



June 9, 2026

TO: Chair Montesino and Commissioners; and Executive Director Sarah Christiansen

FROM: Matt Farrell, Santa Cruz County Friends of the Rail and Trail (FORT)

SUBJECT: Support for June 11 Agenda Item 15. Programming Measure D-Rail Corridor funds as the local match for the ZEPRT Project Environmental Component for the Consolidated Rail Infrastructure and Safety Improvements (CRISI) Program funding application

Friends of the Rail and Trail supports RTC staff's recommendation that Commissioners allocate a total of \$5.06 million in local matching funds for a \$25.3 million Consolidated Rail Infrastructure and Safety Improvements (CRISI) grant. The following tasks would be included in this grant:

- Complete CEQA and NEPA environmental review,
- Prepare an EIR/EIS document,
- Conduct technical studies and agency coordination,
- Complete public and stakeholder engagement, and
- Advance preliminary engineering for a 22-mile shared-use rail corridor with passenger rail, freight rail, bridges, crossings, stations, signals, drainage, trail improvements, and related corridor infrastructure.

We believe this work should be coordinated with the Caltrans Office of Rail and incorporated into the Step 2 Service Development Plan work for the Santa Cruz Branch Rail Line. This approach has been used successfully in other regions; and we look forward to participating in those coordination efforts. Coordination was not discussed in the staff report.

The Corridor ID Step 2 Service Development Plan may result in significant improvements to the ZEPRT report, including value engineering and phased implementation recommendations. We support a scoping process for the environmental review which includes the recommendations of the Zero Emission Passenger Rail and Trail Study Peer Review Memo (December 15, 2025) regarding project phasing (clear definition of the project phasing, specifically the initial project phase), value engineering (especially of the proposed layover and maintenance facility), and a corridor maintenance-of-way plan. The peer review memo also stated that ZPERT report cost estimates seemed high compared to other rail projects in California. For example, the SMART Healdsburg passenger rail service extension and San Bernardino County Transportation Authority (SBCTA) recent projects have significantly lower costs per mile.

We appreciate the opportunity to comment on this item.

From: [nadene thorne](#)
To: [REDACTED] [Andy Schiffrin](#); [Kimberly De Serpa](#); [Manu Koenig](#); [Fred Keeley](#); [Gerry Jensen](#); [REDACTED] [Rebecca](#); [Steve Clark](#); [REDACTED] [Regional Transportation Commission](#); [Shebren Kalantari-Johnson](#)
Subject: Three Comments/Questions ref: June 11 RTC Meeting Agenda
Date: Sunday, June 7, 2026 12:22:44 PM

Commissioners and Staff:

1. I suggest you withdraw Item #15 from the Consent Agenda and consider it separately.:
"Staff recommends the Santa Cruz County Regional Transportation Commission program an additional \$1,440,000 in Measure D-Rail Corridor funds in FY 2027/28 through FY 2031/32 to serve as the local match for the Zero Emission Passenger Rail & Trail (ZEPRT) Project Environmental Component, for the Consolidated Rail Infrastructure and Safety Improvements (CRISI) Program funding application."

Measure D funds are limited, and pursuing the environmental review for the ZEPRT project is highly speculative. Since consideration for the state CID program will entail its own, distinct environmental review, advancing a CEQA project will have no benefit, and only wastes our limited Measure D funds. Please disapprove this staff recommendation.

2. The Climate Resiliency presentation (#6) should encourage you to consider whether rail is feasible at all on our corridor, given the mitigation measures proposed for Capitola and Manresa Bluffs, Watsonville Sloughs and Pajaro River. Mitigations that are clearly out of proportion to cost and benefit should make you seriously consider whether it makes sense to spend today's dollars on so unlikely a project as ZEPRT many, many years in the future.

3. Is the Segment 12 Trail of the rail corridor (item #30) funded? Is it being designed as an Interim Trail? What decision has been made on replacing the rail bridges for rail and/or for bikes and pedestrians?

Thanks for your consideration,
Nadene Thorne