



SANTA CRUZ COUNTY GROUP
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July 23, 2015

Regional Transportation Commission
1523 Pacific Ave
Santa Cruz, CA 95060

RE: Comments on RTC Passenger Rail Study

Dear Executive Director George Dondero, RTC Staff, and RTC Commissioners;

The Sierra Club supports using the Santa Cruz Branch line for passenger rail and the overall findings of the Santa Cruz County Passenger Rail Study. The Sierra Club believes that passenger rail will further many of the Club's goals including decreasing fossil fuel use, promoting sustainable land use, reducing global warming pollution, and get commuters off of congested roads. Passenger rail aligns closely the Sierra Club's overall policies regarding transportation, and as National Policy states "rail systems are most effective [compared to other forms of transportation] in stimulating compact development patterns, increasing public transit patronage and reducing motor vehicle use^[1]." Additionally, the Sierra Club supports the car-free transport options that regional and statewide rail-based connectivity will precipitate.

While the Passenger Rail Study recommends further study of scenarios E (service from Santa Cruz to Aptos) and S (service from Santa Cruz to Seacliff), the Club believes that service to Watsonville is essential to the success of passenger rail, and our responsibility to connect population centers to job centers to promote social equity and environmental justice within our county. Therefore, we recommend that the Regional Transportation Commission continue to study Scenario G, service between Santa Cruz and Watsonville. Residents of Watsonville are disproportionately burdened with long commutes and the need for car ownership due to their distance from county job centers.

Additionally, passenger rail between Santa Cruz and Watsonville will expose all members of the community to the unique ecosystems and habitats along the rail corridor, many of which are not easily accessible or viewable via other means of transportation. For example, the rail corridor passes through beautiful sections of Watsonville's Gallighan and Harkins sloughs that are not easy to get to by other means. Watsonville's extensive sloughs, the county's largest wetlands system, is a local eco-treasure that is underutilized: many more people will be inspired to explore, enjoy and protect this area, with its over 200 species of birds and over 7 miles of walking and biking trails[2].

In addition to expanding service to Watsonville, the Sierra Club believes that it is very important to expand the reach of passengers using the rail services by facilitating easy access to stations and trains for pedestrians and cyclists, providing adequate space on trains for bicycles and wheelchairs, provide ample bike parking at stations, and tie train service in with Metro busses to major destinations and other transit hubs and corridors. Making stations easily accessible to bus users, cyclists, and pedestrians will help to mitigate the need for large car parking lots, with their undesirable community and environmental impacts.

Yours Sincerely,

Greg McPheeters
Chair, Executive Committee

[1] <http://www.sierraclub.org/policy/transportation>

[2] http://cityofwatsonville.org/public-works-utilities/conservation_outreach_and_education_program/nature-center/wetlands-and-trails