



Rail & Trail Candidate Questionnaire

November Election 2022

Local elected officials are appointed to serve on boards like the Metro and the RTC and can have an impact on countywide transportation decisions. Friends of the Rail & Trail is committed to discovering candidate positions and sharing them with the public so we can all make informed choices at the ballot box.

Responses by Shebreh Kalantari-Johnson, Candidate for Santa Cruz County Board of Supervisors District 3

1

The Regional Transportation Commission owns the rail corridor. The RTC has unanimously affirmed its commitment to leave the railroad infrastructure in place, maintain freight rail service, and institute high capacity public transit service. The RTC has also selected electric passenger rail transit as the locally preferred alternative for transit on the corridor. Do you support these policies? Why or why not? How would this position be expressed in your work, should you be elected?

Yes, I support maintaining freight rail services and the use of electric passenger rail transit on the rail corridor. The development of transit on the rail corridor, along with a multi-use trail will have positive long-term impacts on the environment. Our fellow community members in South County are traveling often more than 2 hours a day for a 15-20 mile stretch. A rail system will provide an efficient and effective mode of transportation for many who work in our City. The Unified Corridor Investment Study (UCIS) completed last year, indicated that adding rail transit would double the county-wide use of public transit and that would greatly reduce the number of cars driving around and the accidents they cause. The UCIS also predicted that adding rail transit along with other Scenario B improvements, would reduce the total number of collisions by 346 and save us a collective \$78 million every single year.

I currently serve as a Metro Board alternate on the RTC and when I have had the opportunity, I have voted to support this direction. I had the opportunity to express my support of the RTC staff recommendation to issue an RFP to complete an EIR on the rail corridor at the August RTC meeting. As a Supervisor I would ensure oversight and transparency in this EIR process as one of the first steps towards moving towards utilization of the rail corridor for electric passenger rail transit. It will be important to align our efforts with other

departments and agencies as it will take deep partnerships and leveraging of resources to be successful. We have a new General Manager at the Metro District, Mr. Michael Tree, who is engaging the Metro Board on strategic planning discussions. The Metro Board can play a significant role in ensuring we design a successful passenger light rail system.

Land use, housing decisions and public transportation are very much intertwined. A rail option will create opportunities for infill housing along the rail corridor. Without it, the state will still require us to build housing and it would be required to be car-dependent. The County will be revising its Housing Element over the next year. As we revise our Housing Element to meet the new State RHNA goals, we must think about transit-oriented development along the rail corridor. As a Santa Cruz City Councilmember, I brought forth a resolution for the City of Santa Cruz' Housing Element revision, which included consideration of integrating strategies that would decrease our community's reliance on cars. I would take this same approach as a Supervisor and ensure that our various departments and agencies are partnering. Let's give people the option of quality public transit instead of more traffic.

I will be partnering with other communities who have had success in implementing a passenger light rail system. I have been working with former Sonoma County SMART Director, Mr. Farhad Mansourian over the last year to learn about their process. He has been sharing lessons learned and providing insights as we as a community move forward with our rail corridor. Last month, some rail supporting community leaders and I invited Mr. Mansourian and other interested community members to meet and discuss our efforts. The event was inspiring and hopeful as we look towards a viable passenger light rail system in Santa Cruz County.

Finally, I will work with County staff and State and Federal legislators to identify and secure infrastructure and operational funds.

2

Construction has begun on the **trail** next to the tracks, but some segments have faced opposition and resulting delays. What is your position on the multi-use trail planned for the rail corridor? How would this position be expressed in your work, should you be elected?

I support the multi-use trail on the rail corridor. The trail will provide safe access for pedestrians and cyclists to move across our community. It is ironic that much of the opposition to various segments of the trail on the corridor have come from supporters of a multi-use trail. Rather than celebrating the successes of the trail to this point, there is a 'not enough' narrative among opponents that keeps the community from moving ahead on the trail.

We need to patiently explain to the public why the costs and timeline for implementing the trail often seem challenging. There are constraints on the corridor, and we need to do our best to build the best trail possible so long as it is consistent with rail service also being on the corridor. There will be some segments where the trail may need to leave the corridor for some distances, and that will be an acceptable choice. While the train cannot have anything other than a continuous track along the corridor, the trail will not be destroyed by occasional detours onto public roads. I am willing to make sure that the County provides the necessary subsidies to make the trail work for the portions that run through the unincorporated areas. The City of Santa Cruz has stepped up as a partner for the rail trail and the County needs to join them in this effort. Of course, we need to make sure that the detours are well marked and safe for users.

Plain and simple: I support the rail AND the trail.

Our chance is now to get the trail finished and expedite our implementation of light rail.

The legislature has provided us with the tools (SB 288 - 2020, SB 922 - 2022) to accelerate approval of sustainable climate-friendly transportation projects. That includes future segments, light rail, and improving the bus and pedestrian network that connects to the Santa Cruz Branch Rail Line. We have a whole county to get connected and there are record infrastructure investments at the federal and state levels that we need to be ready for. No more delays.

Through my efforts on council, I have been lining up the City of Santa Cruz to be in prime position from Housing and Community Development to earn transit and climate grants that support the Friends of the Rail & Trail and Coast Connect vision. The state of California is requiring cities to build housing for all incomes in order to receive these grants:

- Transformative Climate Communities (TCC)
- Transit and Intercity Rail Capital Program (TIRCP)

We need to do the same at the County with a solid Housing Element and Pro-housing designation so that we may unlock these transit dollars from the State. I will help do this as a Supervisor. Many of our projects are shovel ready. We need to complete them now.

3

Neighborhoods with **safe streets**, bike lanes, and sidewalks create room for us to move freely without our cars. What would you do to improve safety for pedestrians and cyclists?

We need to ensure that county capital spending on pedestrian infrastructure is equitably distributed throughout the county. We need wider sidewalks, protected bike lanes, and other essential infrastructure for our zero-carbon and fossil fuel-free future. Wherever possible, we need to provide more protected bike lanes where bicyclists don't face conflicts with motorized vehicles.

This will require orienting a higher percentage of our transportation dollars to active transportation projects and that when we make street improvements for cars, they include a complete streets plan to include necessary infrastructure for bikes and pedestrians. The County has been moving in the right direction on this issue, but we need a stronger commitment to move this process forward.

Transformative policy and action requires coalitions. In addition to working with Friends of the Rail and Trail, I will bring together neighborhood and community groups in three categories:

- Safe Routes to Schools - Parent Teacher Organizations, School Boards, Teacher and Classified Employee Unions

- Safe Routes to Transit - FORT, Coast Connect
- Health and Wellness - Community Coalitions and nonprofits including Community Health Trust of the Pajaro Valley, Central California Alliance for Health, The Children's Network, Youth Action Network

4

What did you think of the June 2022 **Measure D vote**? What was your position on this measure? How do you interpret the outcome of this vote?

I opposed Measure D and did so publicly by endorsing the No on D campaign, donating twice to the No on D campaign, co-hosting a fundraiser for the No on D campaign, placing my position on my website and materials, and supporting the literature drops in neighborhoods. Measure D proposed to prematurely eliminate the option of use of public transit on the rail corridor.

The vote demonstrated that our community overwhelmingly supports the preservation and use of our community asset-our rail corridor. As some of the former Measure D supporters may begin to find ways to challenge the planning and implementation of rail service. I will be outspoken in my efforts to remind them that roughly 3/4 of the voters in this community rejected Measure D, and they did so in the same percentages or more in every supervisorial district in Santa Cruz. If I am elected to the Board of Supervisors, I see my position as a good place to keep encouraging the County staff, the RTC staff, and the Metro staff to make their best efforts to bring this community the public transit they so clearly want and need. Nothing less than their best efforts will be acceptable to me or the community.

Find-out more about Shebreh Kalantari-Johnson at their website:
<https://www.shebreh.org/>