

SANTA CRUZ

Tourist trolley plan gains steam

Transportation
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The Santa Cruz County Regional Transportation Commission may bet \$11 million that up to 25,000 tourists will want to take a rail line from Capitola Village to Aptos Village.

The commission's board decided Thursday that it would prefer to create a trolley service from Capitola to Aptos aimed at tourists, more than it would for a similar service from Santa Cruz to Capitola or Santa Cruz to Davenport. All three options will be on the table at a public hearing May 1.

"This gives us an opportunity to get a private operator in there, to get rail online in this county, and an opportunity for rail to prove itself," said Commissioner Dennis Norton. "My thoughts are that if we're serious about getting this (\$11 million), we need to keep the plan simple."

The commission's first choice, the trolley from Capitola to Aptos, is "the path of least resistance," Norton said, because the Union Pacific rail line that the city would purchase to create the system, goes through the fewest neighborhoods there. He added, however, that choosing the wrong option could make the project fail and stymie rail transit.

The Capitola-Aptos plan would cover a little more than 3 miles, with a possible extension of 2 miles to Seascape Resort. The study envisions it running 120 days a year between 11 a.m. and 5 p.m.

The commission would spend \$11 million to buy and make improvements to the right-of-way on the Union Pacific track and hire a private train operator to run the trolley. Roaring Camp Railroad in Felton and Sierra Railroad Co. have said they would apply for the job.

A preliminary study found that the Santa Cruz to Capitola line is the only one that would make money whether it had 10,000 or 25,000 passengers a year.

The study shows that a trolley from Santa Cruz to Capitola would make \$2,648 if 10,000 people rode it a year, and \$48,055 if 25,000 people road it a year. The report states it would make more money because the route is longer, resulting in an economy of scale.

Tickets would cost \$10.

But Live Oak Supervisor Jan Beautz said if a trolley were preferred from Santa Cruz to Capitola she "would have a lot of questions, and we'd need to spend a lot of time looking it."

The Capitola-Aptos line would lose money if it had 10,000 passengers a year. The study found the system would lose \$4,000 a year with 10,000 passengers and make \$26,000 a year with 25,000 passengers. Tickets would cost \$9, because it's a shorter route.

No economic plan has been drawn up for the trolley from Santa Cruz to Davenport.

The public hearing on the topic will be 7 p.m. May 1 at the Supervisors' Chamber, County Administrative Building, 701 Ocean St., Santa Cruz.

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