

Commission seeks funds to proceed with rail purchase

SANTA CRUZ — In a step toward public acquisition of the county's privately owned rail line, the Regional Transportation Commission has agreed to ask the state for \$20.2 million in state funds.

The money has long been earmarked for the county -- in voter-approved Proposition 116 and annual state transportation allocations -- but a formal application is needed to deliver the funds.

The commission's governing board voted unanimously Thursday to file the funding application with the state.

The Regional Transportation Commission, a government agency that allocates local transportation dollars, hopes to complete the \$14.2 million rail deal with the track's owner, Union Pacific Railroad, by the end of the year.

The future of the 32-mile line after the acquisition remains uncertain, though commissioners have discussed building a walking and biking trail along the line and eventually adding passenger trains.

The balance of the \$20.2 million from the state will go toward improvements on the line, which runs from Davenport to Watsonville.

The commission remains in negotiation with Union Pacific over final selling points.