

State, regional awards for \$126 million trail plan

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SANTA CRUZ » No shovels have turned any dirt on the project, but already the 50-mile Sanctuary Scenic Trail plan is bringing home some hardware.

More than two years in the making, the plan envisions a cross-county network of trails using the Branch Rail Line as a backbone. Recently, both the American Planning Association and the California Department of Parks and Recreation honored the \$126 million plan with awards

that underscore the its ambition.

"It's fantastic. We worked so hard and there's just so much public engagement. To have that recognition, it just speaks volumes," said Cory Caletti, project manager for the Regional Transportation Commission.

More than two years in the

making, the Regional Transportation Commission and consultant RRM Design Group came up with the cross-county trail plan, borrowing from experts and the public alike. Once completed, pedestrians and bicyclists will be able to go from the North Coast to

RAIL » PAGE 3

Rail

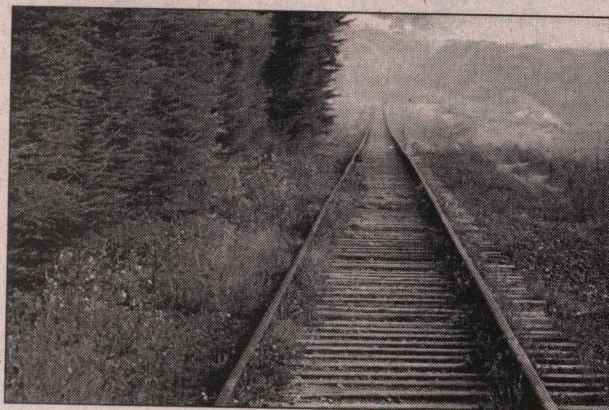
FROM PAGE 1

Watsonville, largely following the rail line and crossing over 26 new bridges in the process.

Broken down into 20 segments, the plan is likely to take years or even decades to complete.

And how to pay for it is still being sketched out, with one idea to use the fundraising prowess of nonprofits to augment government funds. Friends of the Rail and Trail, for example, is already helping raise money for a short Watsonville segment.

More than \$5 million has been committed to a segment between Natural Bridges State Park and the Santa Cruz Beach Boardwalk area. The RTC has re-



FRED ARELLANO — VINTAGE ROCK PHOTOGRAPHY

A train ride to Davenport provides a scenic coastal view.

ceived numerous other requests to build parts of the line.

The Department of Parks and Recreation honored the plan for promoting, enhancing and expanding public awareness and use of bicycle and pedestrian trails in California at its 29th an-

nual California Trails and Greenways Conference last month in Palm Springs.

The American Planning Association also recently gave the project a regional award for transportation planning. It beat out Walk-First, a San Francisco project that targets pedestrian

safety at 170 locations throughout the city.

"Receiving top awards from both the American Planning Association and California State Parks ... highlights the extraordinary effort the Santa Cruz County Regional Transportation Commission put forth to build consensus for this one-of-a-kind braided trail system," said Mike Sherrod, a consultant who worked on the plan for RRM Design Group. "The RTC really has expanded transportation alternatives for everyone in Santa Cruz County in new and exciting ways."

The Regional Transportation Commission bought the 32-mile Branch Rail Line for \$14.2 million in 2012, hoping to use it for freight and passenger train service, as well as a future trail.