

MONTEREY COUNTY



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January 26, 2023

Santa Cruz County Regional Transportation Commission 1101
Pacific Ave, Ste 250
Santa Cruz, CA 95060
Attn: Executive Director Guy Preston

RE: Support for Zero Emission (ZE) Rail Transit & Trail Project

Dear Director Preston,

The County of Monterey is pleased to share our strong support for the **Zero Emission (ZE) Rail Transit & Trail Project**, and we urge state and federal agencies to provide funding for this important project.

The ZE Rail Transit & Trail Project proposes new high-capacity rail transit service along 22 miles of the Santa Cruz Branch Rail Line, from the City of Santa Cruz in the north to the Union Pacific Coast Route just south of the Watsonville city limits in Pajaro, Monterey County. The project also includes 12 miles of the Coastal Rail Trail, a parallel paved bicycle and pedestrian trail within the rail right-of-way.

Santa Cruz County suffers from severe congestion, long and unreliable transit travel times, inequitable land use patterns, and limited transit connectivity to the rest of the Monterey Bay Area and the San Francisco Bay Area. New rail service will utilize the publicly-owned Santa Cruz Branch Rail right-of-way to provide all-day service connecting the most populated areas of Santa Cruz County to the greater region. In addition to increasing transit options within Santa Cruz County, at the Pajaro Junction, the Project will provide a new intercity transportation option for riders traveling to and from the Central Coast, San Francisco Bay Area, and the Central Valley, as well as a connection to High-Speed Rail at Gilroy. Santa Cruz County residents and visitors will also have improved transit access to Silicon Valley's central rail hub, Diridon Station, via the Highway 17 Express Amtrak connector service, which runs directly from downtown Santa Cruz.

The dedicated right-of-way will bypass congested roadways and re-connect cities and town centers. This service will increase mobility for low-income and historically disadvantaged priority populations, providing improved access to employment and educational opportunities in the Monterey Bay Area. Furthermore, this new rail service will also complement Santa Cruz Metropolitan Transit District's ongoing efforts to increase network frequency and reliability.

Once complete, the 32-mile Coastal Rail Trail will provide a nearly entirely off-street transportation facility connecting riders to rail stations. The rail and trail combine to provide a safe, sustainable, healthy, reliable, affordable, and enjoyable alternative to driving for Santa Cruz County residents and visitors. The corridor serves numerous schools, central business districts, affordable housing projects, parks, and beaches.

Passenger rail is an essential component of America's transportation system and supports economic development, connects rural communities to urban job centers, and helps reduce roadway congestion. This project closely aligns with local, regional, state, and federal transportation objectives and will improve safety, increase mobility, reduce congestion, and enhance the quality of life for residents, students, and visitors. We are pleased to support this work and thank you for considering this critical project.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Luis Alejo".

Luis Alejo, Chair
Monterey County Board of Supervisors