



September 29, 2026

Santa Cruz County Regional Transportation Commission
Board of Commissioners

Re: October 1 RTC Meeting Agenda Item 7 — Contract TP2625 for On-Call Property and Rail Maintenance

Dear Chair Montesino and Commissioners:

Friends of the Rail and Trail (FORT) supports staff's recommendation to approve Contract TP2625 for on-call property and rail maintenance of the Santa Cruz Branch Line and other RTC properties.

We especially appreciate the staff report's recognition that regular maintenance is necessary to preserve asset conditions and ensure public safety, and that preventive maintenance and minor repairs are an important part of responsible stewardship of the Branch Line.

Preventative maintenance is almost always more economical than allowing small problems to become large ones. A loose board, deteriorating crossing, drainage problem, damaged signal component, or other minor defect that is addressed promptly can often be repaired inexpensively. Left unattended, small defects can contribute to deterioration, invite further neglect, and ultimately require much more costly rehabilitation. There is a simple lesson sometimes associated with the "broken windows" concept: visible care encourages continued care, while visible neglect tends to invite more neglect.

The Santa Cruz Branch Line is a valuable public transportation asset. **Maintaining the existing rail infrastructure in good condition preserves the community's investment and its future transportation options, including both the Coastal Rail Trail and eventual passenger rail service.**

FORT therefore supports approval of Contract TP2625 and encourages the RTC to continue providing adequate resources for regular inspection, preventative maintenance, and timely repair of the Branch Line.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,
Matt Farrell
Board Chair, Santa Cruz County Friends of the Rail & Trail



Outlook

Trail Now Opposes METRO's Support for Additional Passenger Rail Studies — Item #8 October 1 RTC Meeting

From Brian Peoples [REDACTED] >
 Date Thu 9/24/2026 5:29 AM
 To Regional Transportation Commission [REDACTED]; Corey Aldridge [REDACTED]; Donna Bauer [REDACTED]
 Cc [REDACTED] Felipe Hernandez [REDACTED]; Kim De Serpa [REDACTED]; Manu Koenig [REDACTED]; Fred Keelev [REDACTED]; Steve [REDACTED]; Eduardo Montesino [REDACTED]; Sarah Christensen [REDACTED]

Dear METRO Board Members,

Trail Now opposes METRO's continued support for additional RTC passenger rail studies. We believe regional transportation funding should prioritize existing transit needs rather than continued planning for a multibillion-dollar passenger rail project whose financial and environmental feasibility remains uncertain.

The RTC's Climate Resilience Study identifies significant challenges for future transportation along the Santa Cruz coastline, including coastal erosion, sea-level rise, bluff instability and flooding. Addressing these conditions could require costly coastal protection, major infrastructure improvements or relocation of portions of the rail corridor.

These challenges compound the financial concerns identified in the RTC's Zero Emission Passenger Rail and Trail (ZEPRT) study, which estimates approximately \$4.28 billion in capital costs, \$34–\$41 million in annual operating expenses and typical weekday ridership of approximately 4,200–5,400 boardings.

Trail Now believes the combined financial, engineering, ridership and climate-resilience evidence raises fundamental questions about the cost-effectiveness of future passenger rail along the Santa Cruz coastline. We also question whether a future rail system requiring extensive coastal protection or relocation could satisfy the California Coastal Act's requirements for coastal access, environmental protection and sea-level-rise adaptation.

What does this mean for Santa Cruz METRO?

METRO has its own pressing transit service, infrastructure and long-term funding needs. Its continued support for additional RTC passenger rail studies raise questions about regional transportation priorities and the use of limited public resources.

Trail Now is particularly concerned about the potential consequences for METRO's future funding. Continued support for additional rail studies will become an issue in public discussions about METRO's spending priorities, especially if the agency seeks voter approval for a future local tax measure.

METRO's position on passenger rail planning is therefore directly relevant to public confidence in its financial priorities and long-term transportation strategy.

October 1 RTC Meeting — Agenda Item 8

Trail Now opposes additional ZEPRT studies and asks METRO representatives serving on the RTC to vote NO on the proposed grant funding request under Agenda Item 8 at the October 1 meeting.

We urge METRO to reconsider its support for further passenger rail planning and instead focus on improving existing METRO transit services.

Sincerely,

Brian Peoples





Outlook

Public Comment – Oct. 1 RTC Meeting – Request to Remove Consent Item 8 (ZEPRT Grant Application)

From Steven Plumb [REDACTED]**Date** Wed 9/23/2026 5:48 PM**To** Regional Transportation Commission [REDACTED]**Cc** Steven Plumb [REDACTED]

Chair Montesino and Commissioners,

I ask that you remove Item 8, the ZEPRT grant application, from the consent agenda and discuss it on the regular agenda.

Consent items are supposed to be routine and uncontroversial. This one isn't. By your own fact sheet, ZEPRT would cost \$4.28 billion to build and up to \$41 million a year to run. It can't happen without new state legislation and a countywide sales tax increase.

Last December you chose the interim trail to save \$120 million in grants, and that trail has a hard 2027 deadline. Staff time is limited. It should go to building the trail, not chasing funds for a rail project with no realistic way to pay for it.

"No match required" doesn't mean no cost. Please pull Item 8 and talk about it in public.

Respectfully,
Steven Plumb

[REDACTED]



Consent Agenda Item 8

From Tim Brattan [REDACTED]

Date Thu 9/24/2026 8:25 AM

To Regional Transportation Commission [REDACTED]

Cc Justin Cumminas [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] Steve Clark [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]; Supervisor Manu [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

Dear Commissioners,

Please remove item 8 on the Consent Agenda for discussion and ask yourselves and staff why you continue to spend any more time and money on an unfunded rail EIR (now up to \$20 million from last year) when:

- 1) The continued promotion of an environmental review will not contribute to the state rail readiness evaluation;
- 2) There is no realistic chance of rail construction grant funding or passage of a local sales tax measure to pay for operations; and
- 3) Sufficient passengers that make a multi-billion \$ rail project viable in the foreseeable future.

Continued discussion on a within-suburban rail EIR while predicted El Nino storms wash through and further erode the coastal corridor flies in the face of the Grand Jury report assessments and creates more public distrust of RTC planning decisions.

Let's focus on designing and completing achievable transportation projects that move people today; improved roads, bike lanes, pedestrian infrastructure and the interim corridor trail with local and grant funding you already have. Make Vision Zero, the coastal environment and a healthy community your first priority!

Tim Brattan
[REDACTED]



September 29, 2026

Santa Cruz County Regional Transportation Commission
Board of Commissioners

**Re: October 1 RTC Meeting Agenda Item 8, Flexible State Rail Assistance (SRA)
Cycle 2 Application for the ZEPRT Project**

Dear Chair Montesino and Commissioners:

Friends of the Rail & Trail supports the RTC's application to CalSTA for Flexible SRA Cycle 2 funds to advance passenger rail on the Santa Cruz Branch Rail Line. State rail funding is a significant opportunity for the county.

However, we would like to respectfully call the Commission's attention to the need to integrate the RTC staff work with the Corridor Identification and Development scope and timeline. We also recommend including the ZEPRT project peer review recommendations.

Specifically, we ask that the grant application:

1. Include Service Development Plan work in the scope of the grant application.

In the Federal Railroad Administration's Corridor Identification and Development program (Corridor ID), the environmental review and preliminary engineering activities are intended to be done in "Corridor ID Step 3: Project Development," **following** completion of "Corridor ID Step 2: Service Development Plan."

The Corridor ID: Step 2 Service Development Plan defines service levels, evaluates alternatives such as phased implementation and value engineering, identifies a corridor project inventory, includes preliminary environmental work, and establishes governance. This is critical work that should be done before the EIR or as part of a preliminary EIR.

CalSTA's Notice Of Funding Opportunity for this Flexible State Rail Assistance grant lists service development plans, alternatives analysis, ridership modeling, and multi-agency integration among eligible planning activities.

However, according to the staff report, this grant application is only to fund environmental review and preliminary engineering, which would normally be Corridor ID Step 3 work.

Caltrans staff clearly stated that implementing a local EIR/CEQA before the Step 3 NEPA is not recommended, that they should be done at the same time, and that the FRA wants to see the Step 2 work done before doing the EIR.

We request the RTC include the Step 2 work (Service Development Plan) in the grant, so as to better coordinate this grant application with the Corridor ID program.

Alternatively, if staff believes the 2025 Concept Report already satisfies the Step 2 Service Development Plan function, we ask that the grant application document that conclusion, and that staff provide confirmation from the FRA that it considers the 2025 Project Concept Report to be the functional equivalent of the Corridor ID Step 2 work.

2. Implement the ZEPRT peer review recommendations.

The peer review recommended value engineering and phased implementation. Environmental review is built around a defined project description and alternatives, so completing the EIR based on the current ZEPRT concept risks costly rework. We ask that the scope of the grant include funding to carry out the peer review recommendations before or as part of preliminary environmental work, and that a phased approach to a leaner, more economical rail system be presented as an alternative in the EIR.

3. Address right-of-way readiness and operating-plan credibility.

CalSTA will score the strength and credibility of the ZEPRT project's role in enabling new service, as well as on right-of-way readiness and coordination among agencies. We ask staff to explain how the application addresses these criteria in light of the pending discontinuance filing and the plans to construct a trail in place of the tracks. Please also ask staff to describe planned coordination with TAMC and Monterey County partners, including the construction of Pajaro Station.

4. Alternative if the request is not fully funded.

Please direct staff to prepare an alternative if this request is not funded in full. In particular, please direct staff to proceed with a reduced initial scope, such as implementing the peer review's value engineering and phased-implementation recommendations and completing a service development plan, before committing to the full environmental review and preliminary engineering effort.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,
Matt Farrell
Board Chair, Santa Cruz County Friends of the Rail & Trail

Glossary of Terms

Terms used throughout the item and the Data Platform presentation.

Term	Definition
Software as a Service (SaaS)	Software hosted and run by the vendor and accessed over the internet, rather than installed and maintained locally.
Big Data	Data sets too large, fast-moving or varied for traditional tools to collect, store or analyze.
Location Based Data	Data tied to a specific place, such as a GPS coordinate, address or point of interest.
Mobile App Data	Location and usage data collected from smartphone apps, typically anonymized before use.
Travel Demand Model	A model that forecasts trip volumes and travel patterns across the regional transportation network.
Activity Based Model (SBM)	A model that simulates each person's daily activities and trip choices, rather than aggregate trip totals.
Average Daily Traffic (ADT)	The average number of vehicles passing a point over a defined period shorter than a full year.
Annual Average Daily Traffic (AADT)	The average number of vehicles passing a point per day, averaged across an entire year.
Crash Data	Records of vehicle collisions, including location, severity and contributing factors.
Census Data	Population, household and employment counts from the U.S. Census Bureau.
Multimodal Data	Trip and volume data spanning more than one mode — driving, walking, biking and transit together.
Active Transportation Data	Counts and travel patterns for trips made by walking, biking and other non-motorized modes.
Speed Data	Vehicle speed measurements collected at points along the roadway network.
Connected Vehicle Data	Real-time speed and position signals broadcast by V2X-equipped vehicles.
Vision Zero (VZ)	A regional commitment to eliminate traffic deaths and severe injuries.