

For Immediate Release
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Santa Cruz METRO Votes to Support the Pajaro Regional Flood Management Agency (PRFMA) Benefit Assessment for Levee Operations and Maintenance

Santa Cruz, CA (Friday, June 3, 2022) – The Santa Cruz Metropolitan Transit District (Santa Cruz METRO) Board of Directors voted to cast its ballot in support of the Pajaro Regional Flood Management Agency (PRFMA) Benefit Assessment for Levee Operations and Maintenance during its May 2022 meeting.

The purpose of PRFMA’s proposed assessment is to provide adequate revenues to maintain levees that protect the City of Watsonville, the town of Pajaro, and surrounding agricultural areas from flooding. PRFMA is facing a \$1.2 million shortfall between needed and required revenues.

"South County is well served by the Santa Cruz METRO Board of Directors' positive vote for the PRFMA's Benefit Assessment for Levee Operations and Maintenance," **said Mayor Ari Parker, City of Watsonville, METRO Board of Director.** "As a member of the METRO Board of Directors and Mayor of Watsonville, I believe that the People of the Pajaro Valley will never get a better deal to fix the flooding that has caused such destruction for decades. A 'Yes' vote by the METRO Board of Directors is in the best interests of the residents of Watsonville and Pajaro."

The current levees, originally constructed in 1949, are estimated to provide an 8-year level of flood protection, among the lowest in the state. These levees have previously failed resulting in severe flooding in 1982, 1986, 1989, 1995, 1997 and 1998, damaging acres of crops and displacing hundreds of residents. The Pajaro River levee threatened to break again during a wave of serious storms in early 2017 and was repaired under emergency conditions.

"It is important for METRO to support the Pajaro Valley Levee assessment to help ensure we can avoid any potential future catastrophic damage to our community. This project has been in the works for decades. We now have the opportunity to address it, and we should," **said Jimmy Dutra, City of Watsonville Councilmember, METRO Board of Director.**

In addition to its plans to improve levee operations and maintenance, PRFMA is partnering with the US Army Corps of Engineers and State of California on a \$400 million levee improvement project to provide up to 100-year flood protection for residents, businesses, and agricultural properties. Once the project is completed, properties will be removed from the FEMA Special Flood Hazard Area, ending associated requirements for high-cost flood insurance and building restrictions.

The Corps and State will fully fund the \$400 million project, a first in the state for its type. However, to receive this funding the community must first demonstrate it can adequately fund ongoing levee operations and maintenance.

Santa Cruz METRO, which owns two parcels within PRFMA’s proposed assessment district, voted in favor of the PRFMA annual assessment to help reduce flood risk for the City of Watsonville and township of Pajaro.

Santa Cruz METRO also extends much gratitude to Congressman Panetta for helping to secure federal funding for this project, as this project is one of only four nationwide projects selected to receive federal funding under the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA).

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About Santa Cruz Metropolitan Transit District:

Established in 1968, Santa Cruz METRO provides directly operated fixed-route and Highway 17 commuter service throughout Santa Cruz County, with limited service connecting to Monterey Salinas Transit at our Watsonville Transit Center and Santa Clara County, transporting more than 5 million* passenger trips a year. METRO also directly operates ParaCruz paratransit service to Santa Cruz County, providing about 73,500* trips per year. METRO's operating budget in FY21 is almost \$55 million and is funded through a combination of farebox revenue, sales tax, and state and federal sources. Today METRO operates a fleet of 94 buses on at least 24 fixed-routes and 32 paratransit vehicles. For more information, visit www.scmtd.com. Like METRO on Facebook at www.facebook.com/SantaCruzMETRO or follow us on Twitter at www.twitter.com/SantaCruzMETRO.

*Reflect pre-pandemic ridership numbers