



Capitola Trestle on the Santa Cruz Branch Rail Line

Background

The Santa Cruz Regional Transportation Commission (RTC) owns the Santa Cruz Branch Rail Line. The rail line is a freight rail line in need of structural repairs on several bridges, including the Capitola Trestle. The RTC, in partnership with local jurisdictions, is pursuing development of a dedicated bicycle and pedestrian facility, referred to as the Coastal Rail Trail, within the rail right-of-way. The RTC is also pursuing development of passenger rail within the rail right-of-way as part of the Zero Emission Passenger Rail and Trail project.

The Capitola Trestle complex is comprised of 5 individual, but connected, bridges, each made of different materials. The Capitola Trestle provides an elevated rail crossing of Soquel Creek, Wharf Road, Riverview Avenue, and Capitola Avenue. Repairs to the Capitola Trestle complex are needed before the bridge is viable for freight or passenger service.

FAQS

Can a bicycle and pedestrian bridge be attached to the existing Capitola Trestle to provide bicycles and pedestrians access across Soquel Creek within the rail line right-of-way?

A bicycle and pedestrian bridge cannot be attached to the existing Capitola Trestle. The Capitola Trestle complex is made up of 5 bridges including two concrete spans, two multi-span open deck timber trestles, and an open deck wrought iron bridge that spans Soquel Creek. The wrought iron bridge and timber trestles do not have a location suitable to connect a cantilevered bicycle and pedestrian bridge and do not have adequate structural capacity to support the added weight. Therefore, a bicycle and pedestrian bridge, like the one cantilevered from the San Lorenzo River Trestle, is not feasible on the Capitola Trestle complex.

Can a separate bicycle and pedestrian bridge be constructed across Soquel Creek within the rail line right-of-way?

The rail right-of-way in the area of the Capitola Trestle complex is constrained. Constructing a stand-alone bicycle and pedestrian bridge next to the existing Capitola Trestle and within the rail right-of-way may not be feasible and would require significant engineering. Due to this space constraint, the engineering challenges of constructing a bridge spanning Soquel Creek, and the cost of constructing a new bridge (trail or rail bridge) over Soquel Creek, staff is recommending that a bicycle and pedestrian trail bridge be combined with replacement of a

new Capitola Trestle complex. The Zero Emission Passenger Rail and Trail Project Concept Report will evaluate the feasibility and cost of a combined rail and trail bridge to replace the Capitola Trestle complex. To date, no cost estimate has been developed for a new combined rail and trail bridge to replace the current Capitola Trestle complex.

Can the Capitola Trestle bicycle and pedestrian trail be constructed on the existing Capitola Trestle?

The 2021 Capitola Railroad Bridge Repurposing Conceptual Study analyzed the feasibility of converting the Capitola Trestle from a rail bridge to a bicycle and pedestrian trail bridge. The Study determined that, from a constructability and engineering standpoint, the Capitola Trestle could be repurposed into a bicycle and pedestrian bridge if required structural repairs are completed, including the replacement of the wrought iron bearings, all the timber bracing, and 30-40% of the timber piles. After structural repairs are completed, the existing rails, decking, and ballast could be removed and replaced with a steel and fiber reinforced polymer deck system similar to that used on the San Lorenzo trail bridge. The study estimated that repair and repurposing of the bridge would cost approximately \$7 million in 2021 dollars.

What are the regulatory requirements to allow the repurposing of the Capitola Trestle to a bicycle and pedestrian bridge?

In order to be able to repurpose the Capitola Trestle to a bicycle and pedestrian bridge, the rail line would

either need to go through the regulatory process administered by the federal Surface Transportation Board (STB) to be abandoned or railbanked. STB regulations designate a common carrier who has the obligation to provide freight rail service to potential customers. To remove the obligation, a freight railroad would need to apply to the STB for abandonment based on the lack of freight service and the high cost of repairs. Abandonment is not desired by the RTC since any right-of-way owned by easement and not fee title would revert to the underlying property owners. Railbanking is a method by which freight rail lines proposed for abandonment can be preserved for future freight rail use through interim conversion to trail use and other uses. If railbanked, the rail and ties could be removed, and the right-of-way would be preserved for potential re-activation of freight and other potential rail service.

How can the Santa Cruz Branch Rail Line be railbanked to allow for repurposing of the Capitola Trestle to a bicycle and pedestrian bridge?

To abandon and railbank the Santa Cruz Branch Rail Line, the freight operator would need to file for direct abandonment with the Surface Transportation Board (STB) or an interested party could file for adverse abandonment. The RTC would need to both file a petition with the STB to enter into railbanking negotiations, and subsequently enter into a railbank agreement with the freight operator. The RTC would need to assume financial liability for preserving the rail line. Railbanking by means of a direct abandonment proceeding can be streamlined when there is no opposition. Another freight operator can make an Offer of Financial Assistance (OFA) to maintain the line and assume the legal obligation to provide freight service. A freight rail customer or the owner of a potential stranded line would have grounds to object to abandonment and railbanking. The STB will not refuse to issue a railbanking order based on third-party objections about the desirability or appropriateness of the proposed use. The best path to railbanking is to have the mutual support of all affected parties, including the freight operator, affected freight customers, and owners of potential stranded lines.

What other steps are required to develop an interim trail on the Capitola Trestle?

In addition to railbanking, several steps need to occur to develop an interim trail on the Capitola Trestle, including environmental review, design, permitting and securing funding. The Coastal Rail Trail Segment

10 & 11 Project environmental review under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) will include evaluation of the Ultimate Trail Configuration (Trail next to Rail Line) and an optional Interim Trail (Trail on the Rail Line) and both are part of the Proposed Project. In addition, the Ultimate Trail Configuration includes a design option that would provide environmental clearance under CEQA for an Interim Trail on the Capitola Trestle as part of the Ultimate Trail Configuration to maximize flexibility. Therefore, an interim trail project on the Capitola Trestle will be environmentally cleared under CEQA as part of the proposed Coastal Rail Trail Segment 10 & 11 environmental review, should the County of Santa Cruz certify the Segment 10 & 11 Final Environmental Impact Report. Once the interim trail is environmentally cleared, the project could enter the project design phase, should funding be available.

Is there funding for construction of an interim trail on the Capitola Trestle?

There is not approved funding for repurposing the Capitola Trestle for an interim trail. The County of Santa Cruz, in coordination with the RTC and City of Capitola, are developing the Coastal Rail Trail Segments 10 & 11 project, which extends from 17th Avenue to State Park Drive in the unincorporated area of the County of Santa Cruz. A combination of local, state and federal funding is dedicated to construction of Segment 10 & 11 for the Ultimate Trail Configuration (Trail next to Rail Line). The current funded project does not include funding for development of a trail across the Capitola Trestle.

What does the Coastal Rail Trail Segment 10 & 11 funded project include for Capitola Village?

The Coastal Rail Trail Segments 10 & 11 project includes re-striping the existing bike lanes in Capitola Village and enhancing the Class II bike lanes with green thermoplastic striping, and enhancing existing sharrows on Class III roadways with green paint. The project also includes adding signage directing bicyclists and pedestrians through the Village to the Coastal Rail Trail. In addition, a roughly 350-foot-long section of Cliff Drive from the end of the trail to the start of the Cliff Drive sidewalk will be restriped to create a delineated pedestrian walkway and Class II bike lane on the coastal side of the roadway where bicyclists and pedestrians currently have to share the bike lane.