



**SANTA CRUZ METROPOLITAN TRANSIT DISTRICT (METRO)
BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETING MINUTES*
APRIL 25, 2025 – 9:00 AM**

A regular meeting of the Board of Directors of the Santa Cruz Metropolitan Transit District (METRO) convened on Friday, April 25, 2025, as a hybrid meeting.

The Board Meeting agenda packet can be found online at www.SCMTD.com. *Minutes are “summary” minutes, not verbatim minutes. Audio recordings of Board meeting open sessions are available to the public upon request.

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1 CALLED TO ORDER at 9:02 AM by Board Chair Downing.

2 SAFETY DEBRIEF

Gregory Strecker, Safety, Security & Risk Management Director, provided a debriefing on safety, emphasizing the evacuation routes in response to an emergency.

3 ROLL CALL

The following Directors were **present**, representing a quorum:

| | |
|---|------------------------------|
| Director Rebecca Downing | County of Santa Cruz |
| Director Jimmy Dutra | City of Watsonville |
| Director Shebreh Kalantari-Johnson** | City of Santa Cruz |
| Director Manu Koenig | County of Santa Cruz |
| Director Fabian Leonor | County of Santa Cruz |
| Director Donna Lind | City of Scotts Valley |
| Director Martinez | County of Santa Cruz |
| Director Scott Newsome | City of Santa Cruz |
| Director Melinda Orbach | City of Capitola |
| Director Quiroz-Carter* AR 9:29 AM | City of Watsonville |
| Director Mike Rotkin | County of Santa Cruz |
| Ex-Officio Director Alta Northcutt | Cabrillo College |
| Ex-Officio Director Edward Reiskin | UC Santa Cruz |

*Attended via teleconference at 628 Crown Road, Santa Cruz, CA

**Attended via teleconference at 5619 N. PSO Ventoso, Tucson, AZ

Corey Aldridge
Julie Sherman

CEO/General Manager
General Counsel

4 ANNOUNCEMENTS

4.1 Today's meeting was broadcast by Community Television of Santa Cruz County.

4.2 Susy Magana of Language Line Services provided Spanish interpretation services.

5 BOARD OF DIRECTORS COMMENTS

Director Dutra touched base on communications distributed to Board Members on February 27, 2025, and thanked Directors Downing, Kalantari-Johnson, and Koenig for their support. He said it was a hateful moment for those involved in behind-the-scenes conversations. He will continue to represent South County despite these political tactics. He thanked Margo Ross, Chief Operations Officer, and Freddy Rocha, Maintenance Deputy Director, for working with the City of Watsonville to resolve the bus stops garbage cans situation.

Director Martinez mentioned that she recently visited the Big Basin Redwoods State Park. The park is grateful for METRO's partnership and for providing a bus service to the park.

Director Leonor thanked METRO staff for the Board orientation on Monday, April 21, 2025. He liked touring the facilities and seeing the workforce that brings METRO's services to the County. He learned a lot about the mechanics, bus operators, and the new hydrogen buses.

Ex-Officio Director Northcutt mentioned that Cabrillo College students will be holding their election next week on the continuation of the transportation referendum with METRO. She thanked METRO staff for tabling at both the Aptos and Watsonville sites. The results will be available on Friday, May 2, 2025 and announced at Cabrillo's Board meeting on May 8, 2025. She will communicate the results to John Urgo, Chief Planning and Innovation Officer, when they are available. She also mentioned that Cabrillo will begin receiving applications for its housing project in the fall of 2026 and welcoming its first tenants in the fall of 2027.

Director Orbach echoed appreciation for the Board orientation and hearing from the department heads. She feels optimistic about being a part of this organization and the vision laid out.

Board Chair Downing thanked Director Dutra for his comments and empathized with his situation. She expressed gratitude for his continued representation on the METRO Board and encouraged him to communicate his opinions to the METRO representatives that sit on the Santa Cruz County Regional Transportation Commission (SCCRTC). She also mentioned the upcoming Week Without Driving event being held September 29 - October 5, 2025. METRO, the Community Traffic Safety Coalition, and the Santa Cruz County Community Development and Infrastructure Department are coordinating promotional events leading up to that event. We kicked off the event last Saturday, April 19, at the Earth Day event in Santa Cruz and will have a booth at the Watsonville Earth Day celebration being held Sunday, April 27th, from noon to 3:00 PM.

Hearing nothing further, Board Chair Downing moved to the next agenda item.

6 ORAL AND WRITTEN COMMUNICATIONS TO THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Brian Peoples, Trail Now, directed his comments to Director Dutra and expressed that Trail Now is supportive of his contributions to the community. He mentioned that the Capitola City Council voted to uphold Measure L recently and will be moving forward with the trail. Mr. People's spoke to an email from Jack Brown (attached) regarding Director Rotkin's April 12, 2025 editorial in Lookout Santa Cruz (Lookout)

and provided commentary of Trail Now's interpretation.

Nico, UCSC student, suggested METRO hold their Board meetings at a different time so more students can attend the meetings. He recommended having a bus pick up students from campus on Board meeting dates to increase Board attendance and have their voices heard. He also suggested that the marketing team create a video showing people how to get to the Board meetings and how to make an online service request or complaint.

Portia Ward, member of the public, spoke to her pictures (attached) of the temporary downtown hub. She raised concerns about Area 2 and not having enough space to maneuver around the bench located there with her mobility device. Area 4 also has visibility and maneuverability issues.

David Dean, member of the public, requested the Board provide information to the public about the bus-on-shoulder becoming available and which routes will be using these lanes.

Director Rotkin briefly responded to Mr. People's comments and expressed that he stands by the column he wrote for Lookout. There are differences of opinion between Mr. Brown and himself but emphasized that no money is coming out of Measure D funds set aside for METRO and he will advocate that Measure D funds remain with METRO.

Director Koenig added that the SCCRTC typically sees transit and rail money compete in the consolidated call for projects at the SCCRTC. The SCCRTC did see \$2 million of transit money get diverted to the rail study in 2023. He expects to see further competition in the future between the rail project and the operations at METRO. In response to the student, he doesn't see the time of this meeting changing; it is physically challenging to get this many people in the room and to do so after hours would be difficult. However, he offered to find time to meet with students who are an important constituency for this agency.

Director Orbach mentioned the Capitola City Council meeting recently held and clarified discussions about the Park Avenue alignment of the rail trail that Mr. People's brought up. Measure L passed in 2018 and the City Council voted to interpret it to keep the trail within the rail corridor. However, the Capitola trestle is owned by SCCRTC. The interpretation of Measure L does not mean that the SCCRTC must pursue the interim trail. The SCCRTC will continue to move forward with the coastal rail trail project, Segments 10 and 11, and will continue to study the zero-emissions rail project.

Ex-Officio Director Reiskin mentioned that some written communications to METRO have staff responses in the Board packet and others do not. Staff responded that it depends on when the communication is received and there may not be time to add a response before the packet is posted. Staff will follow up on the items in the packet without a response.

Hearing nothing further, Board Chair Downing moved to the next agenda item.

7 LABOR ORGANIZATION COMMUNICATIONS

Having none, Board Chair Downing moved to the next agenda item.

8 ADDITIONAL DOCUMENTATION TO SUPPORT EXISTING AGENDA ITEMS

Board Chair Downing announced an additional written communication was sent to the Board on April 24, 2025 and will be added to the agenda packet.

CONSENT AGENDA

All items appearing on the Consent Agenda are recommended actions which are considered to be routine and will be acted upon as one motion. All items removed will be considered later in the agenda. The Board Chair will allow public input prior to the approval of the Consent Agenda items.

- 9.1 ACCEPT AND FILE: PRELIMINARY APPROVED CHECK AND ACH JOURNAL
DETAIL FOR THE MONTH OF MARCH 2025
Chuck Farmer, Chief Financial Officer
- 9.2 ACCEPT AND FILE: MINUTES OF MARCH 28, 2025 BOARD OF
DIRECTORS REGULAR MEETING
Corey Aldridge, CEO/General Manager
- 9.3 ACCEPT AND FILE: THE YEAR-TO-DATE MONTHLY FINANCIAL REPORT AS
OF MARCH 31, 2025
Chuck Farmer, Chief Financial Officer
- 9.4 APPROVE: RECOMMENDED ACTION ON TORT CLAIMS
Gregory Strecker, Safety, Security and Risk Management Director
- 9.5 APPROVE: CONSIDERATION OF AWARDED A CONTRACT TO NEW FLYER
OF AMERICA, INC. FOR TECHNICAL TRAINING FOR NEW FLYER HYDROGEN
BUSES NOT TO EXCEED \$255,088
Margo Ross, Chief Operations Officer
- 9.6 APPROVE: RESOLUTION DECLARING CERTAIN PROPERTY EXEMPT
SURPLUS LAND UNDER THE SURPLUS LAND ACT
Chuck Farmer, Chief Financial Officer
- 9.7 APPROVE: CONSIDERATION OF AWARD OF CONTRACT TO K & D
LANDSCAPING, INC. FOR LANDSCAPING MAINTENANCE SERVICES NOT
TO EXCEED \$224,974
Freddy Rocha, Maintenance Deputy Director
- 9.8 APPROVE: CONSIDER A RESOLUTION DESIGNATING THE CEO/GENERAL
MANAGER AS THE AUTHORIZED AGENT TO SUBMIT A GRANT
APPLICATION AND EXECUTE ACTIONS NECESSARY TO RECEIVE
FORMULA FUNDS FROM THE FY25 LOW CARBON TRANSIT OPERATIONS
PROGRAM
Derek Toups, Deputy Director of Planning & Innovation
- 9.9 APPROVE REQUEST FOR RECLASSIFICATION TO CONTRACTS AND
PURCHASING DEPUTY DIRECTOR
Dawn Crummié, Chief Human Resources Officer

There were no public comments.

Hearing nothing further, Board Chair Downing called for a roll call vote.

ACTION: MOTION TO APPROVE THE CONSENT AGENDA AS PRESENTED

MOTION: DIRECTOR LEONOR

SECOND: DIRECTOR ROTKIN

MOTION PASSED WITH 11 AYES (Directors Downing, Dutra, Kalantari-Johnson, Koenig, Leonor, Lind, Martinez, Newsome, Orbach, Quiroz-Carter, and Rotkin)

REGULAR AGENDA

- 10 PRESENTATION OF EMPLOYEE LONGEVITY AWARDS FOR:
(10 YEARS) MANUEL DIAZ, PARATRANSIT OPERATOR*
(20 YEARS) RYAN MACDONELL, PARTS & MATERIALS MANAGER***

*Signifies those present to receive their certificates in person.

Board Chair Downing thanked both for their years of service at METRO.

Mr. MacDonell commented that he is proud to be part of this organization. He grew up in Santa Cruz and rode the 71 as a youth and is happy METRO has continued the service of helping youth get to where they need to be every day.

Mr. Diaz thanked METRO for the opportunity it has given him. He has learned a lot working in the ParaCruz division. He grew up in Watsonville and also relied on the bus system to get around.

There were no public comments.

- 11 STATE LEGISLATIVE UPDATE FROM SHAW, YODER, ANTWHI, SCHMELZER AND LANGE**

Michael Pimentel/Partner and Brendan Repicky/Legislative & Regulatory Advocate, of Shaw, Yoder, Antwhi, Schmelzer and Lange, spoke to the presentation. Mr. Pimentel reviewed the 2025-26 state legislative session and METRO's legislative delegation committee appointments. He added that at the beginning of the year, CEO Corey Aldridge and Mr. Pimentel made rounds with the METRO delegation, apprising them of METRO's priorities for this year as they consider legislation and budget appropriations. Mr. Pimentel discussed Governor Newsom's proposed FY25-26 budget and how the Los Angeles fires and Trump administration decisions may impact the budget. He discussed the statewide request for additional transit funding and CEO Aldridge's part in the Senate Budget Hearings held earlier in the year. He spoke to the budget requests made on behalf of METRO that support METRO's transition to zero-emission technologies and the cap-and-trade program reauthorization.

Mr. Repicky spoke to transit related bills and their status—SB 71 that would permanently extend CEQA (California Environmental Quality Act) exemptions for most transit projects; SB 752 would extend SUT (sales and use tax) exemptions for ZEB (zero-emission bus) purchases by two years; AB 394 would extend enhanced penalties for assault committed against transit operators and ticketing agents to all public transit employees and contractors, and clarify court-ordered restraining orders to apply systemwide; and AB 1070 (which has now been pulled from consideration) would have required transit districts to add two non-voting members to their boards and would prohibit board members from receiving compensation for board activities unless they demonstrated they are transit riders.

Discussion followed on:

- Letters of support from Board Members
- Grid redundancy funding--why it's needed and what gets developed
- TIRCP (Transit and Intercity Rail Capital Program) funding included in the 2023 budget and the timelines associated with the appropriations
- Has the TIRCP money received from the SCCRTC been included in the budget?

Mr. Pimentel, Mr. Repicky, and METRO staff responded to all concerns.

There were no public comments.

Hearing nothing further, Board Chair Downing moved to the next agenda item.

12 FEDERAL LEGISLATIVE UPDATE FROM CFM ADVOCATES

Joel Rubin, CFM Advocates, spoke to his presentation. He expressed appreciation for METRO's staff involvement in creating a workable federal agenda and working with METRO's congressional delegates who attended a METRO facilities tour with participation from Board Chair Downing and Director Lind. He provided background information on his firm, introduced his Federal Affairs Team, the scope of services the firm provides and the successes they have had in advocating for agencies. He reviewed METRO's top funding requests and policy priorities. He also outlined the transportation reauthorization funding along with the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead. He provided a DC update on grant funding, the Trump tax cut bill, debt limit, tariffs and FY26 Trump budget and appropriations.

Discussion followed on:

- Earmark process and caps and possible opportunities for METRO
- Under the current Trump administration, will most earmarks go to red districts/red states?
- Can a project take money from both grants and earmarks?
- Letters of support from local jurisdictions and other organizations to congressional delegates

Mr. Rubin and METRO staff responded to all concerns.

There were no public comments.

Hearing nothing further, Board Chair Downing moved to the next agenda item.

13 CEO ORAL REPORT

Corey Aldridge, CEO/General Manager spoke to the following items:

- Dawn Crummié, Chief Human Resources Officer, and I recently met with representatives from SEIU and a trainer from PERB. Together, we are developing collaborative training sessions that will be conducted jointly by management and union leaders.
- METRO's One Ride at a Time monarch butterfly bus made the front page of the Sentinel on April 16th and is included in this month's news clips.
- The first segment of the Highway 1 bus-on-shoulder project was recently completed with the second segment expected at the end of 2026, providing five miles of operational corridor. Although the red paint is visible, METRO will not

begin service until both segments are complete. Current efforts include finalizing the concept of operations, an MOU (memorandum of understanding), developing operator training protocols, and collaborating on a public information campaign to manage expectations on signage and usage timelines. We met with SCCRTC to discuss the project and are collaborating with the California Highway Patrol (CHP) and California Department of Transportation (Caltrans).

- The mobile hydrogen fueling station will be completed in the first half of May 2025. Testing should be completed by the end of the fiscal year. Employee training sessions on the operation of the fueler will begin after it is commissioned. We are planning future classes for employees on hydrogen safety as well as working with law enforcement and the fire department to coordinate training for them once the mobile fueler is installed. The current plan is to begin placing hydrogen buses into revenue service in September after all the training has been completed.
- The permanent hydrogen fueling station design has started and will take approximately five months with construction expected to commence in the fall. It is anticipated to be operational in the first half of 2026.
- The Pacific Station North Redevelopment project is expected to be completed in 2026. For the Watsonville Transit Center and affordable housing project, METRO will be applying for an Affordable Housing and Sustainable Communities (AHSC) Program funding next month with the City of Watsonville and MidPen Housing. Construction is estimated to begin in 2027 and be completed by 2029.
- ParaCruz staff attended and provided information at the Santa Cruz County Transition and Resource Fair held at Harbor High School. The event provided an opportunity for students, families, and educators to explore post-high school and adult transition services.
- On April 22nd METRO provided free fares systemwide to celebrate Earth Day. METRO also participated in Santa Cruz Earth Day on April 19th and will join in the Watsonville Earth Day on April 27th. METRO will provide eco-friendly games, fun activities, and great prizes.
- May 3rd is the Kids Day event, which is held in downtown Santa Cruz from noon to 4:00 PM. METRO will provide games like corn hole, giant Connect 4, and a spin wheel at the booth.
- May 9th is the Community Health Trust – Health Fair from 2:00 – 6:00 PM and held at the Watsonville City Plaza. This is a family friendly event offering health information, screenings, community resources, and activities.
- May 21st is the Touch-A-Truck event held at Depot Hill from noon to 2:00 PM. This event will showcase public works vehicles to engage youth interest.
- CEO Aldridge thanked METRO's Bus Operators who have been tabling at Cabrillo College in Aptos and Watsonville to promote the benefits of METRO for the upcoming transit fee vote. In addition, the Bus Operators have been at the Watsonville Farmers Market to speak to students.
- Last week our mechanics received training on the Gillig battery electric buses and in June will receive training on the New Flyer fuel-cell buses.

- Since our last Board meeting, METRO has hired two Dispatchers/Schedulers, one Senior Accounting Technician, one Mechanic, and one Vehicle Service Worker.
- CEO Aldridge mentioned that April 29th will mark his one-year anniversary. METRO is an awesome organization and benefits all of us in Santa Cruz County and it's all due to the employees that we have here who are amazing and represent us well every single day.

Discussion followed on:

- Metering lights for on-ramps where the bus-on-shoulders lanes exist
- Ribbon cutting ceremony for completion of bus-on-shoulder
- Will there be a service increase when the hydrogen buses are placed into service?
- Tabling events at Cabrillo College
- Who will be exempted from the Cabrillo transit fee if passed?
- How much money has been diverted from METRO over recent years and how are METRO representatives on the SCCRTC voting on these diversions?
- Update on ballot measure and which election cycle will be used
- Creation of transit classes at Cabrillo College with a possible apprenticeship program

METRO staff and Director Koenig (Commissioner for SCCRTC issues) addressed the concerns raised.

- Ben Finke, Bus Operator, commented that the student response has been positive to METRO's tabling efforts. He thanked all the students who appreciate METRO's service.
- Nico, UCSC student, appreciates the work that Ex-Officio Director Northcutt is doing at Cabrillo. It is amazing to hear the amount of support those students are getting but felt disheartened that UCSC is not getting the same treatment and expressed concern over the disparity.

Hearing nothing further, Board Chair Downing moved to the next agenda item.

14 ANNOUNCEMENT OF NEXT MEETING

Board Chair Downing announced the next regular Board meeting will be held on Friday, May 16, 2025 at 9:00 AM at the Admin Office, 110 Vernon Street, Santa Cruz, CA.

15 ADJOURNMENT

Board Chair Downing adjourned the meeting at 11:04 AM.

Respectfully Submitted,

Donna Bauer
Sr. Executive Assistant

Attachment

From: [REDACTED]
To: [boardinquiries](mailto:boardinquiries@watsonville.gov); [Shebreh Kalantari-Johnson](mailto:Shebreh.Kalantari-Johnson@watsonville.gov); vanessa.quiroz@watsonville.gov; monica.martinez@santacruzcountyca.gov; Fabian@communitylifeservices.org; manu.koenig@santacruzcounty.us; snewsome@santacruzca.gov; [Jimmy Dutra](mailto:Jimmy.Dutra@ci.capitola.ca.us); MOrbach@ci.capitola.ca.us; rebeccadowning@sccs.net; dlind@scottsvally.gov; [Michael Rotkin](mailto:Michael.Rotkin@alnorthc@cabrillo.edu); alnorthc@cabrillo.edu; ereiskin@ucsc.edu
Subject: Corrections to Mike Rotkin's Lookout Commentary Inbox
Date: Friday, April 18, 2025 12:27:59 PM

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To the Board of Directors of Santa Cruz Metropolitan Transit District (Santa Cruz METRO),

This message provides a detailed, line-by-line analysis and correction of Mike Rotkin's April 12, 2025 commentary in *Lookout Santa Cruz*, which discusses the future of the rail corridor and trail in Santa Cruz County. The goal is to provide METRO board members with factual clarity, address misleading or incomplete claims, and promote a more informed public conversation around a major infrastructure decision that could affect METRO's operations, funding, and long-term planning.

As transportation leaders and stewards of taxpayer resources, the METRO board deserves accurate, complete, and transparent information — especially when evaluating corridor options such as **railbanking**, which offers immediate public benefit, preserves future transit options, and aligns with fiscally responsible planning.

Below is Mike Rotkin's original commentary, annotated with factual corrections and clarifications intended to support your board's understanding and potential role in shaping or responding to corridor outcomes.

Mike Rotkin's Lookout Commentary with **corrections inserted inline**.

What is the Regional Transportation Commission's plan for the rail and trail?

Mike Rotkin · Lookout Santa Cruz · April 12, 2025

A recent Regional Transportation Commission (RTC) study projected a cost of just under \$1 billion to bring the existing bridges and culverts on the rail-trail corridor up to required freight train standards. This high price has caused some to question — not for the first time — if the dream of a zero-emission train through Santa Cruz County is feasible.

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I say it is — and we have to try.

Partial Truth: The \$1 billion is **just** for bridges, with no stations, no vehicles, no new tracks, no repaired crossings, no quiet zones, no daily operations. The full cost of the train project will likely be in the \$4–5 billion range. There is no current plan for funding anything like that scale.

Many of those questioning the funding make a critical mistake. They assume the RTC wants to get the funding for the train all or mostly from local taxes or existing local government funds. It doesn't. Even more confusing, some responding to the \$1 billion figure act as if this is money we somehow already have — money that will be diverted from other needed transportation or social projects. That is false, too.

Partial Truth: There is **no committed funding**. Even if the federal government covers 80%, the local share would be at least one billion dollars. In the case of the SMART train in Sonoma/Marin, grants only covered 60% of the total cost. These are **grants**, and local governments have to apply, compete, and often front part of the money. **The public will only approve so many taxes, so there IS a trade-off** between this project and others like roads, an upcoming METRO sales tax, housing, and other infrastructure.

I think most of us can agree our county will need an alternative to Highway 1 and Soquel Avenue for our future population. We need it now, of course, but the problem will only get worse as our population increases.

Misleading: The RTC's own studies show **no meaningful reduction in congestion** from rail. Projected ridership is low, and train service would **add delays** at 30+ street crossings. Also, the population of Santa Cruz County has NOT been increasing.

We have to accept that transportation solutions are expensive and that \$1 billion for the bridges and culverts plus the addition of billions necessary for stations, sidings and other capital costs are to be expected if we ever plan to address our transportation crisis.

Misleading: Spending billions on a project with minimal impact is **not responsible planning**. Railbanking allows the corridor to be used now while preserving it for

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potential future transit at lower cost.

A bike and pedestrian path through our county is a positive, valuable public amenity, but it is not a transportation solution. It is recreational. Very few people are going to ride a bike from Watsonville to Santa Cruz for work.

False: The trail is funded by the **Active Transportation Program**, explicitly intended for commuting and school access. Caltrans and the RTC have described the trail as **transportation infrastructure**, not merely recreational. The advent of e-bikes makes active transportation more realistic. All commutes in Santa Cruz County are not from Watsonville to Santa Cruz. There are many from Watsonville to Aptos, or Santa Cruz to Capitola, more in the 7 - 12 mile range, which are totally possible (and healthier) on an e-bike. **The 2016 Nelson Nygaard study showed enormous active transportation benefits of a continuous trail on the rail corridor.**

So the question for the RTC is what is the best solution for funding a public transit alternative on the corridor that it purchased in 2012 for the transportation needs of the next 100 years of Santa Cruz County residents?

This is a fair question, but it ignores that **railbanking is the most flexible, cost-effective way** to preserve the corridor *and* use it now.

I firmly believe we have to keep what we have and that we can't do anything that would put the future use of the corridor at risk. I have no doubt that if we tear out the existing tracks — as some suggest we do — and lay down a recreational bike and pedestrian path, we will never get the right of way back for a critically necessary public transit use. That's an informed view based on my decades in public office.

False and misleading: This is **classic railbanking disinformation**.

Railbanking **preserves the right-of-way for future rail use**, including public transit. It does not eliminate that possibility. **The federal government holds the corridor in trust** and has restored rail service on railbanked lines before. To continue to refer to active transportation as “recreational” is simply political jargon meant to position a train as the only commuting solution (it is not).

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So the RTC strategy is to plan our public transit alternative on the corridor based on the freight right of way or easement that was created in the late 1800s. We still don't know if the RTC owns the entire right of way on the corridor. It owns part of it, but other parts almost certainly are only an easement that would revert to the property owners on each side of the track if the RTC abandoned freight service.

Misleading: This is **precisely why railbanking is needed** — to prevent reversion. Without railbanking, property owners could sue and fragment the corridor. Railbanking **prevents this** by converting the use to trail while preserving federal protection. **Railbanking also protects the RTC, county and local cities from financial loss from property owner lawsuits.** This is a huge advantage of railbanking and WHY it was created in the first place.

If the RTC loses the right of way, it loses it not only for the public transportation project but for the pedestrian and bike path as well. We would have an option to apply to the federal government for adverse abandonment of the freight line. If this were successful, the federal government — and not the local RTC — would pay for the court cases with owners who want to claim land on each side of the track.

Misleading and fear-based: *Adverse abandonment* is a worst-case scenario. **Railbanking is the legal and practical alternative** that avoids reversion *and* lawsuits. Most successful trail projects in the U.S. rely on railbanking to avoid this very issue.

How likely this is to be successful is a serious question. The federal government does not like to strand existing or even possible freight service by abandoning part of a line, and Roaring Camp Railroad is asserting that it has an interest in freight on the line in the future. Even if the RTC achieves adverse abandonment, it would take years in court before we would finally resolve the ownership issues necessary to proceed with construction of either the public transit project or the pedestrian and bike path.

Misleading: The RTC can apply for **voluntary railbanking**, not adverse abandonment. Rotkin never explains this distinction, even though **railbanking is far more common and avoids litigation.** Even with adverse abandonment,

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the **process should only take 6 - 12 months** based on previous cases decided by the Surface Transportation Board.

Let's also look at the reverse scenario. If the RTC were to abandon the freight right of way, it would need to pay back the more than \$11 million in grants the state chipped in to buy the right of way in 2012.

No evidence: There is **no published requirement** that railbanking would require repayment. **Dozens of railbanked corridors have received federal and state support.** Rotkin's argument is specious since he worries about paying back \$11 million while proposing to spend **billions**. It appears that his main worry is the shame associated with not delivering what everyone wants—a trail—while already wasting 13 years and tens of millions of dollars on irrelevant studies and unnecessary trail infrastructure.

The RTC has also spent millions and about two years to develop the plan and do required environmental work on the current pedestrian and bike path alongside the tracks. All work would have to start from scratch if the RTC were to tear out the tracks and build a bike and pedestrian path. The RTC would also have to return the millions in grants it got for the planning and environmental work.

False and misleading on multiple levels:

1. **Much of the environmental and engineering work is transferable.**
Environmental documents like EIRs or EAs can often be **supplemented or amended**. Many of the studies — such as biological resources, geotechnical surveys, and hydrology — are applicable regardless of whether the trail is alongside or on top of the rail bed. Railbanking projects across the U.S. have routinely **reused or updated existing work**, not started over.
2. **There is no evidence that all grants must be returned.**
Rotkin provides no citation or evidence for this claim. In practice, grantors (like Caltrans or the CTC) often **work with agencies to adjust scope**. If the trail alignment shifts but remains within the corridor and the project goals remain consistent, funders may **approve a change order or amendment**, not demand full repayment. This happens **frequently** in state-funded transportation projects.

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3. **Railbanking does not “tear out” the corridor.**

This framing wrongly implies destruction or loss of public asset value. In fact, railbanking **preserves the corridor for future rail**, maintains federal protection, and **activates it now** for community use. That outcome — a safe, accessible, continuous trail — is **exactly what the grants were intended to support**.

Then, the RTC would need to start new environmental work. And don't assume that there are not serious environmental issues in tearing out and building on tracks that have lain dormant for over 150 years, possibly dropping toxic chemicals over and beneath the tracks.

Fearmongering: Most railbanked trails undergo routine remediation. This is **not unusual** and is often required regardless of rail presence. Trails like the Monterey Bay Coastal Trail and hundreds nationwide faced the same. And frankly, the RTC **SHOULD** be concerned with the continued toxic leaching into our community. At least a trail could be used to cap the issue.

The state likes the RTC's “multi-modal” approach of mixing transportation modes and has been generous with grants, not just for planning the train, but for the bike and pedestrian path, too. The state has given tens of millions of dollars toward trail planning and construction because it likes our rail and trail project. We would have to return those grants if we abandon our current approach.

Speculative and unsubstantiated: There is **no clear evidence** that railbanking or adjusting project plans would require returning all grant money. Agencies **routinely revise projects** while maintaining funding eligibility.

Will the rail trail eventually require a local tax? Probably. But that is quite a ways off in the future.

Misleading: The **massive cost of the rail component** will *definitely* require local tax support, bond measures, or debt financing. Planning for billions without transparent funding is fiscally irresponsible.

For now, all costs for rail planning are coming out of grants or the 8% bucket in 2016's Measure D that the voters gave to the RTC for the rail project.

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True — but the RTC **chose** to spend these funds on rail plans rather than completing the trail, which was voters' more immediate priority.

Let's imagine the alternative. It would still be expensive and there would be no guarantee the trail would get built any faster than is happening now.

False: Railbanking allows **direct trail construction** without rail constraints. Many delays are due to **navigating rail-with-trail design**, which is complex and has proved to be exorbitantly expensive.

And, let's say the current train plan becomes too prohibitive. We might then look at a cheaper public transit system like personal rapid transit, which are small automated vehicles that carry small numbers of people.

Speculative distraction. Railbanking keeps options open. PRT or bus rapid transit could be **planned and implemented far faster** than traditional commuter rail.

That would cost less, but we would also have to abandon our current planned source of state and federal funding, which hinges on a future for rail.

Misleading: There are many sources of funding for trail and transit projects that do **not require rail**. Local agencies can pivot and reapply for updated projects — as others have done successfully.

So far, even with all the craziness of the Trump administration, there is no indication the feds or the state are weakening commitment to a future for rail. The Trump administration does not like the California High Speed Rail System, but it appears to support funding other rail initiatives around the country.

Irrelevant: National rail policy shifts constantly. The **local viability** of this project, not national trends, is what matters. Santa Cruz County needs a **realistic** and locally supported path forward. If Commissioner Rotkin wants to talk about national policy, it seems very unlikely that the Trump Administration would look favorably on this project, since it is already investigating the California High Speed Rail project (and threatening clawbacks on the federal grants), as well as cancelled a high speed

Attachment

rail project this week in Texas. The Santa Cruz County rail plan is a miniature version of the California High Speed Rail project.

And, let's also return to local voters. In 2022, three-quarters of voters in every supervisorial voted in support of both building a bike and pedestrian path and planning a public transportation project down the RTC's corridor. No doubt, it is not a perfect expression of everyone's desires, but it does offer clear direction for what our citizens want in a rail trail project.

Misleading interpretation of the vote:

1. **The 2022 vote (Measure D) was not a rail referendum.**

Voters were **not asked** whether they wanted a train. They were asked to choose between two trail-building approaches:

- **Yes on D** supported railbanking and trail-only.
- **No on D** supported continuing planning for rail-with-trail.

2. The result was a rejection of the railbanking plan — but **not a mandate for rail**, nor a binding commitment. It reflected **confusion, strong negative and misleading messaging by FORT**, and many voters believing they were voting to “keep the trail.”

3. **Capitola voters passed Measure L**, which became Capitola CMC §§ 8.72.010, 8.72.030 which **legally prohibits** moving the trail off the corridor — the very detour being proposed now. That was a **clear and specific vote**, unlike Measure D.

4. Let's assume you agree with Rotkin's interpretation of the vote. Unfortunately, **voters are NOT getting a trail as they were led to believe.** The trail diverts onto city streets, through Capitola Village, onto Park Ave, along San Andreas Rd and Beach St, and most likely along Sumner Rd in Aptos. It has gone from a safe, continuous trail design in the rail corridor (what was promised), to painted stripes on streets with a high level of danger and likely accidents and fatalities for cyclists and pedestrians. **It seems like public servants should be trying to avoid serious injuries and deaths at all costs, and the current plan does just the opposite.**

Final Summary

Attachment

Mike Rotkin's article is filled with omissions, misrepresentations, and rhetorical framing that obscure rather than clarify the issues. Most notably, **it never once acknowledges railbanking** — a federally authorized tool designed to preserve transportation corridors for future rail use while enabling immediate trail construction.

For a transit district like Santa Cruz METRO — tasked with delivering practical, affordable, and accessible service to county residents — it is vital to consider the full picture. The current rail proposal remains decades away from viability, lacks committed funding, and would require enormous local investment with minimal ridership projections. Meanwhile, METRO faces more immediate and achievable opportunities to improve mobility via expanded bus and rapid transit services — options that could integrate with a trail-based corridor more readily than with heavy rail.

Railbanking does not close the door to future rail; it holds that door open, legally and physically, while allowing near-term community benefit. It also protects the corridor from fragmentation, property lawsuits, and abandonment risk — all while preserving the possibility of future high-capacity transit, including bus rapid transit (BRT), personal rapid transit (PRT), or light rail alternatives, should those become viable.

Santa Cruz County needs realistic, cost-effective transportation solutions. The public deserves transparent leadership grounded in facts and fiscal responsibility — not nostalgia or speculative promises.

As a resident of unincorporated Santa Cruz County, I'm frustrated that Mike Rotkin is supposed to represent our area on the METRO Board. In practice, however, he seems to prioritize the interests of the rail lobby and the City of Santa Cruz—where he lives—rather than the needs of the community he was appointed to serve.

Thank you for your continued service to the community. I urge you to examine these facts, speak candidly about the challenges, and help restore public trust through thoughtful, evidence-based decision-making.

Respectfully,
Jack Brown
Aptos, CA

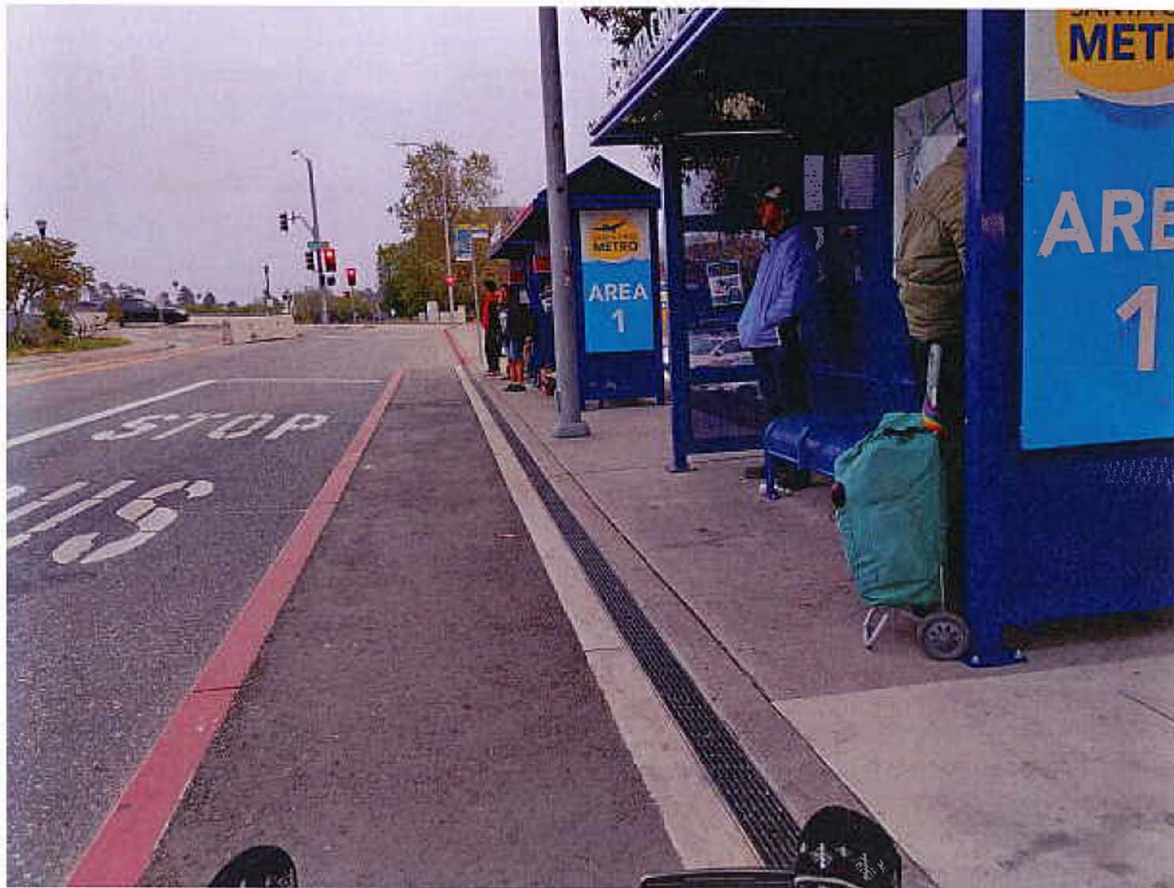
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