



May 5, 2026

TO: Santa Cruz Regional Transportation Commission

SUBJECT: Comments on Item 18. Unmet Transit Needs

Chair Montesino, Commissioners and Executive Director Christiansen,

Santa Cruz County Friends of the Rail and Trail has, since 2002, advocated for the preservation of the Santa Cruz Rail Branch Line for the future passenger rail transit from Santa Cruz to Watsonville and construction of a trail from Davenport to Watsonville.

This rail corridor provides an opportunity to provide transit service with less congestion and more direct service from Watsonville to Santa Cruz than surface routes. Passenger rail service has the potential to serve the large number of people in our county who do not drive for many reasons. Passenger rail service could do much to meet the currently unmet needs of paratransit users.

We appreciate that the current report recognizes that passenger rail (ZEPRT) could meet some of these needs. But we believe that there are more needs that could be met by the addition of passenger rail service to our transit mix.

On page 18-13 and 18-14 under 4.0 Transit Services Need: Increased Frequency and Span of Transit Services, High Density and Mixed-Use Areas had the highest ranking in terms of needs and opportunity (4.95 out of 5.0). Including Zero Emission Rail Passenger Transit Service between Watsonville and Santa Cruz would provide great opportunities for commuters, improved transit access for disabled patrons using wheelchairs given level boarding and wider boarding areas and greater passenger capacity on rail vehicles.

Future connection with Pajaro Station will provide a continuous connection to the State Rail network including Amtrak and other planned regional rail service. Sonoma-Marín Area Rail Transit (SMART) has seen dramatic ridership growth with increased efforts to coordinate transit regionally. April 2026 ridership increased to 133,860, 30% over April 2025. This is the highest monthly ridership in the agency's history.

Density along the Santa Cruz Branch Rail Line is equal to or exceeds density along the SMART corridor.

Planning for zero emission rail service, which will provide tangible improvements in disabled access and onboard accommodations, is clearly a compelling strategy for increasing frequency, span and capacity of transit service

Matt Farrell
Santa Cruz County Friends of the Rail and Trail