ask the populous now whether they support a sales tax to fund our new train. You will have to ask eventually, and that is when you will learn how much support you actually have.

Thank you for your time.

Steve Plumb, MD

From: [REDACTED]
To: [Regional Transportation Commission](#); [REDACTED]
Subject: Zeprt Project
Date: Saturday, November 30, 2024 12:06:59 PM

Dear SCRTC Commissioners , Please review and respond to the following questions before any additional taxpayer dollars are spent on the proposed Santa Cruz Rail Trail project. Also please post these questions on the RTC website and the upcoming RTc information meeting in Watsonville Dec 5 2024.

1. How much will the overall project cost?
2. How long will it take to start construction?
3. How long will it take to complete construction?
4. What will be the maximum capacity of a train?
5. How many people could use the train vs. how many people use the highway?
6. How much of the cost will be paid for by local taxpayers?
7. Will it be a sales tax? Will it be a property tax? How much will they go up? For how long?
8. What will be the subsidy taxpayers will be expected to pay per trip? (Metro costs taxpayers \$12-\$20 per every \$0-\$2 fare)
9. How many 140db horn blasts will occur for a train going one direction to another? How many times a day? What will the hours be?
10. How much does a quiet zone study cost? How many will be submitted? What will be the cost for the additional infrastructure required to support quiet zones and possible liability for accidents. (38 people were killed by trains in California in 2023)

Thank you for your time.

Jim Jordan