



2050 REGIONAL TRANSPORTATION PLAN FOR SANTA CRUZ COUNTY



Santa Cruz County Regional Transportation Commission
June 11, 2026

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GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Adopted **GOALS OF THE REGIONAL TRANSPORTATION PLAN**



Reduce vehicle miles traveled (VMT) in order to establish livable communities that improve people's access to their regular needs.



Eliminate transportation related fatalities and serious injuries for all transportation modes.



Deliver transportation improvements and maintenance cost effectively and responsive to the needs of all users of the transportation system.



Establish a climate-resilient transportation system that anticipates, adapts to, and mitigates the impacts of climate change.



Ensure that plans, investments, policies, and transportation decisions will reduce disparities for historically and systemically marginalized, underserved, and excluded populations.



LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



It is my privilege to share our 2050 Regional Transportation Plan (RTP), our county’s long-range blueprint for a safer, more sustainable, and more connected transportation future. This plan will guide how we will invest in, maintain, and improve our transportation network through the next 25 years—helping shape how people live, work, and travel throughout our region for decades to come.

Built on a foundation of sustainability, equity, and resilience, the plan reflects what we have heard from community members throughout the region: that a thriving transportation system must support the health and safety of our communities, safeguard our natural environment, and expand mobility options so every resident—regardless of age, ability, background, or income—can travel to wherever they want to go, however they choose to get there.

The Plan also acknowledges the challenges ahead—climate impacts, congestion, system preservation needs, and funding uncertainties—and charts a clear path to address them. Guided by updated goals, policies, and performance targets, the RTP prioritizes projects that reduce greenhouse gas emissions, improve multimodal access, enhance system resilience, and better serve our growing and diversifying population.

The RTP outlines a balanced approach that advances multimodal travel, including transit, walking, bicycling, and accessible transportation for seniors and people with disabilities, while supporting the efficient movement of goods and essential services. With approximately \$6.2 billion in anticipated funding, the plan identifies over 320 projects that can be delivered wholly or in part and highlights additional future opportunities should new funding sources become available.

This plan is the result of extensive public engagement and regional collaboration. We are grateful to the thousands of residents, local jurisdictions, partner agencies, and community organizations who contributed ideas, shared experiences, and helped shape the plan’s goals and priorities. Their input ensures that the 2050 RTP reflects the diverse needs of our community and positions us to respond to future challenges with clarity and purpose.

As we look ahead, I invite you to remain engaged in the process. Implementing this plan will require sustained partnership, creative problem-solving, and a shared commitment to ensuring that our transportation system evolves to meet the challenges and opportunities of the coming decades. Together, we can build a region that is more connected, accessible, equitable, and resilient for generations to come.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Sarah Christensen', written in a cursive style.

Sarah Christensen
SCCRTC Executive Director

WHY IS THIS NEEDED

BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE

This Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) is a long-range planning document developed by the RTC in cooperation with Caltrans and other stakeholders, including system users. The purpose of the RTP is to establish regional goals, identify present and future needs, deficiencies, and constraints, analyze potential solutions, estimate available funding, and propose investments over a 20-plus year timeframe.

The 2050 Santa Cruz County Regional Transportation Plan covers the period 2025–2050 and is developed to provide a clear vision of the regional transportation goals, objectives, and strategies. This vision must be realistic and within fiscal constraints. It incorporates sustainability principles in all its elements: transportation goals and policies (policy element – Chapter 4), a financial plan for funding transportation projects (financial element – Chapter 5), and a program of short- and long-range transportation projects (action element – Chapter 6).

The RTC coordinates with the Association of Monterey Bay Area Governments (AMBAG) in that agency's development of the Metropolitan Transportation Plan/Sustainable Communities Strategy (MTP/SCS), and its associated Environmental Impact Report, for the tri-county area of Monterey, San Benito and Santa Cruz Counties. AMBAG develops the population, housing and employment growth projections for the region. The 2050

RTP is consistent with both efforts, and together, the RTP and MTP/SCS fulfill both federal and state requirements for metropolitan level transportation planning.

The development of the RTP is a collaborative process, involving a wide range of stakeholders and partners including: the public, community-based organizations, the business community, advocacy organizations, and federal, state, regional, and local governments. It is essential to extend public participation to include people who have been traditionally underserved by the transportation system and services in the region.

GUIDING POLICIES

Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA)/Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL)

The Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA), also known as the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL), is a U.S. law enacted in November 2021 that provides significant federal investment in the nation's infrastructure. Its primary goal is to modernize infrastructure in areas like transportation (roads, bridges, public transit, rail), water quality, broadband internet, and the clean energy grid. The law uses a mix of formula funding, which goes to states, and competitive grants for state and local

governments to support a wide range of projects that create jobs and improve communities. It represents a record \$105 billion investment in public transit and \$110 billion for roads and bridges, along with funding for airports, ports, and waterways to reduce congestion and improve efficiency.

Title 23. Code Of Federal Regulations (CFR) § 450.306 and § 450.322

23 CFR § 450.306 outlines the scope of the metropolitan transportation planning process, which is a continuous, cooperative, and comprehensive process for planning transportation in metropolitan areas. It must address factors like economic vitality, safety, security, accessibility, environmental protection, energy conservation, and the integration of different modes of transportation.

The process involves developing a long-term metropolitan transportation plan and a shorter-term Transportation Improvement Program (TIP). It also requires considering and integrating other relevant plans, such as the State asset management plan for the National Highway System, the State Safety and Security Plan, and the State Freight Plan. 23 CFR § 450.322 describes the congestion management process (CMP), a specific component of that planning process required in transportation management areas (TMAs) to address and reduce traffic congestion; due to local air quality levels, this is not applicable to Santa Cruz County.

Title VI.

Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 prohibits discrimination based on race, color, or national origin in any program or activity that receives federal financial assistance. This means entities receiving federal funds cannot deny services, provide different benefits, or segregate people based on these factors. It applies to all programs of an organization if any part receives federal funding, not just the federally funded portion.

Transportation planning must ensure that no one is excluded from participation, denied benefits, or subjected to discrimination under these programs. Key aspects include fair distribution of services and benefits, inclusive public engagement, and compliance monitoring by agencies like the Federal Transit Administration (FTA).

Senate Bill 375

SB 375 mandates that the Metropolitan Transportation Plan/Sustainable Communities Strategy (MTP/SCS) must be updated every four years. This update cycle requires that the SCS align transportation, land use, and housing to meet state-mandated greenhouse gas (GHG) reduction targets.

SUCCESSSES

In the last four years since the RTP was last updated for a target year of 2045, there has been major progress in planning efforts, project implementation, and the securing of new funding. Some of these key regional successes are listed below.

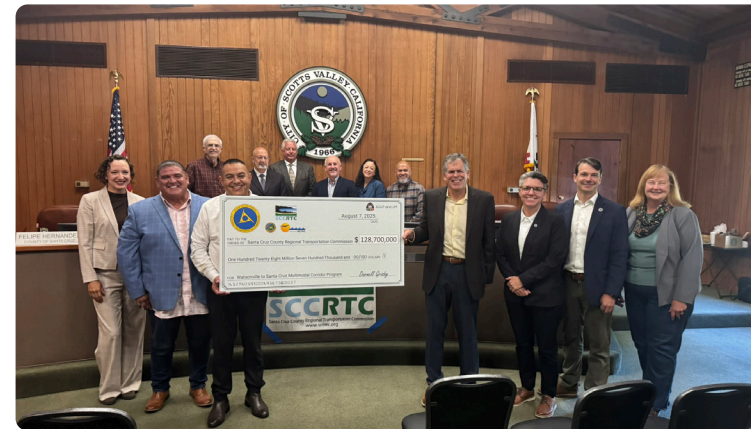
KEY PROJECTS AND PLANNING COMPLETED

- Highway 1 41st Ave to Soquel Dr improvements
- Coastal Rail Trail Segment 7 Phase II
- North Coast Rail Trail (nearing completion)
- Climate Adaptation Vulnerability Assessment
- Rural Highway Safety Plan
- Transportation Equity Action Plan
- GO BIKE! Bike Incentive Program
- County of Santa Cruz Active Transportation Plan
- Reimagine METRO Phases 1 and 2
- Santa Cruz County Climate Action and Adaptation Plan
- City of Santa Cruz Climate Action Plan 2030
- Capitola Climate Action Plan
- Scotts Valley Climate Action Plan
- Watsonville 2030 Climate Action Plan



NEW REVENUES AND GRANTS SECURED

- State SBI grants (\$129m)
- State Active Transportation Program grants (\$103m)
- State Transit and Intercity Rail Capital Program grants (\$50m)
- Federal FLAP grant (\$36m)
- Federal MEGA grant (\$30m)
- Federal RAISE grant (\$19.5m)
- Several Caltrans Sustainable Transportation Planning Grants (\$4m)



Executive Summary



The Santa Cruz County Regional Transportation Commission (RTC) periodically completes a Regional Transportation Plan according to state guidelines to guide short- and long-range transportation planning and project implementation for the county. This 2050 Regional Transportation Plan (called the 2050 RTP) provides guidance for transportation policy and projects through the year 2050. It is based on a sustainability framework to identify the goals, policies and thus the projects and programs to achieve a more sustainable transportation system. Sustainability is defined as balancing economic, environmental and equity interests. Individual projects listed in the 2050 RTP must still undergo separate design and environmental processes, and can only be implemented as local, state and federal funds become available. This RTP, along with those from Monterey and San Benito Counties, has also been incorporated into the 2050 Metropolitan Transportation Plan/Sustainable Communities Strategy (MTP/SCS) covering the three-county Monterey Bay area that will meet state and federal guidelines.

The following is a summary of each chapter.

CHAPTER 1 – CONTEXT

The transportation system not only enables us to get around, but it is also interlinked with our health and safety, the quality of the built and natural environment, and the economic vitality of the region. This chapter provides an overview of the population of the county and its challenges related to transportation. The RTP endeavors to work towards a sustainable transportation

system that addresses the challenges that face transportation in Santa Cruz County now and in the future. The challenges discussed in Chapter 1 include:

- Climate Impacts
- System Preservation
- Safety
- Congestion
- Transportation Funding Equity

The 2050 RTP endeavors to work toward a sustainable transportation system that addresses these challenges and results in safer, healthier and more efficient travel choices that provide improved multimodal access to opportunities such as jobs, education, and healthcare for our residents.

CHAPTER 2 – TRANSPORTATION NETWORK

Santa Cruz County has a rich multi-modal transportation network. The county's existing transportation network comprises a broad range of transportation facilities and modes. These include state highways, local streets and roads, an extensive bus system, a specialized transport system for seniors and people with disabilities, bike lanes, sidewalks, bicycle & pedestrian paths, an airport, and a freight rail branch line.

The RTC owns the Santa Cruz Branch Rail Line in order to preserve the corridor for existing and future transportation uses, including freight rail, passenger rail

service, and bicycle and pedestrian facilities. The Unified Corridor Investment Study performed an analysis of the options for the railroad right-of-way as well as along the parallel Highway 1 and Soquel-Freedom corridors. The implementation of the UCS recommendations continues in the form of the Watsonville-Santa Cruz Multimodal Corridor Program, several Monterey Bay Sanctuary Scenic Trail projects under development or completed, and the Zero Emission Passenger Rail & Trail study.

Transportation system management and transportation demand management programs are also components of the transportation network, improving efficiency and helping reach sustainability goals.

This multi-modal transportation network is crucial to meeting the travel needs of all county residents, including drivers, non-drivers and commercial traffic.

CHAPTER 3 – VISION

The Santa Cruz County Regional Transportation Commission underwent a public process to update its RTP Goals and Policies as the first step of this update to the RTP. They have guided the development of the project list.

The RTP identifies measurable outcomes, called targets that are each linked to a goal and policy. Incorporating targets enables the Regional Transportation Commission to assess how well the long-range plan performs over time. The assessment of performance is provided in Chapter 4.

CHAPTER 4 – PATTERNS & PERFORMANCE

The majority of the population in Santa Cruz County lives and travels within a small area of the county. The areas of the county with higher population density are primarily along the coast (City of Santa Cruz, Capitola, Live Oak, Soquel and Aptos), in the cities of Watsonville and Scotts Valley, and along portions of the San Lorenzo Valley. Although the distances that people travel within Santa Cruz County are not extensive, increasing the diversity of land uses within neighborhoods to improve access to goods and services can result in even greater reductions in trip lengths.

The patterns of travel within Santa Cruz County are dependent on the number of people who live, work and visit the county. Population growth in Santa Cruz County is projected to grow by 7% between 2024 and 2050. Similarly, the number of jobs in Santa Cruz County is forecasted to increase by 6% between 2023 and 2050.

Much effort on this 2050 RTP and the 2050 Metropolitan Transportation Plan has been focused on prioritizing projects that will reduce greenhouse gas emissions primarily from a reduction in vehicle miles traveled (VMT). One vehicle traveling one mile equals one “vehicle mile traveled.” Although residents of Santa Cruz County use single-occupancy vehicles for their trips at a lower rate than the state average, progress to align with the state’s Bicycle Plan and Pedestrian Plan goals to double active transportation rates has been slow. The American Communities Survey provides mode share

data for the “typical mode taken to work” for Santa Cruz County. The most recent ACS data from 2019–2023 includes the COVID-19 pandemic so it is difficult to use as a predictor. That said, it shows that Santa Cruz County residents are working from home at rates about three times higher than before COVID. In terms of percentage points, the corresponding decline in travel modes has been greater for driving alone than for sustainable modes. However, in terms of percent change, the decline in driving alone is less than that in sustainable modes. See Chapter 4 for details.

The 2050 RTP focuses the system performance on presenting available data that monitors the performance of the transportation system to date. Data is not available at this time to monitor all of the measures in the RTP although the fundamental indicators (safety, VMT, greenhouse gas emissions, pavement condition) are presented.

CHAPTER 5 – FINANCIAL PLAN

Transportation programs and projects in Santa Cruz County are funded from a variety of local, state and federal funding programs. Local sources account for 48% of the transportation revenues, 34% from state and 18% from federal. Based on current and projected revenue sources, approximately \$6.2 billion are reasonably anticipated to be available to finance transportation projects in Santa Cruz County through 2050 (\$250 million per year). The vast majority of anticipated revenues are committed to specific dedicated uses. Over one third of local, state and federal funds can only be used for

transit and paratransit projects and operations. A large proportion of these transit revenues come from our county’s dedicated half-cent local sales tax for transit. Airport improvements and highway safety also account for a large portion of the dedicated funds.

In response to ongoing funding shortfalls and the large backlog of maintenance and other projects, Santa Cruz County voters approved Measure D in November 2016, a 30-year half-percent sales tax dedicated to local transportation projects and programs. Measure D provides over \$28 million per year in stable funding for projects in Santa Cruz County. In 2017, the California legislature passed Senate Bill 1 – The Road Repair and Accountability Act to stabilize transportation funding and help address the diminishing transportation revenues from the per gallon gasoline and diesel tax.

The Regional Transportation Commission (RTC) has discretion over about 3% of the funds available for transportation projects in the next 25 years (approximately \$7.5 million per year). These funds are from regional shares of the State Transportation Improvement Program (STIP) Surface Transportation Block Grant Program (STBG) and SB 1- Local Partnership Program.

It is important to note that transportation funding can be very unpredictable. State and federal actions can result in elimination of certain funding programs or diversion of transportation funds to the State General Fund, as has happened regularly to transit funds over the past several years. Inevitably, some of the funding sources assumed within the financial projections for this plan will not actually be realized. Even if all of the revenues

assumed in this document are realized, projected funds are insufficient to keep up with the maintenance, operational, safety, and major improvement needs of the region discussed in Chapter 6. Therefore, this document identifies additional sources for new funds that could potentially become available.

CHAPTER 6 – TRANSPORTATION INVESTMENTS

A list of programs, projects and actions needed to operate, maintain, and improve the transportation system in Santa Cruz County has been developed – based on input from the public and sponsoring agencies -- as part of the Action Element of the RTP. The cost of implementing this list of transportation projects in Santa Cruz County is approximately \$17.3 billion, whereas the estimated funds available through 2050 is approximately \$6.2 billion – only 36% of the estimated need.

Given the significant gap between funding needs for transportation and projected revenues, the projects listed in the RTP must be divided into two groups. Transportation improvements that can be funded with foreseeable transportation revenues between 2025 and 2050 are shown as “Constrained.” This group includes projects with dedicated funding, already funded projects to be constructed in the short term, and planned projects that could be constructed anytime within the RTP’s 25-year timeline as projected funds become available. Transportation

improvements to be implemented only if new revenues are generated or become available show their funding as “unconstrained.” Some projects are identified with both constrained and unconstrained funds, indicating a need for additional funds to complete the entire project, though portions of those projects may be completed using available funding.

In order to determine which projects are prioritized for the constrained list for the RTP, input was solicited from project sponsors, the public, public interest groups and RTC advisory committees throughout the process in developing the final project list that identifies the projects as either constrained and/or unconstrained.

The within projected funds or constrained project list consists of over 330 projects that could be implemented over the twenty-five year timeframe. These projects and programs address the region’s accessibility, economic, safety and environmental sustainability needs and constitute the 2050 RTP’s constrained project list described in Chapter 6, with the full list of projects and programs provided in Appendix E. During the next 25 years, approximately \$6.2 billion from federal, state, and local funding sources is projected to be available to finance transportation projects in Santa Cruz County. Nearly 310 projects are on the unconstrained list, for which additional funds will be needed in order to be implemented.

The RTP assigns future transportation funds to a range of projects and programs designed to maintain the current transportation system, and improve access, safety and environmental and public health by broadening transportation options in an equitable manner.

Development of the RTP project list is a preliminary step towards actual implementation of the projects identified in the 2050 RTP. Prior to the beginning of project construction, a number of steps must be taken which can take from 6 months to 20 years, depending on the particular project's complexity, impacts, level of public interest, funding and environmental requirements, and availability of funds. These steps include developing a detailed project cost estimate; obtaining local, state and/or federal funds; designing the project; determining the project's environmental impacts; securing right-of-way, if necessary; and throughout the process, incorporating public input.

CHAPTER 7 – ENVIRONMENTAL AND AIR QUALITY REVIEW

The California Environmental Quality Act of 1970 (CEQA) requires that the environmental effects of the 2050 RTP be analyzed. This analysis was prepared as a separate program-level Environmental Impact Report (EIR) released along with the 2050 RTP. The EIR, prepared in coordination with the Association of Monterey Bay Area Governments (AMBAG), Transportation Agency for Monterey County (TAMC), and the San Benito County Council of Governments (SBCOG), collectively evaluates the MTP/SCS and the Regional Transportation Plans for the Monterey Bay region – Santa Cruz, Monterey, and San Benito Counties. The EIR analyzes the potential environmental impacts of the 2050 RTP, including alternative investment scenarios, and identifies potential

mitigation measures for impacts of the transportation program for the whole region. The EIR does not analyze impacts of, or mitigations for, individual projects. The respective agency sponsors will conduct a project-specific review, once funding is received and the project is initiated.

CHAPTER 8 – WHAT'S NEXT?

The Regional Transportation Plan is a work in progress that will be updated every four years as per state law. This chapter identifies a number of considerations that will likely be prominent features of the RTP over the next few decades.

A new discussion of emerging technologies that may have more defined project descriptions and funding need in future versions of the RTP is included in this chapter.