

North Coast Freight rail service suit deal approved

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A Marin County judge on Monday approved the settlement in a lawsuit that has blocked the return of freight rail service to Sonoma County.

Superior Court Judge James Ritchie ratified last week's agreement between the city of Novato and North Coast Railroad Authority, the Ukiah-based agency that plans to restore freight service on the Northwestern Pacific line.

Novato sued NCRA last year, charging the rail authority failed to consider environmental impacts of train traffic in the city.

Under terms of the \$1.3 million settlement, NCRA will create "quiet zones" at 13 rail crossings in Novato, use low-emission locomotives and take other steps to ease impacts on the city. NCRA also will pay Novato's legal costs.

The rail authority is completing \$50 million in repairs to the route between Napa and Windsor, said Mitch Stogner, NCRA's executive director. Train service could resume as early as next spring, he said.

-- Steve Hart