

Michele Gomez

From: Brian Peoples <[REDACTED]>
Sent: Saturday, August 29, 2026 7:04 AM
To: Regional Transportation Commission
Cc: [REDACTED] Felipe Hernandez;
Kim De Serpa; Manu Koenig; Fred Keeley; [REDACTED]; Steve Clark;
[REDACTED] Eduardo Montesino; Rebecca Downing; Gerry Jensen;
[REDACTED]; Nathan Nguyen; Robert Tidmore;
Riley Gerbrandt; Sarah Christensen; Matt Machado; Corey Aldridge; Donna Bauer
Subject: RE: Item 17 – Response to the 2025–2026 Santa Cruz County Civil Grand Jury Report on the Santa Cruz Branch Rail Line
Attachments: Trail Now Response to RTC - final.pdf

Chair Montesino and Commissioners,

Trail Now urges you to treat the Grand Jury report as an opportunity to make decisions—not simply defend past practices.

First, make the **Interim Trail the preferred project for Segments 12 through 17**, with the Ultimate Trail evaluated only as an alternative. Do not spend another \$4.5 million engineering a project before deciding what you actually intend to build.

Second, **ZEPRT has answered the passenger-rail question**. A roughly **\$4.3 billion system**, with significant operating subsidies and limited ridership, is not a viable transportation investment for Santa Cruz County. Stop spending staff time and taxpayer dollars studying a train we cannot realistically fund.

Finally, this is about **public trust**. RTC and METRO leadership are closely associated in the public's mind. If transportation agencies cannot make difficult financial choices today, asking voters tomorrow to approve another half-percent sales tax will be much harder.

Build what we can afford. Build what people can use. Build the Coastal Trail. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Brian Peoples



August 29, 2026

Santa Cruz County Regional Transportation Commission

1101 Pacific Avenue, Suite 250

Santa Cruz, CA 95060

RE: Item 17 – Response to the 2025–2026 Santa Cruz County Civil Grand Jury Report on the Santa Cruz Branch Rail Line

Chair Montesino and Commissioners:

Trail Now has reviewed the RTC's proposed response to the 2025–2026 Santa Cruz County Civil Grand Jury report, *The Santa Cruz Branch Rail Line: Competing Visions, Emerging Realities*.

The Grand Jury conducted an important examination of the history, physical condition, governance, financial realities, and planning of the Santa Cruz Branch Rail Line. Its report provides the RTC with an opportunity to learn from the past and establish a more disciplined, financially responsible, and achievable path forward.

Trail Now urges the Commission to revise portions of the proposed response before submitting it to the Superior Court and Civil Grand Jury.

Trail Now's key requested changes to the RTC's current Grand Jury response are:

- Establish the Interim Trail as the preferred design approach for Segments 12–17, with the Ultimate Trail evaluated as an alternative.
- Conclude from the ZEPRT findings that a future passenger rail system is not financially or practically viable and end further RTC staff, consultant, engineering, environmental, grant-development, and planning work to advance passenger rail.
- Determine and publicly disclose the RTC's continuing Proposition 116 obligations, including whether a finding that passenger rail is infeasible would trigger repayment and, if so, the amount and conditions.

1. Acknowledge the lack of a clear, implementable corridor strategy

The Grand Jury found that the RTC lacks a unified strategic plan for delivering capital projects and allocating limited resources and that changing political priorities have contributed to paralysis over the rail corridor.

RTC proposes to disagree, pointing to the Regional Transportation Plan and the Commission's December 2025 direction establishing near-term trail and long-term rail as its overarching vision.

But a broad 25-year Regional Transportation Plan is not the same as a corridor-specific implementation strategy establishing priorities, financial limits, decision criteria, funding requirements, and measurable milestones.

Nor does adopting a new direction in December 2025 erase the years of changing policies, studies, escalating costs, and delayed decisions that preceded it.

Trail Now recommends that the RTC acknowledge these historical problems and accept the Grand Jury's recommendation to establish a genuine strategic framework for major transportation investments.

2. Do not claim the Capital Project Advancement Framework recommendation has already been fully implemented

The Grand Jury recommends that RTC develop a Capital Project Advancement Framework establishing the information required before major projects advance through policy, funding, and implementation milestones.

Importantly, the Grand Jury calls for cost estimates, schedules, contingencies, and other assumptions to include an assessment of their **level of confidence and uncertainty**.

RTC marks this recommendation as **"HAS BEEN IMPLEMENTED,"** citing its existing project funding plans, milestones, risk management, cost estimates, and schedules.

Trail Now believes the Grand Jury is asking for something more rigorous: a formal and transparent framework establishing when a project has sufficient engineering, financial, and implementation certainty to justify advancing to the next major decision.

The history of the Santa Cruz Branch Rail Line demonstrates why such safeguards are needed.

3. Establish the Interim Trail as the primary design, with the Ultimate Trail evaluated as an alternative

The Grand Jury recognizes that escalating costs, physical constraints, and funding realities require RTC to reconsider how the Coastal Trail is delivered.

RTC itself acknowledges that it historically prioritized the Ultimate Trail configuration—trail next to rail—but has now **“shifted its approach” and is “advancing the Interim Trail as the near-term priority.”**

Trail Now believes the next step should therefore be clear:

The Interim Trail should become the primary design approach for future Coastal Trail planning, including Segments 12–17, with the Ultimate Trail evaluated as an alternative where it can be demonstrated to be financially, environmentally, and practically feasible.

This would reverse the historical approach in which the Ultimate Trail was treated as the preferred configuration and the Interim Trail as a fallback.

The information now available—including escalating construction costs, corridor constraints, limited funding, and the need to deliver a continuous trail sooner—supports making the Interim Trail the starting point.

RTC’s own proposed Grand Jury response states that the agency is now advancing the Interim Trail as its near-term priority. The planning and environmental process for Segments 12-17 should reflect that policy direction.

Trail Now therefore asks the Commission to direct staff and its consultants to develop the Interim Trail as the primary project configuration while retaining the Ultimate Trail as an alternative for objective comparison.

This policy choice is especially urgent because the RTC is moving forward with a \$4.5 million contract with HDR Engineering, Inc. for the Project Approval and Environmental Documentation (PA/ED) phase of the Southern Segments Project between Aptos and Pajaro without first establishing which trail configuration should be the primary project. Committing millions of dollars to engineering before making that fundamental policy decision risks perpetuating the lack of clear direction, disciplined project advancement, and financial oversight identified by the Grand Jury.

The physical realities of the southern corridor further support making the Interim Trail the primary design. Between Rio Del Mar (Segment 13) and Pajaro, there are approximately 11 railroad bridge and trestle crossings, several consisting of multiple individual bridge structures. Aging railroad structures that might be repurposed for trail use could require substantial reconstruction or replacement to support a future passenger rail system. That distinction has major implications for cost, environmental impacts, permitting, construction schedules, and overall feasibility.

The so-called Ultimate Trail should also not be treated as a permanent final design. If passenger rail were eventually implemented, portions of a trail constructed next to the existing tracks could still require redesign, relocation, or reconstruction to provide the separation, safety improvements, and infrastructure needed for passenger rail operations. Spending millions to engineer an Ultimate Trail that may prove unaffordable, infeasible, or

subject to later reconstruction risks repeating the costly planning problems already experienced on Segments 9–11.

Coastal Act compliance creates an additional reason to avoid presuming the Ultimate Trail is the preferred configuration. The Southern Segments traverse sensitive coastal resources, wetlands, agricultural lands, waterways, flood-prone areas, and locations vulnerable to sea-level rise. The Coastal Commission's review of projects such as the North Coast Trail demonstrates that protection of coastal resources, public access, habitat, and long-term resiliency can materially affect project design and permitting. RTC should not spend millions engineering an Ultimate Trail before determining whether it can realistically satisfy those requirements.

The more pragmatic approach is too direct HDR to advance the Interim Trail as the preferred project, using the existing rail corridor and infrastructure wherever feasible, while evaluating the Ultimate Trail as an alternative. The governing question should be straightforward: which trail can actually be funded, permitted, and built? This approach offers the strongest opportunity to deliver a continuous Coastal Trail sooner, at a more realistic cost, with fewer environmental impacts and substantially less financial risk to taxpayers. It is time to stop engineering the unaffordable and start building the achievable.

4. The ZEPRT study demonstrates that a future passenger rail system is not viable and RTC should end further passenger-rail work

The RTC agrees with the Grand Jury that the ZEPRT Concept Report provided significantly greater engineering detail than previous studies and estimated approximately **\$4.3 billion** to construct passenger rail.

The ZEPRT findings should not trigger another round of passenger-rail study. They provide the evidence needed for the RTC to make a decision: **a new passenger rail system on the Santa Cruz Branch Rail Line is not financially or practically viable.**

ZEPRT's billion-dollar capital estimate, \$41 million-dollar annual operating cost, low projected ridership, and the physical constraints of the corridor demonstrate that the proposed passenger rail system is not a realistic transportation investment for Santa Cruz County.

The ZEPRT analysis is the RTC's most detailed examination of passenger rail. Trail Now believes its findings should be treated as the conclusion of the passenger-rail evaluation process—not the starting point for additional studies intended to keep the concept alive.

Trail Now therefore recommends that the Commission formally conclude that a future passenger rail system is not viable and direct that no additional RTC staff time, consultant work, engineering, environmental review, grant development, planning, feasibility analysis, ridership analysis, cost estimating, or other public resources be spent evaluating, developing, or advancing a future passenger rail system on the Santa Cruz Branch Rail Line.

Trail Now believes ZEPRT has provided sufficient evidence for that decision: **the proposed passenger train is not a viable transportation investment for Santa Cruz County.**

RTC should end further passenger-rail evaluations and redirect staff time, consultant resources, and available transportation funding toward projects that can realistically be funded, permitted, and built—most importantly, completion of the continuous Santa Cruz Coastal Trail.

5. Clarify the RTC's continuing Proposition 116 obligations before using them to justify further passenger-rail work

The RTC's proposed response to Finding F8 cites Proposition 116 and the funding used to acquire the Santa Cruz Branch Rail Line as part of the basis for preserving passenger rail as a long-term objective.

Before Proposition 116 is relied upon to justify continued passenger-rail planning or expenditure, the RTC should determine and publicly disclose what continuing legal or financial obligation actually remains under Proposition 116 and the associated California Transportation Commission funding agreements.

That disclosure should specifically address whether a formal RTC determination that passenger rail is financially or practically infeasible would trigger any repayment obligation, and, if so, the amount that could be subject to repayment, the conditions that would trigger repayment, the party to whom repayment would be owed, and any available alternatives or remedies.

The Commission should not continue spending staff time, consultant resources, or public funds on passenger rail based on an assumed Proposition 116 obligation without first establishing, through a clear and authoritative legal and financial analysis, what obligation actually exists today.

6. The ZEPRT peer-review recommendations are no longer relevant to advancing passenger rail

The Grand Jury recommends that RTC follow best practices by directing staff to follow the recommendations of the independent ZEPRT peer review and continue working with peer organizations.

Although a separate formal peer-review report was not prepared, RTC did conduct a peer review of the ZEPRT work, and the conclusions were presented to the Commission in slide format at a prior public meeting. The review was not merely an internal RTC exercise. It drew on recognized passenger-rail professionals from peer agencies with substantial rail expertise, including SMART, San Bernardino-area transit, BART, Caltrain, and other agencies. Importantly, that expert review validated the ZEPRT study and its overall technical approach and findings. This provides additional independent support for relying on ZEPRT as a sound basis for the Commission's decision-making rather than treating the absence of a stand-alone written peer-review report as a reason to reopen or extend the passenger-rail evaluation process.

However, the ZEPRT Concept Report has now provided the detailed cost, ridership, operating, and corridor information necessary to determine whether a future passenger rail system is viable. As explained above, those findings demonstrate that a new passenger train on the Santa Cruz Branch Rail Line is not a financially or practically viable transportation investment.

Because the underlying passenger rail project is not viable, peer-review recommendations intended to refine, improve, or guide continued development of that rail project are no longer relevant. Implementing those recommendations would only perpetuate additional staff work, consultant analysis, planning, and public expense for a passenger rail system that should not proceed.

Trail Now therefore recommends that RTC not use the peer review as a basis for further passenger-rail work. Instead, the Commission should formally conclude the passenger-rail evaluation process based on the ZEPRT findings and direct staff and consultants to devote no additional resources to implementing peer-review recommendations related to developing or advancing a future passenger train.

The appropriate response to the peer review is not another round of rail planning. It is to recognize that ZEPRT answered the threshold question: **the proposed passenger train is not viable, and RTC should move on to transportation projects that can realistically be funded, permitted, and built.**

7. Take greater responsibility for providing complete and authoritative public information

The Grand Jury found that RTC historically failed to effectively communicate complete and accurate information regarding the financial, engineering, and legal challenges associated with building infrastructure on the Santa Cruz Branch Rail Line.

The Grand Jury concluded that the result has been competing advocacy narratives and the absence of a sufficiently timely, objective, and authoritative source of information for the public.

RTC proposes to **disagree** with this finding.

Trail Now believes a more constructive response would be to acknowledge that communication can and must improve.

This is especially important regarding realistic capital and operating costs, the condition of rail infrastructure, assumptions and uncertainty underlying cost and ridership estimates, available funding, differences between Interim and Ultimate Trail alternatives, legal and regulatory issues affecting the corridor, and the financial consequences of competing transportation investments.

The Grand Jury's Recommendation R7 calls for RTC to develop a plan to strengthen public communication and ensure the **timely and accurate dissemination of information**, with the goal of improving public understanding and reducing misinformation.

RTC instead marks R7 as **“HAS BEEN IMPLEMENTED,”** largely based on its Equitable Outreach and Engagement Toolkit.

That toolkit may improve community engagement, but **community engagement and authoritative project information are not the same thing.**

RTC should establish a publicly accessible and regularly updated source of authoritative Santa Cruz Branch Rail Line information containing major cost estimates, funding commitments, assumptions, engineering findings, legal developments, project schedules, and Commission decisions.

A Better Path Forward

The Civil Grand Jury report should not be viewed as an attack on the RTC. It provides the Commission with an opportunity to improve how major transportation investments are evaluated, communicated, and delivered.

Trail Now asks the Commission to revise its proposed response and take the following actions:

1. **Acknowledge the historical lack of a consistent implementation strategy** for the Santa Cruz Branch Rail Line.
2. **Accept the Grand Jury’s recommendation for a formal Capital Project Advancement Framework** rather than declaring existing practices sufficient.
3. Direct HDR Engineering and other RTC consultants to establish the **Interim Trail as the primary design approach for Segments 12-17**, with the Ultimate Trail evaluated as an alternative.
4. **Conclude**, based on the evidence developed through ZEPRT—including the approximately \$4.3 billion capital estimate, projected ridership, operating costs, required subsidies, and corridor constraints—that **a future passenger rail system is not viable**, and direct RTC staff and consultants to perform no further work evaluating, planning, engineering, studying, seeking grants for, or otherwise advancing a future passenger rail system.
5. Direct staff and legal counsel to **determine and publicly disclose the RTC’s continuing Proposition 116 obligations**, including whether a finding that passenger rail is infeasible would trigger repayment and, if so, the amount and conditions of any repayment obligation.
6. **Develop a comprehensive strategic framework** for major transportation investments rather than treating the existing Regional Transportation Plan as a substitute.

The RTC itself agrees with significant portions of the Grand Jury’s assessment: the rail infrastructure has deteriorated; the agency historically operated primarily as a planning organization; financial resources are constrained; Ultimate Trail costs have increased dramatically; and the much more detailed ZEPRT analysis now estimates passenger rail at approximately \$4.3 billion.

These findings should result in more than explanations of why past decisions were made - **they should result in changes to how future decisions are made and changes in the direction of transportation investments (Trail vs. Train)** by RTC.

Trail Now believes the most immediate changes should be straightforward: prioritize construction of the continuous Santa Cruz Coastal Trail; direct HDR and RTC staff to establish the Interim Trail as the primary near-term design; evaluate the Ultimate Trail only as an alternative; formally conclude from the ZEPRT findings that a future passenger rail system is not viable; determine and publicly disclose the RTC's continuing Proposition 116 obligations, including any actual repayment trigger, amount, and conditions; and direct that no further RTC staff time, consultant work, studies, engineering, environmental review, grant development, or other public resources be devoted to evaluating or advancing future passenger rail. **The RTC should focus its limited resources on transportation investments that can actually be funded, permitted, and built.**

Finally, the Commission should also recognize that its response to the Grand Jury report will have consequences well beyond the Santa Cruz Branch Rail Line. Santa Cruz METRO has identified a potential 0.5% sales-tax measure as a means of addressing its future funding deficit. Too much of the public, RTC and METRO are not viewed as separate institutions; their leadership and transportation decisions are closely associated. Public confidence in one therefore affects public confidence in the other. If the RTC refuses to acknowledge the financial conclusions of ZEPRT and continues pursuing an unaffordable passenger-rail system, or fails to make the Interim Trail the preferred plan needed to deliver the Coastal Trail sooner and at a realistic cost, those decisions are likely to influence public willingness to support a future METRO sales-tax measure. **Voters cannot reasonably be expected to approve additional transportation taxes while they perceive existing transportation agencies as unwilling to make difficult choices,** establish clear priorities, or focus limited public resources on projects that can actually be funded and built. The RTC's response to the Grand Jury is therefore also an opportunity to restore public confidence in regional transportation leadership—confidence that may be essential to METRO's ability to secure future taxpayer support.

Respectfully,

Brian Peoples



Michele Gomez

From: Doug Huskey [REDACTED]
Sent: Saturday, August 29, 2026 2:02 PM
To: Regional Transportation Commission
Subject: Response to Grand Jury

Hi,

I urge the RTC commissioners to make the following changes to the proposed response to the Grand Jury Report:

- **Establish the Interim Trail as the preferred design approach for Segments 12–17, with the Ultimate Trail evaluated as an alternative.**
- **Conclude from the ZEPRT findings that a future passenger rail system is not financially or practically viable and end further RTC staff, consultant, engineering, environmental, grant-development, and planning work to advance passenger rail at the current time.**
- **Determine and publicly disclose the RTC's continuing Proposition 116 obligations, including whether a finding that passenger rail is infeasible would trigger repayment and, if so, the amount and conditions.**
- **Do not conclude or publish cost projections without a thorough engineering analysis.**

Thank you for listening,

Sincerely,

Doug Huskey
[REDACTED]

From: nadene thorne <[REDACTED]>
Sent: Sunday, August 30, 2026 7:05 PM
To: Manu Koenig; Kimberly De Serpa; Fred Keeley; Gerry Jensen; Rebecca; Steve Clark; [REDACTED]; Andy Schiffrin; justin.cummings@santacruzcounty.us; Regional Transportation Commission; [REDACTED]; Shebreh Kalantari-Johnson; [REDACTED]
Subject: Grand Jury Response to F15 - Public Communication

Commissioners,

I strongly disagree with the RTC response of 'disagree' to this finding of historic failure in public communication. There may now be an attempt to improve public communication going forward (the most singular instance being ED Christensen's published commentary on the recent FORT rally to "save the tracks" held at Simpkins Swim Center) but previously there has been little if any attempt made to counter the many falsehoods published by organizations such as FORT - even to the repetition of these unsubstantiated conjectures, innuendos, and outright fabrications by commissioners themselves, even published as guest commentary in the Sentinel!

2022's Measure D may not have passed on its own merit, but it would surely not have failed so significantly if the RTC had spoken out to counter the misinformation that was promulgated by FORT. I applaud Director Christensen's recent remarks regarding the necessity for a complete reconstruction of the tracks, highlighting the focus on saving the right of way, but in my recollection this is a unique and sudden departure from the RTC's history. I hope this focus on transparency and clearly communicated facts will continue! I think the RTC's response to this finding should be re-written.

Nadene Thorne

Michele Gomez

From: david van brink [REDACTED] >
Sent: Monday, August 31, 2026 1:59 PM
To: Regional Transportation Commission
Subject: Comment on "17. Santa Cruz County Civil Grand Jury Report Response"

Dear Esteemed Transportation Commission,

->

https://www.santacruzcountyca.gov/Portals/0/County/GrandJury/GJ2026_final/Santa%20Cruz%20Branch%20Rail%20Line.pdf

The Grand Jury Report was on the whole an excellent bit of research and historical summary. Just to note: It did correctly identify Friends of the Rail & Trail as having been influential in our ROW acquisition in the first place, and consistently advocating for improving our transportation network and in particular, just like it says in the organization's name, a county-spanning trail. Page 13.

The Grand Jury Report, unfortunately, completely elides the consistent, persistent level of strategic obstruction to even these first trail segments of the anti-rail groups greenway & trail now. Segment 7 was protested vigorously by Greenway at every step. In fact a Greenway board member, Scott Roseman, attempted to renege on an agreement with the RTC to skirt New Leaf's parking lot, in an absurd attempt to "force the trail onto the tracks". The **actual** owners of New Leaf, however, later apologized to the community and the well-loved trail was able to be built without a 3 block detour. (Obviously, that same *strategy* is still being attempted on other segments.)

But to the present. The RTC's proposed response to its recommendations contains an error which is the subject of this note. The RTC response to Grand Jury Report R5 is shown here (from the current agenda):

R5. The Grand Jury recommends that the Santa Cruz County Regional Transportation Commission (RTC) follow best practices for complicated rail and trail projects by directing staff to follow the recommendations of the Zero Emission Passenger Rail and Trail Project peer review and continue to take advantage of opportunities to work with peer organizations. The RTC should commit to following these recommendations no later than December 31, 2026.

☒ HAS BEEN IMPLEMENTED – summarize what has been done

☐ HAS NOT YET BEEN IMPLEMENTED BUT WILL BE IN THE FUTURE -
summarize what will be done and the timeframe

☐ REQUIRES FURTHER ANALYSIS – explain the scope and timeframe (not to exceed six months)

☐ WILL NOT BE IMPLEMENTED – explain why

Required response explanation, summary, and timeframe:

The findings of the Peer Review of the ZEPRT Concept Report are very valuable and are taken into consideration in development of capital projects.

https://www.sccrtc.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/02/ZEPRT_Peer_Review_Memo_2025-12-15_Final.pdf

The response to "Follow the recommendations of the peer review" is merely, "Yeah we read it." This is different from following its recommendations. Specifically, the Peer Review advises:

"Review costs of similar recent projects/estimates (such as the SMART passenger rail service extension to Healdsburg and recent SBCTA projects, using recent bid tab information) to find further opportunities for cost reduction. o The ZEPRT Project's costs per mile seems high compared to other passenger rail projects in California."

There is understandable skepticism over the high estimate, and skepticism over its presentation as a single lump-sum value. These estimates must be verified or refuted, and must be properly contextualized rather than waved around for shock value.

Respectfully -- David Van Brink / city of Santa Cruz

david van brink / [REDACTED]



September 1, 2026

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

September 3 RTC Agenda Item 17: Comment on Proposed RTC Grand Jury Response Letter

Chair Montesino, Executive Director Christiansen, and Commissioners,

Friends of the Rail and Trail has the following comments on the Staff and Commission's Ad Hoc Committee proposed response to the civil grand jury report on the Santa Cruz Branch Rail Line:

Finding 1: Condition of the Branch Rail Line. While the proposed response points to "deferred maintenance that occurred prior to the RTC's acquisition of the line.", it omits any discussion of deferred maintenance that has occurred under the RTC's 14 years of ownership and control. In 2012, when the line first came under the RTC's control, freight rail service was still possible between Santa Cruz and Watsonville. That is no longer the case. Freight was operational on the branch line until 2017, five years after the RTC's purchase of the line. That is no longer the case north of Watsonville mile post 3.

While there have been projects to repair storm damage in 2017 and 2021, during this 14 year period, there was no concerted effort to apply for federal or state rail funding to repair the line. The commission did finally authorize staff to apply for FRA funding last year after 13 years of inaction.

The last major capital project on the Santa Cruz Branch Rail Line that Friends of the Rail and Trail is aware of was the Manresa Replacement Project completed in 2015. According to our understanding, this repair was made by Union Pacific as a condition of the sale of the rail line to the RTC. It is also our understanding that FEMA payments have not been received due to inconsistent requests, objections raised by FEMA that the line was not viable because of previous storm damage from which repairs had not been made, as well as FEMA's lack of satisfaction with documentation submitted.

Rehabilitation, repairs, and maintenance of the line should be a higher priority for the RTC. As stated in Recommendation 1 of the Grand Jury Report the “Capital Project Advancement Frameworkshould 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.” page 22

F5: This grand jury report recommendation states, “ The Grand Jury recommends that the Santa Cruz County Regional Transportation Commission (RTC) follow best practices for complicated rail and trail projects by directing staff to follow the recommendations of the Zero Emission Passenger Rail and Trail Project peer review and continue to take advantage of opportunities to work with peer organizations...” page 22

The RTC’s response to this recommendation follows, “The findings of the Peer Review of the ZEPRT Concept Report are very valuable and are taken into consideration in development of capital projects. “ Page 17-27 There is no discussion of how the RTC plans to follow up on the peer review recommendations and collaboration with peer organizations.

The commission should direct staff to provide a report to the commission on its work plan for the December 2025 peer review report. It has been almost a year since the peer review was released and, as far as the public knows, nothing has been done in response to their recommendations. There are major opportunities for savings (especially project phasing, and a review of cost elements included in bridge cost estimates). This is especially important given that the RTC stated, “The findings of the Peer Review of the ZEPRT Concept Report are very valuable and are taken into consideration in development of capital projects.” Page 4

Our community purchased the rail corridor with a fundamental understanding that the primary purpose and goal of this asset is the development of timely passenger rail. Friends of the Rail and Trail continues to support that primary goal and opposes any removal of the existing rail line because history shows that rail rarely, if ever, returns after the rail is removed and replaced by a paved trail.

Matt Farrell
Chair
Friends of the Rail and Trail