

Pipe Dream Railway

Service between SC and Watsonville is at least five years away, if at all

IF YOU'RE waiting for rail service between Santa Cruz and Watsonville, you'd be better off walking.

The service would have to run on Southern Pacific's track, and the railroad company has given no sign that it's interested in sharing its right of way. "They're not willing to give up much of anything," said Scott Gallo-way, director of the SC Metro Transit District.

A call this week to Southern Pacific's offices in San Francisco netted a "no comment" from the company.

Currently 300,000 people a year use the bus between Santa Cruz and Watsonville. Transportation

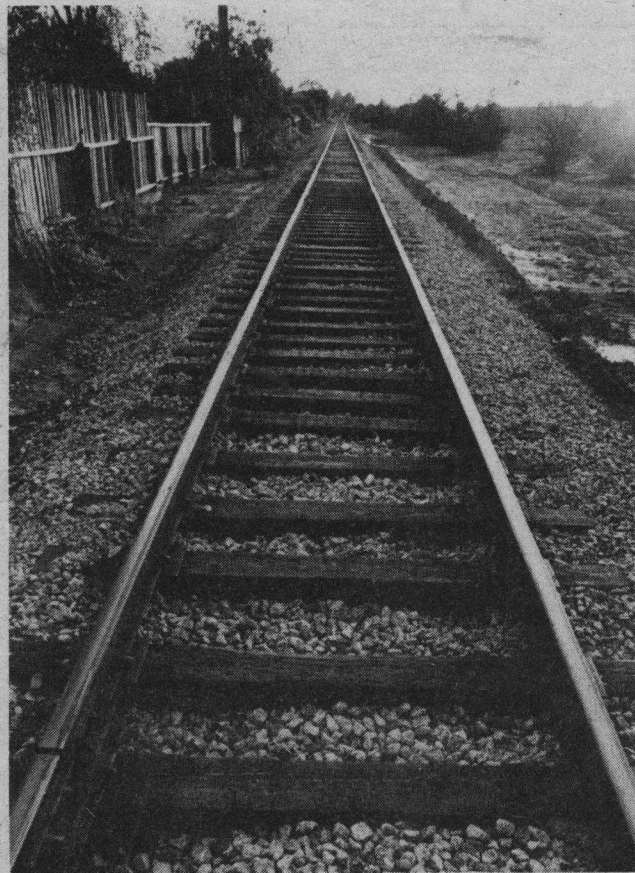
planner Ken Thomas said studies indicate ridership would almost double on rail lines. State funding could provide most of the estimated \$4 million start-up costs for rail service, but Santa Cruz County would have to come up with about \$1.6 million, said Thomas.

Initially, the plan calls for a two-car trolley to run every hour from 7 am to 7 pm at a cost of 75 cents for a one-way trip. Bus fare is presently 50 cents.

Bus service is already running close to capacity, and state funding for the service is drying up, said Thomas. But rail service could not start up until

1988 at the earliest, according to Thomas. In addition to right-of-way problems, it's still uncertain whether the rail plan will receive the public support necessary to make it a success. Two public hearings have been held by the county and another is planned in Santa Cruz for May 18.

Commuter rail service here isn't a new idea. Between 1890 and 1926 street cars served all residential developments in the area with connections to San Francisco. But the automobile and bus quickly replaced the electric rail, and by 1926 service in Santa Cruz was discontinued. •



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