

TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION

Many residents welcome rail trail in their backyards

County transit leaders hold public workshops for coastal trail input

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SANTA CRUZ — Many residents want the county's transportation leaders to start building a trail next to the railroad as soon as possible, and they'd like it close to their individual neighborhoods and homes.

The Regional Transportation Commission of Santa Cruz County held its third public workshop Wednesday at the Simpkins Family Swim Center to gather input on how to move forward with the commission's recent purchase of the 32-mile Branch Rail Line, which runs from Watsonville to Davenport.

About 100 people attended the meeting. The final workshop is planned Thursday night in Watsonville.

The commission's long-term vision for the rail line, which was acquired from

TRAIL

Continued from A1

Union Pacific in October for \$14.2 million, includes a pedestrian-bike trail that will eventually connect with trails in Monterey County and stretch north to the San Mateo County line.

However, the \$82 million Monterey Bay Sanctuary Scenic Trail plan is expected to take years, even decades, to be completed.

The draft plan is in the works while the final plan is expected to be adopted by the Regional Transportation Commission next fall.

"Having a continuous network is the key objective," said Cory Caletti, a senior transportation planner with the Regional Transportation Commission. "We want a right of way that will be the spine of the trail network."

County transportation officials dis-

sected the rail line into 20 segments — from Waddell Creek to the Pajaro River.

Participants on Wednesday were asked to jot down the segments they believe should be a priority for building the rail trail.

Segments near the Santa Cruz Boardwalk and Live Oak were popular choices.

Live Oak resident Tom Celli, who rides his bike nearly five miles to work with the county Parks Department each day, cast his vote for the Live Oak area.

He said bicycling along Capitola Road is hazardous even when he's in the designated bike lane.

"Cars are whizzing by me. It's very scary," Celli said. "Coming home, sometimes I feel like my time's going to be up."

Kai Parker of Live Oak said she looks forward to one day having a designated area separate from vehicles to walk and ride a bike safely with her children.

Parker and her partner Moshe Vilozny, who commutes by bicycle to work on Morrissey Boulevard, say there aren't enough areas in Santa Cruz County to push a stroller or pedal a bike with kids without constantly watching out for cars.

"I hope they do this segment soon so I can move around. I walk a lot, and it's not really safe," Parker said. "Sometimes the sidewalk just ends, and cars go so fast on Capitola Road."

Parker and Vilozny say they believe having a trail next to the rail line will help with traffic congestion as well.

"Traffic is so horrendous," Vilozny said. "If you could go on the train tracks, it would be way better."

Transportation officials say they've raised about \$5.7 million so far for design and construction of the trail through federal funds secured by Rep. Sam Farr, D-Carmel, and the California Coastal Conservancy.

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