

Gautho, Julia

From: Clark Cochran <clark.e.cochran@gmail.com>
Sent: Saturday, March 8, 2025 9:42 PM
To: City Council
Subject: Capitola Council Letter About RTC Plans

Dear Capitola Mayor and City Council,

The RTC presentation at New Brighton School was a disappointment. I would have preferred they first make a presentation about their plans and the route options they are proposing rather than only having tables covered with detailed drawings for review and discussion with RTC representatives. I believe many attendees came away confused.

It became clear to me at this meeting that the RTC is in this for the (very) long haul as they are planning that it will take at least a new federal administration and then a decade or more to have a viable rail and trail. Potentially and probably much longer for rail. Further, it was also made clear to me the funding will come for the rail, so there will be no trail without rail. The RTC has both short term and long term aka “ultimate” plans. The City of Capitola must differentiate between these two and decide how best to achieve both.

The RTC continues to push their agenda. The citizens and council of Capitola must remain vigilant to track their changing options and plans that otherwise might go unnoticed like including two rail lines along Cliff Drive to allow trains to pass one another.

So as a summary before going into detail, for Section 11B spanning Soquel Creek, the trestle can be reinforced and used as a trail until the ultimate solution is determined and approved. This should be considered a short term solution using available funds. Next, the part of Section 10 starting at Opal can be run on the existing rail corridor. Below are details for both statements.

Spanning Soquel Creek has never been planned or funded by the RTC. This section is a future ultimate goal. Hence their short term detour through the village was proposed. Now at the March 4th RTC meeting they proposed a new trail only bridge to be constructed directly adjacent to the trestle on the ocean side. This should be considered as a potential long term solution but since no real architectural design has been presented to see if it would be acceptable to Capitola, no cost has been mentioned, and the trestle itself is a huge TBD, a decision approving this option should wait for further details. Instead, I suggest a short term solution using a portion of the currently allotted \$67.6M funding for Sections 10 and 11 to stabilize the trestle for trail use. This work was stated as costing \$7.5M in 2021 dollars (per SCCRTC FAQ dated October 2023) and an RTC member told me at the meeting this would likely cost \$10+M now. A new deck trail walkway would keep the rails so no railbanking issues would be affected. If necessary, have riders walk their bikes across. Ultimately the trestle

may need to be torn down and replaced for the rail but, until such time in the distant future this decision is made, let's at least have a trail.

The part of Section 10 from Opal to Live Oak has two bad but doable long term proposal options. The first is detouring onto Jade and Brommer Streets and then through Jade Street Park next to Opal Cliffs School and then onto 47th. Traffic and all on street parking would be greatly impacted, not to mention this would violate the Capitola Municipal Code thus opening a potential citizens lawsuit. The second option uses Nova Drive on the other side of the tracks and zigzags on other quiet streets located in unincorporated Santa Cruz County except for a one block detour along very busy 41st in Capitola. This detour option just kicks the can into Santa Cruz County's court. It's not an ultimate solution. The ultimate solution is to use the existing rail corridor. Now the RTC states there is insufficient right of way width to use it. Mobile homes are too close. If needed, they should think about an easement from the back yards of houses fronting Nova in the County. BUT, and this is a big but, there is sufficient width available without these measures.

Specifically, the RTC shows a 36' wide rail trail width is needed. 22' for rail (11' each side of the rail centerline), plus 12' for the trail, and an additional 2' for fencing and walls. HOWEVER, the California PUC General Order 26-D "Regulation Governing Clearances on Railroads and Street Railroads with Reference to Side and Overhead Structures, Parallel Tracks, Crossings of Public Roads, Highways and Streets" (docs.cpuc.ca.gov) Section 3.2 states that minimum side clearances from the centerline of standard gage industrial railroads for all structures above the top of the rail shall be 8'-6". Further, in Section 9.2 of the same document it states that for railroad tracks that are not for freight (I would say that includes future RTC light rail passenger trains) the minimum side clearance is 30" from the widest point on the equipment being operated. This means a 29' wide easement is needed plus the width for walls and/or fences as needed.

BUT again, there is a big but. The above rail clearance is also stated in the RTC Rail Transit Feasibility Study Final Report (sccrtc.org) on page 18 and in note 16, in Section 1.5.1.2 "Right of Way Width". BUT it further states, "The absolute minimum width required for both a trail and single track rail in tangent (straight) sections of the right-of-way is 25 feet". Note 16 further states, "Transportation design standards require multi-use bi-directional trails to be a minimum of 8 feet wide and require a minimum of 17 feet for train operations (8'-6" from the centerline of the tracks)." This means at constricted areas, such as the section along the mobile home park in question and potentially other locations along the rail line, the minimum width needed would be 27' (17' + 8' + 2' maximum added for walls and fences – less if the fences are chain link or similar narrow width). I recently walked the trail and measured the width at the mobile home section. The minimum width was 29'-6" with 12' or a bit more on each side of the rails themselves.

Unless there are other government documents superseding these and the RTC is disregarding its own Final Report, why is the RTC now requiring a 36' width? If narrower is good enough for the State of California, why not the RTC?

Sincerely,

Clark Cochran

Jewel Box resident