

# Surveys support summer trains

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**SANTA CRUZ** — Once every 37 years isn't enough for train lovers wanting to ride the rails between San Jose and Santa Cruz.

A celebratory crowd aboard a rare run of the old Sun Tan Special showed strong support for a summer train service, according to survey results released Tuesday.

The results go to the Santa Cruz County Regional Transportation Commission on Monday. At the same meeting, the commission will hold a public hearing on the draft Intercity Recreational Rail Study, regarding the possibility of bringing summer weekend train service to the county.

"I think the survey re-enforces commissioners' personal impression from the event itself, which was very positive," said Scott Kennedy, commission chairman.

The level of support, he said, was high.

On May 18, a five-car Amtrak Superliner and an eight-car CalTrain — carrying 1,250 passengers — roared into town for a weekend Rail Fair. The last time a passenger train ran between the Bay Area and Santa Cruz was 1959.

During the weekend revival of the Sun Tan Special, 950 survey forms were completed by passengers and fair participants.

Seventy percent of the respondents said they would spend \$10 or more for a one-way ticket to ride a summer train between San Jose and the Santa Cruz Beach Boardwalk. Thirty-six percent said they would spend more than \$15 for the trip.

While riders enjoy the train, they don't want to spend too long on it. Seventy percent said a one-way travel time of two hours would be acceptable. Anything longer, and the number drops to 23 percent.

A travel time of two hours or less was rated the second most important item in the survey, followed by the train having comfortable cars and special family fares.

The most important of 10 aspects considered was convenient departure times, according to the survey. The departure times most preferred were from 8 to 9 a.m. leaving San Jose and from 5 to 7 p.m. leaving Santa Cruz.

Most people, 59 percent, would use the service once or twice during the summer. About one-third, 32 percent, would use it at least one weekend per month during the summer, according

to the survey.

While train passengers and fair-goers gave transportation officials these figures to consider, another group that wasn't surveyed holds a different view.

"Those are nostalgic train buffs," said Barbara Rodak, whose Aptos home sits about 40 feet from the Southern Pacific tracks. "What would you expect them to say? No one asked the rest of us what we thought."

She is part of RAILS, a citizens group opposed to any passenger rail service in the county. The group, she said, is worried about the public subsidy of a train service.

"We don't want to subsidize ticket fares," she said. "We already have a mass transit system in the county. It's called the bus and it works just fine."

Transit officials said they have no illusions that the weekend survey of train enthusiasts and other riders was a scientific study.

A random study of county residents earlier this year, however, showed that 70 percent of people favored rail service, said Linda Wilshusen, executive director of the transportation commission.

Other results of the recent survey showed:

- 45 percent of those people who did not live in the county said they would

be more inclined to stay overnight in Santa Cruz if they took the train.

- About one person in four, 28 percent, said they would use summer weekend train service between the Boardwalk and the Monterey Peninsula at least one weekend per month. Just more than half of these respondents said they would use this service once or twice in the summer.

- Among nine reasons for wanting to use the summer weekend train service, the feeling that "train travel is fun" was most often selected as a reason for using the train. Other reasons included scenery, special outing with family and to avoid Highway 17.