

DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

DIVISION OF RAIL AND MASS TRANSPORTATION

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*Making Conservation
a California Way of Life.*

January 4, 2020

Mr. Guy Preston
Executive Director
Santa Cruz County Regional Transportation Commission (SCCRTC)
1523 Pacific Avenue
Santa Cruz, CA 95060

Dear Mr. Preston:

Caltrans appreciates Santa Cruz County Regional Transportation Commission's (SCCRTC) efforts to address existing transportation challenges and future needs of Santa Cruz County through the Transit Corridors Alternatives Analysis study (TCAA). Caltrans supports and will continue to work with SCCRTC on the next steps that lead toward implementation of the locally preferred alternative identified in the draft TCAA.

The 2018 California State Rail Plan (Rail Plan) provides a vision and framework for investing in and integrating the state rail network over the next twenty years and beyond. The Rail Plan outlines a strategy for developing a clean, efficient, integrated rail system that will improve livability, help California meet climate and air quality goals, and improve regional mobility with connectivity to the statewide system. The Rail Plan identifies the Santa Cruz Branch Rail Line as a key facility in the corridor for providing passenger rail service throughout the region while providing connections to other popular destinations, including the San Francisco Bay Area, locations on the central coast and further south, and access to High Speed Rail at Gilroy. It is vital to preserve this rail line because it aligns with the State Rail Plan Vision for service and connectivity in the region.

Caltrans, through the Rail Plan and other strategic planning work, is committed to advancing equity goals and rethinking the opportunities for the role of transit and public agencies that fund, administer and operate transit. Passenger rail service in this corridor can meet the demands of commuters while, importantly,

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to enhance California's economy and livability"*

providing all-day service and mobility that provides transportation options for all users in the community - Investments in passenger rail service can support a shared vision of improved connections and travel time reliability in the Santa Cruz region. This is a priority for the State and there are significant State funding opportunities available that can provide a pathway for advancing Santa Cruz County connections as part of the statewide network, building on the State's investment in the corridor through Proposition 116 bonds.

Prop 116 and associated STIP funds showed a commitment from the State and from voters for preserving and delivering freight and passenger rail service on this corridor. Caltrans stresses that it is vital for SCCRTC to preserve rail rights of way for rail service, particularly where there has been a public investment to purchase rail lines for this purpose, as is the case with the Santa Cruz Branch Rail Line and conditions established under Proposition 116 (1990).

The entire statewide rail network will be delivered with zero, or near-zero emission infrastructure and technologies to continue decarbonizing the transportation sector while minimizing impacts to local communities. Incumbent to the vision is operating clean, quiet vehicles that are deployed strategically to meet regional and statewide speed, capacity, and community needs. Caltrans is also leading statewide fleet management planning to leverage state and regional investments while taking advantage of the newest advancements in fuel technology. The passenger rail vehicles that would eventually operate in this corridor will be zero-emissions vehicles that operate quietly without air pollutants or the need for costly and visually obstructive overhead catenary. Such vehicles align with the TCAA locally preferred alternative to deliver efficient, zero-emission transit throughout Santa Cruz County.

Importantly, the locally preferred alternative identified in the TCAA includes a rail with trail option to further expand multimodal options and enhance utilization of the corridor for passenger rail operations within the same footprint as a dedicated trail for bicycle, scooter, and pedestrian use. Caltrans previously supported a similar rail-with-trail option in the North Bay Area to deliver a trail along the SMART rail corridor which is nearly complete and already heavily used. Realizing the full potential of a combined rail and active transportation corridor is consistent with the Sustainable Communities Strategy for the Monterey Bay area, the State Rail Plan connectivity goals for this region, and regional greenhouse gas emissions targets.

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Again, Caltrans supports the locally preferred alternative identified in the TCAA and we look forward to the resulting final action on the preferred scenario.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "W. Kyle Grading", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

W. Kyle Grading, Chief
Division of Rail and Mass Transportation

c: Scott Eades, Caltrans District 5