

Santa Cruz rail line purchase approved

Transportation RP7-110
Regional Transportation Commission buys 32-mile span from Watsonville to Davenport

REGISTER-PAJARONIAN STAFF REPORT

The California Transportation Commission on Wednesday unanimously approved the purchase of the Santa Cruz Branch Rail Line by the Santa Cruz County Regional Transportation Commission.

The \$14.2 million purchase was made from Union Pacific after nearly 10 years of negotiations and review of the 130-year-old rail line's condition. The agreement stipulates that the county spend \$5 million on improvements to the line, which has been preserved for future use as a corridor for

modes of transportation that could include passenger rail, transit, bicycle and pedestrian. In the short term, the county will continue its existing freight and recreational rail service and plans to add recreational service between Santa Cruz Main Beach and Davenport.

The current rail line connects to the California Coast Line at the Pajaro station at the Watsonville junction and spans many of the area's top attractions, including parks,

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community centers, schools, beaches and villages. The railroad is within walking distance of much of the county's residential population.

The purchase and improvements are being funded by Proposition 116, the State Transportation Improvement Program and a \$1.5 million earmark secured by Rep. Sam Farr.

In a letter urging the CTC to approve the purchase, Farr noted, "The acquisition of this 32-mile coastal rail corridor is a vital element of the Central California Coast's efforts to provide multi-modal solutions to its significant transportation problems."

The county unanimously agreed to move ahead with the purchase, concurring that Proposition 116 funds facilitated the opportunity to provide transportation options for current and future generations. Commissioners expressed optimism

about the potential of the rail line, which for decades has been limited to freight rail service.

"Acquisition of the rail line corridor will allow our county to plan for future transportation solutions that link large parts of our region and promote strategies that reduce greenhouse gas emissions, promote tourism and support new employment opportunities for local residents," said Santa Cruz County 1st District Supervisor John Leopold.