

SANTA CRUZ BRANCH RAIL LINE



SHMUEL THALER/SENTINEL FILE

A number of the trestles along the Branch Rail Line are in need of rehabilitation.

Officials OK \$4.2M in bridge repairs

Regional Transportation Commission
project scaled back to four bridges

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8-16-13

WATSONVILLE — Santa Cruz County transportation officials approved spending \$4.2 million Thursday to fix four of the "most dangerous" bridges along the 31-mile Santa Cruz Branch Rail Line.

The near unanimous decision by the 11-member Regional Transportation Commission moves forward a scaled-down version of a project stalled in June when initial bids came in higher than anticipated.

County Supervisor John Leopold made the motion to approve the bid by Stacy and Witbeck Inc. to repair a bridge at Wilder Ranch and three more in South County, including one in La Selva considered the most seriously impaired.

"The bridges in the most dangerous condition now get to be fixed, and it's being done by firms that have fixed bridges like this before" said county Supervisor John Leopold. The work improves "a transportation corridor that will be critical to the future of transportation in Santa Cruz County."

Stacy and Witbeck specializes in light rail, commuter rail and street car projects. Founded in 1981 in San Francisco, one of its first projects was to restore the cable car line on California Street.

Originally estimated at less than \$5 million to complete the full scope of work, the low bid in June was

BRIDGE

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closer to \$7 million. This time, officials concentrated on nine bridges described as priorities. But the low bid remained above \$5 million, so work on five less critical bridges will be put off until additional funding can be found.

Transportation officials also lowered a set aside for contingencies from 10 to 7 percent, allowed more work to be done by subcontractors and removed a requirement that the La Selva bridge remain open during November and December for operation of the Train to Christmas Town from Santa Cruz during the holiday season.

Scotts Valley Councilman Dene Bustichi, who cast the sole dissenting vote, questioned lowering the contingency fund.

Luis Mendez, the RTC's deputy director, said since the bidding was done on a



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Bids to rehabilitate trestles on the 31-mile Branch Rail Line, like this one in Seascapes have come in significantly higher than originally estimated.

lump sum rather than itemized basis, the possibility of unanticipated costs was reduced.

A state grant of up to \$5.3 million will fund the work.

The county commission bought the rail line from Union Pacific in 2012 for \$14.2 million with the idea of supporting passenger and freight service, as well as creating a coastal trail for

recreation.

Iowa Pacific runs the line as the Santa Cruz & Monterey Bay Railway. The Chicago-based railroad company is responsible for maintenance, though not the work that needs to be done to upgrade the line.

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