

Study: Railroad service would be widely used

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SANTA CRUZ — As many as 450 people would ride a railroad train daily during summer weekends, according to a study on re-establishing recreational passenger rail service in Santa Cruz County.

The Santa Cruz Regional Transportation Commission and the Service Authority for Freeway Emergencies held their first public hearing Thursday on the proposal, attracting an evenly divided audience of about 30 people.

The proposed rail service, which would run from the San Francisco Bay Area to Santa Cruz County, prompted public questions about costs, economic gain for the county, air pollution and noise, and safety for those who live near the rail-

road tracks.

No action was taken Thursday. The public hearing will be continued at the board's July 8 meeting, set for 7:30 p.m. at the Board of Supervisors Chambers, County Governmental Center, 701 Ocean St., Santa Cruz.

According to the study conducted by Parsons Brinckerhoff Quade & Douglas Inc., the rail service would collect \$223,000 in fares from mid-May to late October, which proponents believe would justify the existence of the service. The majority of the riders would be older people whose destinations would be restaurants and hotels, the study said.

But many in the audience Thurs-

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day contended there was no guarantee that 450 people would ride each day into the county, especially on foggy days. They also said the negative impacts of the rail system would outweigh its benefits.

The operational and management cost of the rail service is estimated at \$522,000 annually, more than twice the amount it would collect in rider fares.

"When I look in your report ... under economic benefits it's one of the shortest sections," a Pajaro Valley resident said. "It can be summarized in one word: unknown."

Residents who live along the rail corridor also expressed concerns about safety, noise and air pollution.

But Gary Plomp, a Watsonville resident and member of the Santa Cruz Watsonville Railroad Viable, said that using diesel fuel, electrification and quiet-running welded rail could eliminate much of the noise associated

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