

From: [Jack Brown](#)
To: [Regional Transportation Commission](#)
Subject: Support for March 2026 Agenda Item #8
Date: Wednesday, February 25, 2026 12:44:37 PM

Dear Chair and Commissioners of the Santa Cruz County Regional Transportation Commission,

I am writing to support the proposed formation of a nonprofit subsidiary to serve as the common carrier for the Santa Cruz Branch Rail Line, as outlined in Agenda Item #8.

Establishing a subsidiary to assume the common carrier role is a prudent and necessary step that will give the RTC greater operational control and flexibility in managing this critical public asset. Since the RTC acquired the corridor from Union Pacific Railroad to preserve it for long-term transportation purposes, the goal has been to maintain freight service, support recreational rail operations, and preserve the option for future passenger rail. Creating a dedicated entity to serve as the railroad operator helps advance those goals while appropriately managing the regulatory and liability framework associated with railroad operations.

This approach is also consistent with the structure created when the corridor was acquired through the “State of Maine” proceeding approved by the Surface Transportation Board. That framework allowed a public agency to acquire the rail infrastructure while a separate entity retained the common carrier obligation. Establishing a subsidiary now to assume that role is a logical continuation of that structure and helps ensure that the corridor remains within the federal rail system while under public stewardship.

Railroads operate under a unique federal regulatory structure overseen by the Surface Transportation Board and the Federal Railroad Administration. Housing the common carrier obligation within a specialized subsidiary rather than the RTC itself is a sensible governance approach that many public agencies use to separate operational railroad responsibilities from broader transportation planning functions. This structure provides clarity for regulators, protects the parent agency from unnecessary liability exposure, and creates a platform for contracting with qualified rail operators as needed.

Importantly, this step also helps ensure continuity of freight service in Watsonville and supports the ongoing recreational rail operations that remain a valued part of the corridor for Roaring Camp. At the same time, it positions the RTC to better pursue state and federal funding opportunities for corridor improvements and future rail transit projects should you decide to pursue them.

The Santa Cruz Branch Rail Line is a long-term regional transportation asset. Establishing the proper institutional structure to manage it responsibly is a key part of protecting that investment for future generations.

Thank you for your continued stewardship of this corridor and for considering this important action.

Sincerely,

Jack Brown
Aptos, CA