

From: [Matt Farrell](#)
To:

[Regional Transportation Commission](#)

Subject: Comment Letter on January 15 Agenda Item 7. Contract Amendment with HDR for Climate Resiliency Planning for the Santa Cruz Branch Rail Line

Date: Wednesday, January 14, 2026 8:47:08 AM

Attachments: [12152026 Agenda Item 7. Contract Amendment with HDR for Climate Resiliency Plan Final.pdf](#)

Chair Montesino, Commissioners and Executive Director Christiansen,

We appreciate the opportunity to comment on the proposed contract amendment with HDR for its climate resiliency planning for the Santa Cruz Branch Rail Line.

We have three major questions about the proposed amendment.

First, evaluating the interim trail should include an alternative which preserves the rail line. This is especially appropriate given that this alternative is being evaluated as a short term alternative with replacement in 2050.

Second, we are concerned that the agreement documents call for the evaluation of use of the Harkins Slough Bridge. This alternative would also result in seasonal flooding of the trail, which is not the case for any other planned or constructed trail segment. In addition, RTC staff, county, and city of Watsonville staff have presented a Class I bike path alternative on San Andreas, Beach and Rodrigues in community meetings; and that alternative would not face seasonal flooding.

Third, the agreement includes replacement of the La Selva/Manresa bridge without an evaluation of the cost of converting the existing bridge. It is not clear why this option is not being explored, when the Commission has given direction for performing an analysis of the conversion of the Capitola Trestle for the interim trail.

We would request that this item be pulled from the consent agenda and that there be an opportunity for public comment.

Matt Farrell
Board Chair, Santa Cruz County Friends of the Rail and Trail



January 12, 2026

TO: Chair Eduardo Montesino, Commissioners and Executive Director Christiansen

RE: Agenda Item 7. Contract Amendment with HDR for Climate Resiliency Planning for the Santa Cruz Branch Rail Line

Chair Mendocino, Commissioners and Executive Director Christiansen:

Santa Cruz County Friends of the Rail and Trail (FORT) requests that this item be pulled from the consent agenda. We have the following comments and concerns.

First, while the evaluation of the interim trail includes the interim trail alternative which would remove the rails, it does not include an interim trail alternative which would preserve the rail. This alternative should be included. The staff report states that this interim trail would be 16' feet wide. There is no discussion of whether or not that width includes a gravel shoulder. This should be clarified in the scope of work.

Second, the staff report states that the design for this interim trail alternative would use "gray infrastructure". This term is not defined but, from reading the staff report and its attachments, it seems that the design concept allows in some reaches of the trail (specifically around Harkins Slough), seasonal flooding. It is not clear to us that this design approach has been presented in community meetings or at the commission. Before making a decision which is not part of the design criteria for any other segment of the trail (as far as we know), we believe that there should be an opportunity for public discussion..

We are also concerned about the public planning process that has already taken place for Segments 17-20. Current planning trail planning efforts have focused on a separated Class 1 path on San Andreas Road, Beach Street and Rodrigues Street. It is not clear from the staff report how these two alignments are being weighed or evaluated in this process; and why the Harkins Slough Bridge is being evaluated for climate resilience in light of the current work on the San Andreas-Beach Street alternative. This alternative has been well-received and supported in community meetings.

Finally we have concerns about the treatment of the La Selva/Manresa Bluffs bridge. The contract language reads, "This amendment assumes a level of effort corresponding to a 200-300 foot and a 700 foot long viaduct at La Selva/Manresa. Feasibility and cost of converting the existing La Selva/Manresa Bluffs bridge will not be evaluated or included in the project documentation." It would be helpful to understand why the cost of converting the existing bridge has not been included in this contract agreement. If the Commission has approved evaluating the Capitola Trestle for an interim trail, it would appear reasonable to provide the same review here.

We request that these questions be answered before moving forward with this agreement.

Matt Farrell

Board Chair, Santa Cruz County Friends of the Rail and Trail