

What the RTC Hoped You'd Never Notice

By Cami Corvin

When the Regional Transportation Commission (RTC) purchased the Santa Cruz Branch Line in 2012, they did not perform a full boundary survey. This was a critical failure. Only years later, around 2023, did the RTC finally complete a survey and begin to fully understand how encroachments, easements, and physical constraints affected the corridor.

By then, the damage was done.

For over a decade, the RTC promoted a vision of the "ultimate trail" running beside active rail, assuring the public that this was feasible. That vision became the basis for ballot measures like Measure D (2016) and Measure L in Capitola (2018). Yet all of those measures were built on incomplete information. Had the RTC surveyed the corridor when they acquired it, the public debate might have been radically different.

The problem is not just oversight. It's about accountability.

RTC staff and commissioners have made sweeping promises without the facts to back them. And rather than acknowledging the corridor's serious limitations, they have doubled down, spending millions on studies and promoting plans that don't align with reality. These include backdoor negotiations, selective release of information, and a consistent pattern of avoiding inconvenient truths.

Documents obtained through Public Records Act (PRA) requests are starting to reveal what's really been going on: quiet internal discussions about impossible trail widths, legal complications from easements, and mounting project costs. Meanwhile, the public narrative continues unchanged, as if the corridor is a blank slate.

Even today, RTC leaders refuse to confront the obvious: that years of misleading promises have led to unrealistic expectations and deep public division. Instead of owning up to their mistakes, they let community groups battle it out while sitting silently on the sidelines.

This is not just bad planning. It's bad governance.

The public deserves the truth—and a transportation commission that works with facts, not fantasy.

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