

From: Capitola Morrissey <morrisseycapitola@gmail.com>
Sent: Tuesday, April 15, 2025 4:00 PM
To: City Council; Clarke, Joe; Gerry Jensen; Pedersen, Alexander; Margaux Morgan; Melinda Orbach; Goldstein, Jamie (jgoldstein@ci.capitola.ca.us); Gautho, Julia
Subject: Comments for Agenda Item 3B: Opposition to Park Avenue Alignment and Support for Coastal Bluff Alignment of the Coastal Rail Trail (Segments 10 & 11)

Dear Capitola City Council,

This letter outlines the key reasons why the City of Capitola should reaffirm its support for the previously approved Coastal Bluff alignment of the Coastal Rail Trail and formally reject the recently proposed Park Avenue alignment options A and B.

The Coastal Bluff Alignment: The Clear and Compliant Path Forward

The Coastal Bluff alignment remains the only legally, environmentally, and regionally appropriate option for Segment 10/11 of the Rail Trail. It keeps the trail within the designated rail corridor, consistent with Capitola Municipal Code (CMC) Chapter 8.72, which mandates preservation of public pathways within that corridor. Moving the trail out of the rail corridor and onto city streets—such as in the Park Avenue alternatives—is inconsistent with that mandate and unequivocally violates CMC Chapter 8.72.

Importantly, City staff have stated that if the Park Avenue options are rejected, the RTC and County would likely pursue the previously studied Coastal Bluff alignment. Contrary to previous public speculation, rejecting Park Avenue does not kill the project—it returns it to its more appropriate, originally envisioned route.

Further advantages of the Coastal Bluff alignment include:

- **Preservation of ATP grant eligibility:** This original alignment is already the sole focus on the existing grant and has been environmentally cleared, keeping the County on track to meet the April 2027 construction funding deadline and protecting the \$67.6 million ATP grant.
- **Improved safety and experience:** A dedicated, vehicle-free trail ensures a protected, scenic, and serene environment for walkers, cyclists, and families.
- **Enhanced regional connectivity:** The coastal route preserves the trail's scenic value and accessibility for neighborhoods, ensuring continuity across the corridor.
- **Supports rail-trail integration:** The coastal alignment keeps future passenger rail and trail co-location on the table and is a natural location to place the trail if the cost of a train is deemed to be overwhelmingly expensive in the future.
- **Preservation of Capitola's historic trestle:** This alignment allows for long-term plans to repurpose the trestle for public use, maintaining cultural heritage and a visually iconic coastal gateway.

Park Avenue Options A & B: Unsafe, Uncertain, and Misaligned with Capitola's Goals

While framed as lower-impact alternatives, the Park Avenue alignments introduce a number of serious legal, safety, regulatory, and financial issues that undermine the integrity and future of the Rail Trail:

1. Violates Local Law

The Park Avenue options shift the trail out of the rail corridor, a move that violates Capitola Municipal Code Chapter 8.72, which calls for preserving public use within the existing rail corridor.

2. Exposes Trail Users to Traffic Hazards

Both options A and B place trail users, including children and seniors, immediately adjacent to a busy street. With minimal buffers and signage, this creates clear conflict zones at driveways, intersections, and narrow roadway sections. These conditions contradict the Rail Trail's core promise of a safe, separated, family-friendly pathway.

3. Relies on an Unapproved and Risky Rail Crossing

The success of the Park Avenue route depends on building a new pedestrian crossing at Coronado Street—which still lacks final approval from the CPUC. This crossing is not guaranteed. If denied, the Park Avenue route would fail to connect to the rest of the Rail Trail, rendering it incomplete and non-functional.

4. Triggers Costly and Time-Consuming Environmental Review

Adopting the Park Avenue alignment would necessitate a new environmental review, possibly even a Supplemental EIR, introducing significant delay and uncertainty. In contrast, the Coastal Bluff route is already cleared and ready to proceed.

5. Breaks Regional Continuity and Reduces Trail Access

The Park Avenue design deviates from the scenic coastal route and reduces connections to the beach. It sacrifices regional usability and trail identity for a temporary workaround that is disconnected from the rest of the trail system.

6. Undermines Future Use of the Capitola Trestle

Choosing the Park Avenue route deprioritizes the long-term plan to restore the Capitola Trestle for trail use. Without a commitment to the rail corridor, the opportunity to fund and transform the trestle into a public asset could be lost.

7. Offers False Economy at Long-Term Cost

While tree removals may be slightly reduced, this comes at the expense of user safety and long-term efficiency. The Park Avenue options require significant new infrastructure—including curb realignments, signalized crossings, and sidewalk reconstruction—all for an inferior trail experience. These “savings” could ultimately cost more in both dollars and lost value.

Conclusion: Restore the Coastal Bluff Alignment by Rejecting Park Avenue Alignment Options A and B

The Coastal Bluff alignment is not just a preferred route—it is the right route. It is safer, legally compliant, environmentally cleared, and ready to be built. It preserves Capitola’s scenic beauty, historical landmarks, and future mobility options.

By contrast, the Park Avenue alignment introduces safety risks, legal concerns, new delays, and an uncertain future for the Rail Trail. Most importantly, staff have confirmed that rejecting Park Avenue will likely result in a return to the Coastal Bluff route—not a cancellation of the project.

Capitola has a chance to protect its community’s safety, values, and vision. We urge the Council to:

- Reaffirm support for the Coastal Bluff alignment as the correct path forward for Capitola and the region, and,
- Reject Park Avenue options A and B.

Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Mike and Meghan Morrissey

Capitola