

Memorandum

To: CHAIR AND COMMISSIONERS

Date: November 18, 2009

From: BIMLA G. RHINEHART
Executive Director

File: Book Item 2.2c (16)
Action

Ref: Negative Declaration for the Santa Cruz Branch Rail Line Acquisition Project (Resolution E-09-105)

ISSUE: Should the Commission, as a Responsible Agency, accept the Negative Declaration (ND) for the Santa Cruz Branch Rail Line Acquisition Project (project) in Santa Cruz County and approve the project for future consideration of funding?

RECOMMENDATION: Staff recommends that the Commission accept the ND and approve the project for future consideration of funding.

BACKGROUND: The project will acquire the Santa Cruz Branch Rail Line, a 31-mile railroad right of way and conduct all of the studies and negotiations associated with the purchase. The purchase includes the right of way, track, signal system, yard facilities, structures (including bridges), and all appurtenant facilities. The project also includes a variety of improvements as a condition of purchase and needed to ensure continued operation of existing freight and recreational rail service and to improve portions of the rail line to at least Class I. The improvements include, but are not limited to, drainage improvements, joint bar replacement, track replacement, structure improvements, grade crossing improvements, and safety improvements.

Santa Cruz County Regional Transportation Commission (SCCRTC), as the CEQA lead agency for the project, approved the ND in April 2002. The ND was prepared to determine the environmental impacts resulting from the proposed acquisition of the Santa Cruz Branch rail line. The ND was prepared to provide full public disclosure, however, this is not a “project” as defined by CEQA. The project includes rehabilitation and improvement of the structures and track of the Santa Cruz Branch Rail Line as negotiated with the project owner and made part of the acquisition project. Through the environmental analysis, SCCRTC determined that the proposed project could not have a significant effect on the environment and no impacts were required to be mitigated.

On November 12, 2009, the SCCRTC provided written confirmation that the environmental document remains legally sufficient as there are no project changes or changes in circumstances under which the project is being undertaken, and no new information that would require additional environmental review. In addition, SCCRTC confirmed that the project that is cleared in the environmental document is consistent with the project programmed by the Commission.

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The project is estimated to cost \$23,500,000 and is anticipated to be funded with Proposition 116 (\$11,000,000), STIP (\$10,000,000), Federal (\$1,500,000) and Local (\$1,000,000) funds. Acquisition of the rail line is expected to occur in February 2010 and construction is expected to begin in May 2010.

Attachments

- Resolution E-09-105
- Project Location

CALIFORNIA TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION

Resolution for Future Consideration of Funding 05-Santa Cruz Resolution E-09-105

- 1.1 **WHEREAS**, the Santa Cruz County Regional Transportation Commission (SCCRTC) has completed a Negative Declaration pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) and the CEQA Guidelines for the following project:
- Santa Cruz Branch Rail Line Acquisition
- 1.2 **WHEREAS**, the SCCRTC has certified that the Negative Declaration has been completed pursuant to CEQA and the State CEQA Guidelines for its implementation; and
- 1.3 **WHEREAS**, the project will acquire the Santa Cruz Branch Rail Line, including right of way, track, signal system, yard facilities, structures, and all appurtenant facilities; and
- 1.4 **WHEREAS**, the California Transportation Commission, as a Responsible Agency, has considered the information contained in the Negative Declaration; and
- 1.5 **WHEREAS**, the SCCRTC found that there are no significant or potentially significant impacts that require mitigation measures to be reduced to a less than significant level; and
- 1.6 **WHEREAS**, the SCCRTC approved the Negative Declaration.
- 2.1 **NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED** that the California Transportation Commission does hereby accept the Negative Declaration and approve the above referenced project to allow for future consideration of funding.

Agency Name – Santa Cruz County Regional Transportation Commission (SCRTC)
Project Title – Santa Cruz Branch Rail Line Acquisition: Corridor Preservation with Improvements

- c) Project Maps. Provide 8-1/2"x11" project site map showing simplified cross street detail and another area map showing city and county boundaries.

