

**From:** [Kevin Maguire - Bike Capitola](#)  
**To:** [Regional Transportation Commission](#)  
**Subject:** Fiscal Sequencing and Transportation Priorities Agenda item #23  
**Date:** Tuesday, March 3, 2026 5:11:52 PM

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I recently submitted a letter to the editor regarding the RTC's request for \$15 million in state and federal funds for additional passenger rail environmental work. State and federal rail programs require their own environmental processes, meaning this study may not even advance construction eligibility.

Santa Cruz County is entering a period of fiscal constraint. The County faces a projected structural deficit, and METRO has identified a potential funding gap beginning in 2028 as temporary operating support expires. A local transportation tax measure may soon be before voters.

In this environment, project sequencing matters.

We respectfully urge prioritization of:

- Completion of the Interim Trail and protection of ATP funding
- Stabilization of existing METRO service (**This is very important!**)
- Near-term safety and active transportation projects with clear deliverability

Advancing additional rail environmental expenditures without a clearly identified capital and long-term operating funding pathway risks undermining public confidence in transportation spending.

Before committing further resources to rail studies, we request:

- A full accounting of rail expenditures to date
- Updated capital cost projections
- Estimated annual operating subsidy requirements
- Identification of realistic funding sources

Public trust depends on fiscal discipline and clear prioritization. Santa Cruz is one of the most expensive places to live, prioritization matters, METRO is facing issues now, today, rail is 30+ years away. The message it sends, no matter if its local funds, state or federal dollars, the public will notice what is being prioritized.

Thank you for your consideration.

Kevin Maguire  
Capitola

**Regional Transportation Commission**

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**From:** J Lighthill [REDACTED] >  
**Sent:** Tuesday, March 3, 2026 8:37 AM  
**To:** [REDACTED] Regional  
Transportation Commission  
**Subject:** Item 23- Request for earmarks to fund ZEPRT

Dear Commissioners and Staff,

Before directing staff to seek state or federal funding for the ZEPRT project, please confirm that RTC will remain in compliance with the trail project’s funding obligations.

The trail is funded through the California Transportation Commission’s Active Transportation Program (ATP), which requires funded projects to remain in place for a minimum of 20 years. Agenda Item 23 proposes ZEPRT construction beginning in 2036—just 10 years from now. Because ZEPRT would require the removal of the Interim Trail, the two projects appear incompatible under current timelines.

Please clarify how RTC intends to ensure compliance with state funding requirements, or whether adjustments to the ZEPRT timeline will be necessary.

Thank you for your consideration.

Regards,

Johanna Lighthill

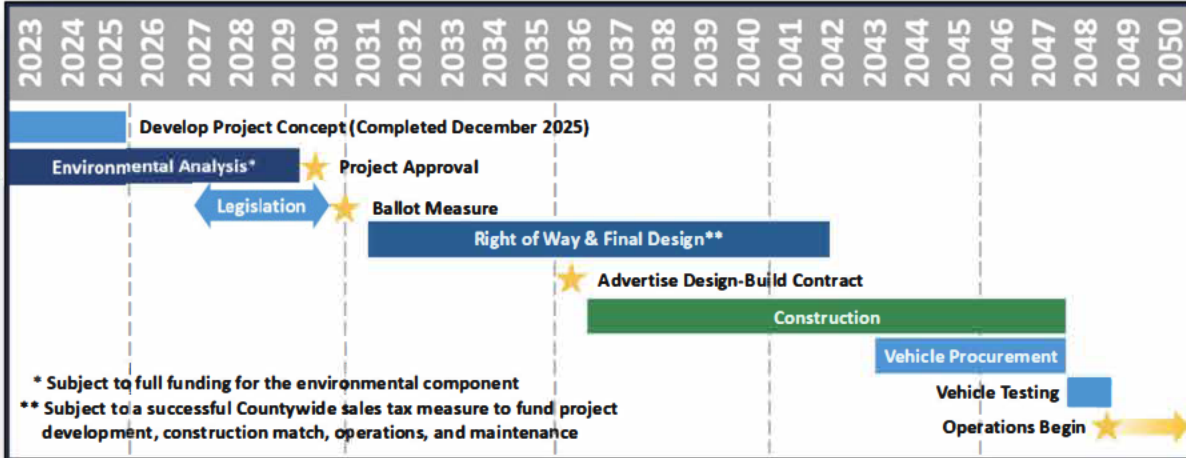


Figure 1 - Project Schedule for Zero Emission Passenger Rail & Trail Project

**From:** [Kevin Maguire - Bike Capitola](#)  
**To:** [Regional Transportation Commission;](#) [REDACTED]  
**Subject:** Public Comment – RTC Agenda #23 and Santa Cruz \$23 Million dollar deficit  
**Date:** Thursday, February 26, 2026 8:45:40 PM

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**Public Comment – RTC Agenda #23**

Commissioners,

Santa Cruz County is facing a \$23 million deficit. Metro is discussing a potential half-cent sales tax just to sustain existing bus service. Roads, bridges, emergency services, and basic infrastructure are under strain.

In that fiscal environment, it is not responsible to continue advancing environmental review and earmark requests for a \$4–5+ billion passenger rail proposal that has no secured construction funding, no clear tax pathway, and no near-term deliverability.

Meanwhile, your own materials confirm that at least 10 bridges on the corridor are out of service or structurally deficient, and the line is “inoperable to freight north of Watsonville indefinitely.” The Capitola Trestle cannot support rail without extraordinary reinvestment.

We are being asked to fund more studies for a system that cannot operate today and cannot be built for decades.

The Interim Trail, by contrast, is funded, buildable, ADA-compliant, and aligned with the ATP grant schedule. It delivers mobility in years — not generations.

This is not anti-rail. It is pro-reality.

Focus scarce public dollars where they produce measurable benefit now: completing Segments 9–11, protecting the grant, stabilizing Metro, and maintaining the roads people use every day.

Santa Cruz deserves infrastructure we can afford and use — not another decade of studies.

Thank you.

Kevin Maguire

Founder Bike Capitola

**From:** [Brian Peoples](#)  
**To:** [Regional Transportation Commission](#)  
**Cc:** [REDACTED]  
**Subject:** RTC Agenda #23: REJECT Staff Request for Earmarks to Fund Environmental Component of the Zero Emission Passenger Rail & Trail Project  
**Date:** Thursday, February 26, 2026 5:18:15 AM

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RTC,

Trail Now respectfully urges the RTC Commission to reject staff's request to pursue additional earmarks and grant funding for the environmental phase of the proposed Zero Emission Passenger Rail & Trail Project.

Continuing to advance costly passenger rail proposals along the Santa Cruz Coastal Corridor will divert scarce transportation dollars away from higher-priority needs — including roadway improvements, Coastal Trail construction, and essential Santa Cruz Metro bus services. These are investments that can deliver real, measurable benefits to residents today.

Santa Cruz Metro will likely require a future tax measure simply to sustain and improve existing bus service. Ongoing expenditures on a proposed passenger rail system — currently estimated at roughly \$5 billion, with no demonstrated traffic relief and significant Coastal Act compliance concerns — risk undermining public confidence and jeopardizing support for future Metro funding.

The public expects fiscal responsibility and practical solutions. We therefore request that the RTC deny staff's recommendation and instead direct funding efforts toward realistic, implementable transportation improvements that address today's needs.

Best regards,

Brian Peoples  
Trail Now

**From:** [Joe Martinez](#)  
**To:** [Regional Transportation Commission](#)  
**Subject:** RTC Agenda #23: REJECT Staff Request to Fund Environmental Phase of ZEPRT  
**Date:** Monday, March 2, 2026 3:09:57 PM

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RTC Commissioners,

I urge you to reject your Staff's request to pursue additional grant funding for the environmental phase of the proposed ZEPRT Project.

Continuing to advance passenger rail proposals along the Santa Cruz Coastal Corridor will most certainly divert transportation dollars away from our County's higher priority needs, such as roadway improvements, bus services, and actual coastal trail construction.

Ongoing expenditures for a proposed passenger rail system—currently estimated at an absurd \$5 Billion—risk undermining public confidence in the RTC and jeopardize support for future Metro funding. The public needs, expects and is impatiently waiting for practical solutions to our transportation woes.

We request that the RTC deny your Staff's recommendation. Instead, laser focus your funding on realistic and attainable transportation improvements that directly address—and solve—our county's transportation needs.

Thank you.

**From:** [REDACTED]  
**To:** [Regional Transportation Commission](#)  
**Cc:** [REDACTED]; "[Joe Martinez](#)"  
**Subject:** RTC Agenda #23: REJECT Staff Request to Fund Environmental Phase of ZEPRT  
**Date:** Thursday, February 26, 2026 3:24:00 PM

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Gentlemen and Ladies of the RTC,

I respectfully urge the RTC to reject your Staff's request to pursue additional grant funding for the environmental phase of the proposed ZEPRT Project.

Continuing to advance passenger rail proposals along the Santa Cruz Coastal Corridor will most certainly divert transportation dollars away from our County's higher priority needs, such as roadway improvements, bus services and actual coastal trail construction.

Ongoing expenditures for a proposed passenger rail system—currently estimated at an absurd \$5 Billion—risk undermining public confidence in the RTC and jeopardize support for future Metro funding. The public needs, expects and is impatiently waiting for practical solutions to our transportation woes.

We request that the RTC deny your Staff's recommendation. Instead, laser focus your funding on realistic and attainable transportation improvements that directly address—and solve—our County's transportation needs.

Thank you.

Ellen Martinez

25-year full time resident of Aptos

**From:** [Rebecca Byron Kleis](#)  
**To:** [Regional Transportation Commission](#)  
**Subject:** Rails out!  
**Date:** Friday, February 27, 2026 5:52:49 PM

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We are recommending RTC not approve Staff recommendations to continue investing in a future passenger train.

Sincerely,  
Rebecca and Randal Kleis

Sent from my Galaxy

**From:** [nadene thorne](#)  
**To:** [Regional Transportation Commission;](#) [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
**Subject:** Say No! to Earmarks for Santa Cruz's Rail Corridor  
**Date:** Monday, March 2, 2026 7:30:48 PM

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The RTC has announced in their agenda for the upcoming March 5th meeting that they are asking commissioners to direct staff to contact federal legislators and John Laird of the state's budget committee to pursue earmarks to contribute to a shortfall of \$15M to initiate environmental studies (an EIR) as a follow up to the Zero Emission Passenger Rail and Trail study (ZEPRT).

I'm writing to suggest that you dismiss taking any such interest in funding this environmental work for the foreseeable future, for the following reasons. First and foremost, the budget deficits the state and Santa Cruz County face are far more critical to the well-functioning of our local government and its residents than any prospective rail project here. Further, the ZEPRT study has shown that the estimated cost of a 22-mile rail construction at \$4.3 Billion (2025 dollars for 2045 construction) is far beyond any likelihood of attracting federal or state funding. It would entail passing a 1.5-2.5% additional sales tax in the county for the local portion, while we already have a 9.5% sales tax - voters will never pass such an increase.

Finally, the study estimates only a few thousand riders a day, hardly enough to make a noticeable difference in Highway 1 traffic. It's simply too much money for too little benefit. You will be told that the Santa Cruz corridor is one of five under consideration in the Corridor Identification Development plan. As the state examines the merits of these potential rail projects, an entirely different suite of environmental clearances will be required. In short, our local CEQA envisioned EIR will have no value to such a rail project down the road: funding this will simply be spending money on consultants' salaries with no benefit to the taxpayers of this county.

I urge you to entirely disregard any consideration of earmarking funds for such a useless and wasteful endeavor as an EIR for the ZEPRT rail project.

Sincerely,  
Nadene Thorne