

From: [Trail Now](#)
To: [Regional Transportation Commission](#)
Subject: Grand Jury Demands RTC Accountability
Date: Monday, August 3, 2026 1:18:11 PM



Santa Cruz County Regional Transportation Commission (RTC) meeting will be August 6th with public written comments due by August 5th (Noon) to info@sccrtc.org.

[AGENDA: "\[Click here and type the date\]"](#)

Trail Now responses:

Item #14: Chair Montesino to appoint Ad Hoc Committee of Commissioners to develop and review responses to the Grand Jury report on the Santa Cruz Branch Rail Line

Trail Now is asking Santa Cruz County Regional Transportation Commission (RTC) to publicly recognize their failures identified within the 2025–2026 Santa Cruz County Civil Grand Jury report on the Santa Cruz Branch Rail Line. The Grand Jury's findings raise significant concerns about the management, planning, and financial oversight of the rail project. The report makes clear that it is time for the RTC to stop spending taxpayer dollars pursuing an unfunded passenger rail system and expensive "rail-with-trail" projects that provide little public benefit while delaying completion of the Santa Cruz Coastal Trail.

"Our community has waited decades for a safe, continuous Coastal Trail and this Grand Jury report should be a wake-up call. The RTC needs to stop investing in costly rail planning and instead deliver the transportation project residents can actually use."

We ask that the RTC not elect Commissioners who advocated the rail projects over the last decade, specifically Felipe Hernandez, Justin Cummings and Andy Schfrinn. These individuals on the RTC should take responsibility for the failure of the RTC. Our expectation is that the RTC will not only elect Commissioners who publicly recognize the failure of the rail project, but also immediately shift the plans away from rail and to opening the Santa Cruz Coastal Trail from Watsonville to Santa Cruz.

RTC needs to end further spending on passenger rail planning and unnecessary rail infrastructure.

The Coastal Trail will provide immediate benefits for commuters, families, students, seniors, and visitors while improving safety, recreation, and active transportation throughout Santa Cruz County.

The Grand Jury has highlighted the need for greater accountability and better stewardship of taxpayer dollars. The RTC should seize this opportunity to complete the Santa Cruz Coastal Trail without further delay.

Item #17: Coastal Rail Trail Southern Segments Project contract award (Riley Gerbrandt, Senior Transportation Engineer)

Trail Now supports the RTC staff recommendation to award Contract TP2603 to HDR Engineering, Inc. to complete the Project Approval and Environmental Documentation (PA/ED) phase of the Coastal Rail Trail Southern Segments Project between Aptos and Pajaro.

This action represents an important step toward advancing the long-awaited Santa Cruz Coastal Trail. We encourage the RTC to approve the staff recommendation and continue moving the project forward on schedule.

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From: [Geoffrey Ellis](#)
To: [Regional Transportation Commission](#)
Subject: comment on item 14 of agenda for August 6, 2026 meeting
Date: Tuesday, August 4, 2026 12:31:01 PM

This is a comment on item 14 of agenda for August 6, 2026 meeting:

It's time for the RTC to accept the fact that passenger rail is not going to happen here due to the massive costs involved, both capital and operating. Instead of trying to rebut the Grand Jury report on the Santa Cruz Branch Line, you should stop rail planning and focus on things that you can achieve:

- Complete the bicycle/walking trail in the rail right-of-way
- Increase ridership on Metro
- Increase transportation options for parts of the county that currently are transit deserts
- Make the county more bike-friendly by working with the sheriff and the city police chiefs to reduce bicycle theft

Geoffrey Ellis, District 1 resident



August 2, 2026

Santa Cruz County Regional Transportation Commission
1101 Pacific Avenue, Suite 250
Santa Cruz, CA 95060

Comment Letter on Item 14a. Grand Jury Report Response

Friends of the Rail and Trail has reviewed the Grand Jury report; and supports the appointment of an Ad Hoc Committee to respond within 90 days to its report on the Santa Cruz Branch Rail Line.

Friends of the Rail and Trail wants to take this opportunity to urge the committee to pay special attention to the Grand Jury's first recommendation:

“R1. The Grand Jury recommends that the Santa Cruz County Regional Transportation Commission (RTC) develop a Capital Project Advancement Framework for future major capital projects. The framework should define the information required before projects advance through major policy, funding, and implementation milestones and should require that cost estimates, schedule projections, contingencies and other key assumptions be accompanied by a clear assessment of their level of confidence and uncertainty. The RTC should direct staff to initiate development of such a framework no later than December 31, 2026, and present (it) to the Commission no later than December 31, 2027.” (page 22, The Santa Cruz Branch Rail Line: Competing Visions, Emerging Realities)

The process and transparency provided for the projects advanced for various modes has varied widely. Cost estimates, contingencies and key assessments have not been provided with the same public process and discussion. We urge the commission to apply the same rigor and review to all projects (including road widening and car-focused projects) that have been used for active transportation, transit and rail projects.

Thanks for your consideration,

Matt Farrell
Chair
Santa Cruz County Friends of the Rail and Trail