

From: [MICHAEL SALERNO](#)
To: California_Transportation_Commission@CATC
Cc: Ruggiero_Kacey@CATC; Taylor_Tanisha@CATC
Subject: KFOW Comments: Approval of Credit for the Monterey Branch Line Property Purchased with Proposition 116 Funds, Resolution G-24-78 [CTC Meeting: December 5-6, 2024]
Date: Wednesday, December 4, 2024 7:47:11 PM
Attachments: [image.png](#)

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CTC Meeting: December 5-6, 2024

To: CHAIR AND COMMISSIONERS

From: Keep Fort Ord Wild

RE: Approval of Credit for the Monterey Branch Line Property Purchased with Proposition 116 Funds, Resolution G-24-78

Dear Chair and Commissioners,

I write on behalf of Keep Fort Ord Wild (KFOW). KFOW members live in the City of Marina and communities adjacent to the Monterey Branch Line. The Monterey Branch Line crosses Fort Ord Dunes State Park where KFOW members regularly go for recreational activities such as cycling, running, walking and wildlife viewing.

KFOW objects to the placement of Resolution G-24-78 on the consent agenda.

Proposition 116 was approved by CA voters for expansion of rail transportation and is of the utmost importance statewide. This item should not be buried on the consent agenda. KFOW requests the item be pulled from the consent agenda for full and proper discussion by the Commission.

KFOW provides the following comments on *Approval of Credit for the Monterey Branch Line Property Purchased with Proposition 116 Funds, Resolution G-24-78*:

- The Monterey Branch Line was purchased by TAMC with Proposition 116 funds that set guidelines as to how the line is to be used. Proposition 116 was a State Proposition approved by voters specifically for expansion of rail service. Ultimately, the Monterey Branch Line can only be used for rail because rail bond funds were used to purchase the line. The line cannot be converted to a busway and the tracks cannot be destroyed or covered. The Commission does not have the authority to unwind a voter approved State proposition nor should it seek to.
- TAMC has far exceeded its statutory authority granted by the CA State Legislature [under TITLE 7.89. TRANSPORTATION AGENCY OF MONTEREY COUNTY \[67930 - 67931\]](#). TAMC's sole mandate is administration and

expansion of rail in Monterey County. TAMC's intended purpose is narrow and should be focused on furthering Monterey County rail operations and regional connections. The expansion of rail operations by TAMC is crucially important to statewide transportation and of the utmost interest to Monterey County residents.

- The staff report fails to adequately address the reason for the proposed credit and just refers to a generic "Bus Rapid Transit project". This is misleading. The specific busway at issue is the SURF project from MST. Critically, the design of the SURF project would destroy 6 miles of the Monterey Branch Line. This is important information that must be evaluated by the Commission as it is in direct conflict with Proposition 116. If the Commission approves Resolution G-24-78, the CTC (along with TAMC) would be directly and intentionally involved in the destruction of rail infrastructure for non-rail uses. The intent of Proposition 116 was expansion of rail infrastructure, not its removal.
- Even if it were allowed under the law, which it is not, the proposed credit scheme would not actually repay the Proposition 116 funding. A promise by TAMC to "repay" the Proposition 116 funding by identifying a list of future rail projects funded by other sources is not a repayment. Any future rail funding TAMC secures would be in addition to the original Proposition 116 funding, not a replacement for it. The scheme being presented to the Commission here is analogous to loan forgiveness with the recipient of the funds forgiving their own loan and walking away.
- Resolution G-24-78 proposes to immediately remove the Proposition 116 restrictions on the Monterey Branch Line. Why would the restrictions immediately be removed when TAMC has until June 2025 to submit a project list? In other words, the restrictions would be removed before TAMC does anything. This makes no sense.
- The proposed scheme to relieve the Monterey Branch Line of Proposition 116 restrictions would impact areas far beyond the project boundaries of the SURF busway. For example, significant areas of the Monterey Branch Line in the Northern part of Marina could be developed for other non-rail purposes. The original CEQA exemption for Proposition 116 did not consider non-rail development of the corridor as the assumption was it would be used for rail. Any lifting of Proposition 116 restrictions on the Monterey Branch Line would need to comply with CEQA and analyze the foreseeable impacts of developing the Line for non-rail uses.
- The staff report doesn't provide an adequate basis for determining \$16,765,000 is an appropriate sum to repay the original Proposition 116 funding issued to TAMC. The resolution states a single appraisal was obtained by TAMC. CTC has an obligation to itself (and to the California electorate) to independently appraise the Monterey Branch Line.

The Commission SHOULD NOT approve Resolution G-24-78

Sincerely yours,

Michael Salerno

Spokesman, Keep Fort Ord Wild.

From: [Bryan Rosen](#)
To: California.Transportation.Commission@CATC
Cc: Waters.Laurie@CATC; Ruggiero.Kacey@CATC
Subject: Please revoke state funding for the environmentally destructive Surf busway in Monterey County
Date: Wednesday, December 4, 2024 3:06:48 PM

EXTERNAL EMAIL. Links/attachments may not be safe.

Dear Members of the Transportation Commission,

After the Coastal Commission insisted the Surf busway be laid right over the railroad tracks, TAMC and MST agreed to a whole new project. The public doesn't know what hit them, and many aren't aware of the change in plans. It's wrong to approve a whole new project without substantial public outreach. The CTC and other agencies were informed the railroad tracks would stay in place, and granted funding based on plans submitted. The public, strongly in favor of restoring intercity rail service to the Monterey area, were repeatedly told the same.

This is so wrong—to give funding for a whole new project without significant public outreach.

We worked hard on Proposition 116. Once the tracks are paved over, it will be much more unlikely that rail service will be resumed. There won't be the political will to do so after so much money and energy is invested in the busway.

TAMC informs us that restoring rail will cost \$350 million, and MST's Lisa Rheinheimer states it will cost \$150 million a mile (see below attached Monterey County Now article, "Monterey County's Embattled SURF! Project Hurling Ahead at Great Expense. Is it worth it?")

This doesn't have to be. In Romania there are steam trains that run on tracks that appear much worse than the ones in the area of the Surf project (some tracks are overgrown with plants on the Sand City side). The Train Riders Association of California (TRAC) states that railroad tracks can be restored for \$1 million a mile. A private railroad just fixes the parts that need repairing, and this is done much less expensively. Take a hammer and hit the steel tracks in Fort Ord Dunes State Park—you will see how strong they are. The ballast underneath is also in excellent shape despite what MST says—ballast and underlayment can last over a hundred years!

There needs to be independent analysis!

We need your help to stop this project. The busway bypasses 4 miles of freeway traffic, not including onramps and off ramps. The busway bypasses the short 3 lane section of freeway traffic where traffic flows better. The rest of Highway 1 from Castroville to Carmel has two lanes on either side. The remaining 16 or so miles of freeway will remain congested if a busway is in place.

Except for some busy weekends, the traffic is only backed up from about 7-9 AM on weekday mornings in the southbound direction. Having a bus-on-shoulder lane or carpool lane on the ocean side of the freeway would ease congestion greatly on the 3 lane section; of course it would remain bad on the 2 lane section from Carmel to Castroville. Another alternative not considered is to have a few express buses from Salinas to Monterey running in the morning. It takes around 52 minutes to travel from Salinas to Monterey on this slow bus Route 20 which has 46 stops. Express buses would compensate for the morning traffic delay;

The Coastal Commission insisted these alternatives were feasible until area politicians met with Coastal staff for many hours (environmental groups who opposed the project like the Sierra Club and TRAC weren't included. Suddenly all alternatives were infeasible. Reason given: No plans to study them in the works. Under such broad criteria any alternative becomes infeasible. If politicians don't want to look at alternatives that makes them infeasible. If MST doesn't want to look at alternatives, they are infeasible. Feasibility shouldn't be based on what politicians want, but what is actually feasible.

It's completely unnecessary to significantly disrupt the second most important dune complex in California. Buses will be whizzing by every 15 minutes (7.5 minutes if you consider both directions of travel). Endangered wildlife species, as well as recreational users will be at risk.

So maybe 1000 people will use the Surf bus every day. That's a drop in the bucket compared to the up to 83,000 vehicles using the adjacent section of Highway 1 during peak periods. \$90 or \$100 million will be spent to accomplish very little. Meanwhile the traffic from San Jose to Monterey will remain congested. Traffic congestion has become so bad and far reaching that the only way to bypass it in a meaningful manner is a train.

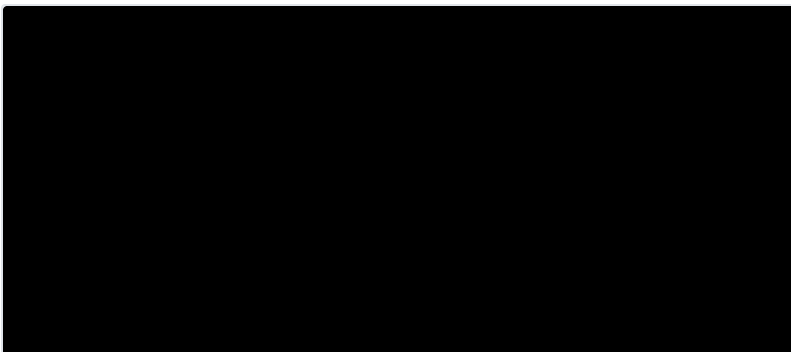
Marin County put in a train. Monterey County, with a population even larger than Marin County, needs to have one too, and for a reasonable cost. Trains have been put in all over the world at a reasonable cost, Please put rail to Monterey on the agenda, and be willing to allocate a decent amount of money for this purpose.

This would be an important train route, and with traffic so horrible quite a few people would use it.

Thank you,

Bryan Rosen

[11-21-24](#)



11-21-24

Issue of November 21, 2024.