

# Capitola City Council

## Agenda Report



**Meeting:** February 13, 2025

**From:** Public Works Department

**Subject:** Park Avenue Traffic Calming Improvements with Coastal Rail Trail Options

---

**Recommended Action:** Review options for Coastal Rail Trail improvements in the Park Avenue right-of-way and identify Option A (as described in the staff report) as the preferred alternative for further analysis.

**Background:** Park Avenue is a principal arterial road in Capitola, supporting vehicle, bicycle, and pedestrian traffic. Caltrans designates it as part of the Pacific Coast Bike Route, making it vital for both local and regional transportation. Following a traffic study conducted in January 2020, the City Council identified the need for speed reduction measures due to perceived safety concerns along this corridor.

In response, City staff engaged its on-call traffic engineering firm, Kimley Horn, to evaluate traffic calming alternatives. These options were presented to the City Council on [September 8, 2022](#), and focused on reducing vehicle speeds and enhancing safety for all users. Traffic calming strategies included: speed bumps/tables, adding curves, physical barriers, road diets, and signage (Attachment 1).

Separately, during this same timeframe, the County of Santa Cruz (County), in coordination with the Santa Cruz County Regional Transportation Commission (RTC), developed preliminary design plans and completed an environmental review for Segments 10 and 11 of the Rail Trail, which runs from 17<sup>th</sup> Avenue to State Park Drive, traversing the length of the City of Capitola. This project is funded by a combination of state and federal grants and Measure D-Active Transportation funds, with no financial contribution required from the City of Capitola. The County and the RTC previously presented project updates to the City Council on [March 23, 2023](#), and [October 26, 2023](#). During the October 26, 2023, meeting, the City Council consented to a consolidated Coastal Development Permit. This project is funded by a \$67.6 million grant from the California Transportation Commission, \$8.5 million in federal Rebuilding American Infrastructure with Sustainability and Equity (RAISE) funding, and local Measure D-Active Transportation funds. Cost estimates in 2023 indicated the project was over budget by approximately \$27 million (not including the recently announced RAISE grant funding of \$8.5 million).

### Discussion:

#### **Park Avenue Traffic Calming Community Outreach**

In late 2023, the City conducted a survey to gather input on proposed traffic calming measures and received around 100 responses. This effort was complemented by a virtual public meeting in January 2024, which attracted significant participation. A summary of public outreach is included in Attachment 2. Key findings from the outreach include:

1. **Parking Issues:** Concerns were raised about potential reductions in parking availability, particularly affecting families with multiple vehicles.
2. **Traffic Safety:** Residents advocated for physical barriers to separate bicycles from vehicles, radar signs, and enhanced speed enforcement. Speed bumps or speed tables were also suggested to discourage speeding.
3. **Support for Road Diet:** There was strong support for narrowing car lanes and widening bike lanes to improve safety for cyclists, pedestrians, and school children.

4. Community Engagement: Residents expressed the need for continued transparency and opportunities for input.
5. Traffic Patterns: Concerns about unsafe conditions due to cut-through traffic were highlighted.
6. Visual Concerns: Some community members worried about aesthetic impacts on the area's natural beauty.

The City's project team incorporated feedback from the community outreach process into a final design for the Traffic Calming Project, which was completed in October 2024 (Attachment 3). The elements of this project would include:

1. Restriping the entire roadway to narrow vehicle lanes down to 10.5 feet
2. Add a buffered bike lane for outbound Park Avenue starting at Washburn Avenue and terminating at Coronado Street
3. Add a buffered bike lane for inbound Park Avenue starting at Coronado Street and terminating at Wesley Street. Due to project budget constraints and challenges associated with leaf litter in the project area, a physical barrier to separate bicycles from vehicles was not included.
4. Adding green bike markings at all intersections
5. Improving the intersection at Park and Monterey Avenues with updated bike and pedestrian markings
6. Improving the intersection at Park Avenue and Kennedy Drive by switching the crosswalk locations to match with the existing curb ramps and creating a small painted bulbout
7. Installing additional speed feedback signs
8. Considering, but not implementing, speed tables/crossings/cushions. These could be implemented at a later date when funding is available.

The Traffic Calming Project was primarily a restriping effort that was not planned to include any treatment to road or sidewalk conditions, nor the fully separated bicycle facility that was requested by members of the public during the community outreach phase. Items 5 and 6 listed above are being completed as part of the City's coordinated work with the Pure Water Soquel Project and the Upper Village Parking Lot Sidewalk Project.

### **Coastal Rail Trail Alignment Options**

As stated above, during the same time period that the City has been preparing its Traffic Calming Project, the County of Santa Cruz and RTC have been developing the Coastal Rail Trail. Segments 10 and 11 of the Rail Trail, as approved by the Board of Supervisors in April 2024, included a trail alignment that was on the coastal side of the existing tracks between Monterey Avenue and Coronado Street, within the rail right-of-way. This alignment is consistent with the Monterey Bay Sanctuary Scenic Trail Master Plan from 2013. The County and RTC presented this design to the Capitola City Council on October 26, 2023. Due to existing topography and right-of-way constraints, constructing the trail on the coastal side of the tracks between Monterey Avenue and Grove Lane requires the construction of significant infrastructural components, including approximately 1,500 feet of retaining walls up to 16 feet high and a 240 foot long viaduct across Escalona Gulch. Similarly, constructing the trail on the coastal side of the rail between Grove Lane and Coronado Street also requires significant infrastructure, including approximately 950 feet of retaining walls up to 8 feet high, and a 330 foot long viaduct on steep slopes above the New Brighton State Beach parking lot.

Because of the extensive infrastructure required by the original design, the County and RTC are proposing to revise the Coastal Rail Trail Segment 11 alignment between Monterey Avenue and Coronado Street (approximately 0.7 miles) to the Park Avenue right-of-way, in the City of Capitola. The County and RTC are also proposing to coordinate the realigned segment of the trail with Capitola's Park Avenue Traffic Calming Project. Shifting the Coastal Rail Trail alignment to the Park Avenue right-of-way will enhance bicycle and pedestrian safety while improving connectivity between neighborhoods, the Coastal Rail Trail, and Capitola Village. This alignment serves as a cost reduction strategy identified in

the value engineering analysis. Finally, the Park Avenue Coastal Rail Trail alignment is designed to avoid possible conflicts with potential future transportation uses in the rail corridor.

Since the approved designs were developed in 2022-2023, additional information has emerged that should be considered as part of the trail and rail corridor's development.

1. Updated cost estimates for the Coastal Rail Trail Segments 10 & 11 showed significant increases in construction costs and right-of-way costs, which increased the project costs for these two phases from \$78.3 to \$104.4 million. The potential cost increase necessitated the need for value engineering to reduce costs. The RTC completed a value analysis study for the project in June 2024, which included a cost reduction strategy to route the trail along the Park Avenue right-of-way.

Space constraints in the existing rail corridor may limit the ability to accommodate both the Rail Trail and other future transportation uses. Routing the trail along the Park Avenue right-of-way provides a long-term solution that avoids potential conflicts within the rail right-of-way while ensuring the trail remains a viable and continuous active transportation route. Additionally, shifting the trail out of the rail corridor minimizes the risk of future modifications or removals that could arise if other transportation projects, such as those studied in the Zero Emission Passenger Rail and Trail Project, are pursued in the corridor.

2. As mentioned earlier, the City was independently developing lower-cost traffic-calming options along Park Avenue to help slow vehicular traffic and improve bicycle and pedestrian safety.

As a result of this new information, the County and RTC have recommended shifting Coastal Rail Trail Segment 11 from between Monterey Avenue and Coronado Street (approximately 0.7 miles) to the Park Avenue right-of-way. City staff supports this recommendation.

The proposed realignment would include a new 12-foot-wide Class I multi-use path adjacent to Park Avenue on the coastal side of the roadway and includes a minimum 3-foot buffer between the vehicular travel lane and trail. The design includes improvements from Capitola's Park Avenue Traffic Calming Project, such as narrowed travel lanes and speed feedback signs. The Coastal Rail Trail project will also add crosswalks with push-button activated rectangular rapid flashing beacons (RRFB), similar to the newly installed crosswalk at Cabrillo Street, that would connect the trail to the surrounding neighborhood at McCormick Avenue, Washburn Avenue, and the 600 Park Avenue driveway. Intersection lighting will also be upgraded at new crosswalks and trail lighting could also be installed.

In coordination with Capitola staff, the Rail Trail Project team developed two Coastal Rail Trail alignment options along the Park Avenue right-of-way. Option A (Attachment 4) extends the Park Avenue footprint further towards the coast to add the Coastal Rail Trail on the coast side of Park Avenue in order to preserve the existing on-street Class II bike lane on the inland (inbound) side of Park Avenue. Option B (Attachment 5) shifts the Park Avenue roadway alignment inland in order to maximize the use of the existing Park Avenue right-of-way for development of the Coastal Rail Trail and eliminates the Class II bike lane on the inland (inbound) side. Option B is expected to reduce environmental impacts when comparing the two Park Avenue alignments and will reduce project costs. With Option B, cyclists traveling towards Capitola Village would utilize the Class 1 multi-use path on the coast side of Park Avenue instead of the existing Class II bike lane on the inland side of Park Avenue. This would require local bicycle traffic from the Cliffwood Heights neighborhood to cross Park Avenue to access a bike path. Option A would maintain the existing Class II bike lane on the inland side of Park Avenue and allow local users direct access to a bike path for westbound trips without crossing Park Avenue.

Under either option, the existing on-street Class II bike lane on the coastal (eastbound) side of Park Avenue will be eliminated to accommodate the Class I trail. Similarly, from Grove Lane to Coronado

Street, the existing sidewalk on the coastal side of the street would be converted to a portion of the Class I trail under either option. Sections of that sidewalk are currently deficient.

As noted above, this trail alignment along the Park Avenue right-of-way and outside of the rail right-of-way is consistent with cost reduction strategies identified in the value engineering analysis. Attachment 6 shows both options.

Both Park Avenue alignments include a ramp from Park Avenue to the rail line at Coronado Street. The feasibility of a trail alignment on Park Avenue and on the inland side of the rail right-of-way between Grove Lane to Coronado Street is subject to the California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC) approval of a new formal pedestrian crossing of the existing rail line at Coronado Avenue. This is because in either of the above scenarios, a new formal crossing is needed to shift the trail from the inland side of the rail right-of-way to the coastal side of the rail right-of-way at Coronado Street, where the trail is above the New Brighton State Beach parking lot. From Coronado Street, through New Brighton State Park to Mar Vista Avenue, the trail is on the coastal side of the tracks. This crossing is needed to connect these two portions of the project and facilitate the trail crossing from the inland to the coastal side of the tracks. Although the existing informal crossing is heavily used, CPUC approval is needed to construct the trail crossing. Initial discussions between the County of Santa Cruz, RTC, Capitola, and CPUC staff indicate that the CPUC would approve a new crossing of the rail line at Coronado Street given existing conditions. Should the CPUC not approve the new crossing of the existing rail line at Coronado as part of the Rail Trail Project, the County of Santa Cruz and RTC could consider a partial alignment of the trail on Park Avenue from Monterey Avenue to Grove Lane that transitions the trail from Park Avenue to the coast side of the tracks at the existing Grove Lane crossing.

Both Park Avenue alignment options aim to reduce tree removals, especially the trees that function as a windbreak to the Escalona Gulch monarch butterfly habitat. To that end, both Park Avenue alignment options include reconstruction of the existing sidewalk, curb, and gutter along the 600 Park Avenue frontage to move the sidewalk approximately 4 feet inland to the edge of the City-owned right-of-way. This allows the roadway centerline to shift inland in the area directly adjacent to Escalona Gulch, reducing tree removals to the maximum extent possible.

The previously approved coastal alignment required the removal of 78 trees between Monterey Avenue and Grove Lane and 63 trees between Grove Lane and Coronado Street, for a total of 141 tree removals. Option A is estimated to require the removal of approximately 122 trees (105 trees between Monterey Avenue and Grove Lane and 17 trees between Grove Lane and Coronado Street), and Option B is estimated to require the removal of approximately 94 trees (79 trees between Monterey Avenue and Grove Lane and 15 trees between Grove Lane and Coronado Street). Either Park Avenue alignment therefore would result in overall less tree removal than the coastal alignment.

Some of the trees that would be removed with either Park Avenue alignment option function as important windbreak trees for the Escalona Gulch monarch butterfly habitat, and their removal could result in increased impacts to that habitat. The Rail Trail Project team is working with City staff, regulatory agencies, and local monarch butterfly experts to understand the potential impacts to the Escalona Gulch monarch butterfly habitat, and ways to both minimize impacts through design of the trail and to enhance the long-term health of the habitat through enhanced mitigation.

RTC staff, in coordination with County and City staff, will seek input on the alignments from the RTC's Bicycle Advisory Committee on February 10<sup>th</sup> and the Elderly and Disabled Technical Advisory Committee on February 11<sup>th</sup>. Results from the advisory committee meetings will be shared by County and RTC staff as part of their presentation to the City Council for this agenda item.

The County of Santa Cruz staff is seeking City Council input on the preliminary design of the Park Avenue alignment and recommends identifying Option B as the preferred alternative, citing reduced tree removals and cost savings. City staff, however, recommends Option A to preserve the existing Class II bike lane on the inland side of Park Avenue, ensuring continued on-street bike access toward Capitola Village.

Regardless of the selected option, the preferred alignment will proceed with additional environmental analysis to implement alignment of the Coastal Rail Trail along Park Avenue. If approved, the project

team will conduct additional environmental analysis in order to environmentally clear the Coastal Rail Trail Park Avenue alignment, including potential impacts to the monarch butterfly habitat at Escalona Gulch. Depending on the impact analysis of the new alignment, the additional environmental review will be an addendum to the environmental impact report (EIR) or a supplemental EIR. Once ready, the analysis will be brought back to the Council as part of the City's consideration of the project's final EIR. This is estimated to occur in Summer 2025.

### **Measure L**

Capitola voters approved Measure L in 2018. Measure L is codified in Chapter 8.72 (Greenway Capitola Corridor) of the Capitola Municipal Code. Its purpose is to enhance pedestrian, bicycle, and traffic safety within the City by encouraging the development of the Monterey Bay Sanctuary Scenic Trail (Trail) within the Santa Cruz Branch Line Rail Corridor (Corridor) (CMC §§ 8.72.010, 8.72.030). CMC section 8.72.040, which contains the "implementation" sections of Measure L, provides:

A. The city of Capitola, through its constituent departments, shall take all steps necessary to preserve and utilize the Corridor and Trestle for active transportation and recreation.

B. No city of Capitola department, agency or employee shall expend any funds or resources related to the construction, reconstruction, operation, maintenance, financing, marketing, or signage for a detour of the Trail onto Capitola streets or sidewalks.

RTC's proposal to construct the Trail within the City's Park Avenue right-of-way is consistent with Measure L for several reasons.

First, Measure L directs the City to take "all steps necessary to preserve and utilize the Corridor and Trestle for active transportation and recreation" (CMC § 8.72.040(A)). The City does not own the Trail or the Corridor, so the Coastal Rail Trail Segment 11 Project is the only foreseeable opportunity that the City has to advance Measure L's goals. The Coastal Rail Trail Segment 11 project advances Measure L's goal of preserving and utilizing the Corridor for active transportation and recreation because it proposes to construct the Trail on portions of the Corridor. If the City does not approve Option A or Option B, staff understand that the County may be unable to construct the segment of the Coastal Rail Trail Segment 11 project that runs through Capitola at all. Interpreting Measure L to preclude the City from approving Option A or Option B would thus undermine, rather than advance, Measure L's goals. Indeed, without the project, the capitol segment of the Corridor will not be utilized for active transportation and recreation at all.

Second, the section of Measure L that prohibits the expenditure of resources on a "detour of the Trail onto Capitola streets or sidewalks" is not implicated by Option A or Option B (CMC 8.72.040(B)). The dictionary defines a "detour" as a "departure from a direct course" or a "roundabout way temporarily replacing the regular route." Designing and construction of Coastal Rail Trail Segment 11 as described in Option A and/or Option B is not a "detour" because the Trail does not exist and has no "direct course" in the City. Moreover, Option A and/or Option B are consistent with Measure L because they do not propose the construction of the Trail on Capitola's streets or sidewalks. As explained above, RTC proposes to construct a new Class I bike path within a portion of the right-of-way that is adjacent to and physically separated from Park Avenue.

### **Summary of Considerations**

Capitola, County of Santa Cruz, and RTC staff recommend approval of the Park Avenue alignment for Coastal Rail Trail Segments 10 and 11 for the following reasons:

1. **Traffic Safety:** The Coastal Rail Trail project will provide a grade-separated facility for pedestrians and cyclists, improving safety and reducing conflicts along Park Avenue. The trail project will also narrow vehicular lanes and install speed feedback signs, helping to reduce vehicle speeds.

2. **Community Engagement Consistency:** Extensive outreach has already been conducted as part of the City's Traffic Calming Project, with notifications sent to participants of previous Park Avenue outreach efforts, and the improvements proposed as part of the Rail Trail's Park Avenue alignment are consistent with community feedback. Principal themes from community outreach were a request to provide as much separation from vehicles for pedestrians and bicycles as possible, enhancing visibility of crosswalks, reducing roadway width to slow vehicle speeds, and introducing minimal visual impact.
3. **Improved Neighborhood Connectivity:** The Park Avenue alignment for the Coastal Rail Trail will improve connectivity to the surrounding neighborhoods, since it will be accessible from Park Avenue and connecting streets. In addition, the Coastal Rail Trail will install crosswalks with RRFBs to allow neighbors to directly and safely access the trail from connecting streets.
4. **Reduced Cost:** The Park Avenue is expected to reduce Coastal Rail Trail construction costs compared to the previously approved coastal alignment.
5. **Avoids Conflict with Potential Future Transportation Options:** The Park Avenue alignment ensures the long-term viability of the Coastal Rail Trail by reducing conflicts within the rail corridor and avoiding potential throw-away costs if future transportation projects, such as those in the Zero Emission Passenger Rail and Trail Project, are pursued.
6. **Pedestrian Enhancements:** Addresses deficiencies in the existing sidewalk section along Park Avenue between Coronado Street and Cabrillo Street.

City staff recommends approval of Option A, as it preserves the existing Class II bike lane on the inland side of Park Avenue. Maintaining this lane ensures continued access for on-street cyclists, particularly those accustomed to riding in a standard bike lane rather than a shared-use path and local users who are traveling westbound.

If the Capitola City Council authorizes further analysis of the Park Avenue alignment, City staff will defer the Park Avenue Traffic Calming improvements to save City costs, since the traffic calming improvements will be included with the Coastal Rail Trail Project Segments 10 and 11.

### **Interim Measures**

Staff does not recommend implementing previously considered alternatives (road diet, buffered bike lanes, and green striping) as an interim measure due to costs (estimated at approximately \$160,000) and the anticipated Rail Trail Project improvements.

Fiscal Impact: The City allocated \$100,000 for the Park Avenue Traffic Calming Project in the FY 2024-25 CIP budget. To date, \$19,500 has been spent on design alternatives and public outreach, leaving \$80,500 available. If Council opts to proceed with the Coastal Rail Trail Project improvements, these funds could be reallocated to another street project or to the General Fund.

The Coastal Rail Trail Project, including Park Avenue improvements, will be funded by state and federal grants and Measure D-Active Transportation funds from the RTC. There are no City funds being invested in the project. Without the realignment, the City would not be funding or installing these improvements independently. The bicycle and pedestrian improvements proposed as part of the Rail Trail alignment along Park Avenue have an estimated value of \$3 to \$5 million dollars. This is a large investment that will significantly improve bicycle and pedestrian safety and infrastructure on Park Avenue that does not require the use of any City funding and would be unlikely to be funded otherwise.

California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA): The Coastal Rail Trail Segment 10 and 11 Project's Final EIR was certified by the County on March 26, 2024, and the project was approved on April 30, 2024. The modified trail alignment along Park Avenue will require additional environmental review to analyze impacts. Once additional environmental review for this alignment is completed, staff will bring the final EIR, including any modifications required by the additional environmental review, to the City Council for acceptance. The County's Final EIR can be accessed at the following link:

Attachments:

1. Public Outreach Presentation Slides
2. Public Outreach Results
3. Traffic Calming Plans October 2024
4. Park Avenue Alignment Option A: Preserving the Inland Class II Bike Lane
5. Park Avenue Alignment Option B: Maximizing Right-of-Way for the Coastal Rail Trail
6. Comparative Perspectives of Alignment Options on Park Avenue

Report Prepared By: Kailash Mozumder, Public Works Project Manager

Reviewed By: Jessica Kahn, Public Works Director, Julia Gautho, City Clerk

Approved By: Jamie Goldstein, City Manager

Manager