

Draft Script for Public Forum

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[stage notes are in brackets; all else is facilitator]

Does Santa Cruz County need podcars?

A public conversation about congestion, transit, and better transportation solutions.

6:59 pm - [opening slide - Does Santa Cruz County need podcars?]

7:00 pm - Welcome and Meeting Rules

[MC self-introduction] Good evening folks. I'm Stacy Hughes, your facilitator for this public forum on the future of transportation in Santa Cruz County. Thank you for being here. I expect it will be a good use of your time. Please note that the discussion and stage will be recorded for posting online.

[Agenda slide]

This public forum on the future of local transportation is sponsored by Santa Cruz Personal Rapid Transit, Silicon Valley Clean Cities Coalition, and LoopWorks.

Logistics: [Bathroom and water location]

Here's our agenda for this evening. As you can see, there's a lot to cover, so let's get started with panelist introductions.

[Welcome slide: Panelist names/orgs]

I'll start. My background with the Conflict Resolution Center of SC County includes mediator and trainer in conflict resolution and communication. One thing we do not have is an opinion in this discussion; rather, my role is to facilitate productive communication between everyone here.

Lani Faulkner is Director of Equity Transit. Lani, would you introduce yourself?

[Lani's day job is development and management of Biotechnology and Device Clinical Trials. She also serves on the Santa Cruz Central Fire Board.

More apropos to this forum is her role as Founder and Director of Equity Transit which is calling out the systematization of racism and classism through transportation policies and projects. Lani sees our path to an equitable future requires a robust public transit system. In her words, "We advocate for a robust and affordable public transportation system, a clean environment, affordable housing, safe walkable streets, and opportunity access for work, school, and everyday life."]

Elaine Johnson is Executive Director of Housing Santa Cruz County, and President of the NAACP Santa Cruz County Branch. What else would you like us to know about you?

[Elaine was born and raised in Bronx, New York City, where she first learned the importance of community and being of service. She's a passionate advocate for affordable housing, and leveling the playing field so that everyone can have a safe, stable place to call home.

Elaine holds a bachelor's degree in political science and a Juris Doctorate from Monterey College of Law and is a certified mediator. She has extensive experience collaborating in the community around restorative justice and housing issues.]

Rob Means is a podcar advocate working with LoopWorks. Anything else?

LoopWorks is creating a podcar network in a congested area of Milpitas to serve the BART Transit Center. His first career was helping build the Internet as a programmer, followed by selling, servicing, and promoting electric bikes and scooters. He's a political activist working on transportation, environmental, and democracy issues. He recommends learning more about podcars at the LoopWorks web site. The URL is MilpitasPRT.com

Hannah Fairbairn teaches at the [Vista Center for the Blind and Visually Impaired](#). Hannah, your turn.

[Vista empowers individuals who are visually impaired to embrace life to the fullest through evaluation, counseling, education, and training.

Hannah Fairbairn, who is nearly blind, teaches Vista clients about low-tech and high-tech solutions available to help vision-impaired people expand their world.

Born with vision impairment, Hannah lost most of her remaining sight at 33. She taught at the Carroll Center for the Blind near Boston for 18 years, and raised two daughters, one of whom inherited her eye condition. She has used that experience to write an award-winning book about low vision and blindness entitled *When You Can't Believe Your Eyes*. It's a "how-to" book for anyone losing their sight, and guidance for their families.]

Matt Farrell is Board Chair of [Friends of the Rail & Trail](#). Mike, what else should we know about you?

Founded in 2002, Santa Cruz County Friends of the Rail & Trail is a grassroots, non-profit organization that advocates for transforming the 32-mile Coastal Rail Corridor into a trail and rail transit system that supports equitable access to opportunity and our beautiful coastline. Prior to retiring, Matt spent 20 years managing parking – 6 for the City of San Jose, and then 14 for Santa Cruz. In addition to chairing the Rail & Trail group, Matt is a Board Member at Santa Cruz Community Credit Union, a not-for-profit financial cooperative that promotes economic justice.

I want to emphasize that panelists speak as knowledgeable members of our community, not as official representatives of their organizations. With this in mind, we hope panelists will feel freer in describing how they perceive things.

Here in Santa Cruz County, **daily and seasonal congestion** stalls economic growth and community vitality. Yet, new transportation technologies are appearing. Let's make this conversation about weaving these new technologies into our transportation tapestry, and whether the **promised value** of adding robotaxis and podcars is worth the **expected costs**.

We are using an open fishbowl conversation format that allows attendees to participate in the conversation by coming onto this stage, and taking the empty seat. Once you've shared your question, correction, or addition, please return to your audience seat so someone else can share. Access the stage via the steps over there. [point to steps].

[Ground Rules slide]

To achieve a civil discussion, we will use these GROUND RULES.

- Step up / Step back means shy people are urged to talk, and talkative ones to allow them.
- Try on the process asks you to suspend judgment about this process until later.
- Don't interrupt / raise hands
- Turn off cell phones
- Leave your ego at the door. We are here about our community and its future.
- Lead by example

Let's start by assessing Where We Are, and How We Got Here.

7:10 pm - Where We Are, and How We Got Here

[Corridors slide: aerial view of Santa Cruz]

The Santa Cruz PRT group has offered some background information that I will present before getting into the discussion about 7:40, a half-hour from now. That's when audience members, one at a time, can join us here on the stage by sitting in the empty seat. We expect about 45 minutes for discussion and exploring opportunities for moving forward.

Here in Santa Cruz County, **daily and seasonal congestion** shows the imbalance between demand for road space and the limited supply. Compounding the issue is the mismatch between sprawl growth and mass transit's corridor service. Mass transit has for 150 years relied upon large expensive engines to move lots of stuff and people all at once. That worked well for transportation when towns grew up along rail lines. As Santa Cruz County has learned, corridors like Hwy. 1 or the coastal rail do not well serve cities that sprawl.

For the past 100 years, the automobile and racism have shaped our cities by changing the pattern of development. We now live and work in places that sprawl across the land and up into the mountains.

While corridor transit such as light rail may not mesh well with such sprawl, network transit like our bus system works better. Unfortunately, daily and seasonal congestion stalls buses along with cars.

That's a 30,000-foot level description of Where We Are, and How We Got Here. Would anyone like to add some detail to that picture?

[panelists keep comments brief]

Part of where we are is the imbalance between demand for road space and the limited supply. Clearly, increasing the supply of roads is not easy or cheap. On the other hand, reducing roadway demand by increasing transportation alternatives could be easier and less costly.

7:15 pm - Common Assents

[Assents slide]

Let's see if our panelists have some common beliefs, some things they would agree on. Here are 4 points that you all might agree to.

- Our Climate Crisis is worsening quickly.
- Shifting 10% of trips to public transit could substantially reduce CO₂ emissions.
- Santa Cruzans want more and better public transit.
- RTC and METRO operations are currently funded with revenue from these sources at approximately these percentages:
 1. 40% = Local sales taxes, especially Measure D
 2. 10% to 12% = Passenger fares (including UCSC and Cabrillo College student fees)
 3. 20% = California STA (State Transportation Agency) and TDA (Transportation Development Act)
 4. 12% = California TIRCP (Transit and Intercity Rail Capital Program)
 5. 14% = Federal FTA (Federal Transit Administration)
 6. 2% (or probably more) = other misc

How do we feel about these four statements?

[Panelists comment.]

[If panelists agree, then ...] I take it that you all agree on these 4 points. Is there another point we should add?

7:20 pm - Intro to Mobility Options

[Mobility Options slide]

Progress has been made with private micro-transit (bikes, e-bikes, and scooters). Now, two new technologies promise widespread community benefits: automated vehicles (robotaxis) and Personal Rapid Transit (PRT, or podcars). So, here's our basic list of options.

- Micro Transit (feet, bikes, scooters, [BCycle](#))
- Personal Automobile
- Shared Cars (taxi cab, Uber/Lyft, car share)
- Buses and Bus Rapid Transit
- Light Rail Transit
- Commuter Rail/Subway (BART)
- Autonomous/Driverless Vehicles (robotaxis)
- Personal Rapid Transit (podcars)
- Air Taxis

That is a lot of options. Let's whittle that list down a bit.

7:25 pm - Options Moving Forward

So, here's a question for us: What transit do we want?

[Mobility Options slide #2]

For various reasons, we don't to encourage the personal automobile. We already have too many of those for the road space available.

Light Rail Transit requires right-of-way that is likely to come at the expense of road space, something that's already scarce. Recent experience in Santa Clara County shows ridership per dollar invested to be a low return on investment.

Commuter Rail and subways also have right-of-way and ROI issues.

While air taxis may serve a niche market, they won't transport lots of people per hour. To reduce congestion wider bandwidth is required.

Pulling those options from our list leaves more affordable and effective options as shown in the slide.

- Micro Transit (feet, bikes, scooters)
- ~~Personal Automobile~~ (for various reasons, we won't encourage these)
- Shared Cars (taxi cab, Uber/Lyft, car share)
- Buses and Bus Rapid Transit
- ~~Light Rail Transit~~ (right-of-way and ROI issues)
- ~~Commuter Rail/subway~~ (issues with right-of-way, excessive ridership capacity compared to demand, and costly - \$4.3 billion for RTC's ZEPRT coastal rail proposal)
- Autonomous/driverless Vehicle (**uncongested areas**) Waymo and Zoox are spreading the robotaxi message of ride-hailing.
- ~~Air Taxis~~ (While air taxis may serve a niche market, they won't transport lots of people per hour nor cheaply.)
- Personal Rapid Transit (**congested areas**)

Also, please note that autonomous or driverless vehicles are most appropriate in uncongested areas because they add more traffic. There are 2 reasons. First, they are moving people who may not have been on the roads at all. The technical term is latent demand, or the people who want the convenience of driving but can't for some reason. The second reason is that after a robo-taxi drops off a rider, it adds to traffic looking for a place to park or to fetch another rider.

PRT, on the other hand, makes sense in congested areas because it does not increase traffic. The real question about PRT is whether the promised value of adding podcars is worth the expected costs.

While some audience members may not be familiar with podcars, I expect you panelists do. Before outlining PRT technology for the audience, let's see if you agree on removing these 4 options from tonight's discussion of future transportation options.

[Facilitator seeks agreement from the panelists.]

Most people are somewhat familiar with these technologies, even the newer ones like micro-transit and robo-taxis. Less familiar to most people is Personal Rapid Transit, PRT, or podcars. So, let's look at what it is.

[Hardware slide]

Hardware for a PRT system includes guideways, cabs, and offline stops. Offline stops are a critical part that enables podcars to travel non-stop from origin to destination. As an example, these images show the LoopWorks design. There are many different PRT designs.

[Guideway Designs slide]

PRT designs vary greatly in the amount of stuff – primarily steel and concrete - needed to build them. Designs from [Swyft Cities](#) and [Zippar](#) use minimal infrastructure, because the primary guideway is a steel cable. LoopWorks and Modutram use steel trusses for their guideways. Designs from UTRa and Glydways use road-like guideways. These wide-ranging designs also have wide-ranging price tags, at least an order of magnitude, or 10-fold increase between the lowest priced and the highest.

While we're discussing financial costs, be aware of [2 different types](#):

- Capital Expenditure (CapEx) is what it costs to build something.
- Operations and Maintenance (O&M) is what it costs to operate the system day after day. While traditional mass transit requires 3% to 5% annually of CapEx to maintain operations, PRT systems only cost 1% to 3% of CapEx due to reduced costs for operators and fuel.

[PRT Benefits slide]

Each transportation option comes with costs and benefits. Here are benefits demonstrated by existing podcar systems:

- quicker and safer than driving
- energy efficient

- dependable trip time
- transit time options like reading, working, or meditating
- low-cost O&M

Investors often refer to Return on Investment, or ROI. Most look only at the financial aspects. As a community, we are better served by using a 3-factor ROI that includes people, planet, and profit. PRT advocates argue that podcars check all 3 boxes by providing better service for people, efficient and clean transit to lighten our footprint on nature, and low O&M that leads to better financial results.

With that background, let's begin the discussion.

7:40 pm - Does Santa Cruz County need podcars?

[Panel Discussion slide]

[A/V technician ready to display web pages on the screen]

Is there anyone in the audience who has something to contribute to the discussion, like a question, a clarification, or a request for additional information. If so, please join us here on stage. If more than 1 wants to speak, form a line leading to the steps.

Panelists, what do you think? Does Santa Cruz County need podcars? Or is there a better question to ask?

[Panelists discuss.]

Consensus: 75%

8:00 pm - Moving Forward (commitments)

[slide of PRT Master Plan]

Now we see why Santa Cruz has so much congestion, and the potential of podcars to mitigate some of that congestion by reducing roadway demand. The local PRT group has proposed a PRT Master Plan that could serve the county in congested areas. Feedback from the community is encouraged. If you think some podcars stops need to be added, moved, or deleted, please submit your comments before leaving tonight, or submit them to the local PRT group.

Let's assume that the PRT Master Plan is worth pursuing. Who wants to make a commitment to forward the proposed Plan? This could be sharing what you've learned tonight with others, contacting your elected representatives, joining the local PRT group, or any number of other possibilities. Is anyone inspired to make a small commitment of time and effort?

[Commitments: who will do what by when. **Someone take notes!**]

8:20 pm - Wrap Up and Requests

[Moving Forward slide]

Thank you for your attendance and participation. You'll find the presentation slides and a recording of this forum on the Forum web page. Please go there for more information.

Also, just a reminder. No Kings events are happening on Saturday, March 28, in Santa Cruz, Scotts Valley, Watsonville, and Boulder Creek. Please attend one if you think We the People should be in charge of our government. Details are at No Kings dot org (NoKings.org). Scroll to the map, and enter a ZIP code for details.

Because RCNV closes at 9:00 pm, socializing after the meeting can continue in the parking lot or across the street in the Hotel Paradox's Solaire Restaurant + Bar.

Thank you again for attending and contributing to a new vision for transportation in Santa Cruz County. Good night.

8:30 pm - end of event; start of clean-up

[lively music starts in Kennedy Hall]