

Capitola City Council

Agenda Report



Meeting: March 23, 2023

From: Public Works Department

Subject: Coastal Rail Trail Segments 10 and 11

Recommended Action: Receive report on the Coastal Rail Trail Segments 10 and 11 Project through the City of Capitola.

Background: The Santa Cruz County Regional Transportation Commission (RTC) adopted the Monterey Bay Sanctuary Scenic Trail (MBSST) Master Plan in November 2013. The Master Plan laid out an overview of the Coastal Rail Trail, a proposed 32-mile-long paved multi-use pathway for bicyclists and pedestrians along the RTC-owned Santa Cruz Branch Rail Line (SCBRL). The Master Plan divided the Coastal Rail Trail into 20 segments. The cities of Capitola, Santa Cruz, Watsonville, and County of Santa Cruz all adopted the MBSST Master Plan in 2014.

In November 2016, over two-thirds of Santa Cruz County voters approved a 1/2-cent sales tax to fund transportation projects and programs (Measure D). Seventeen percent of Measure D revenues are allocated for active transportation (development and construction of the Coastal Rail Trail and maintenance of the corridor). Over the 30-year life of the Measure, active transportation allocations are forecasted to be approximately \$178 million. However, there is insufficient Measure D revenue to fully fund the construction costs of the entire 32-mile Coastal Rail Trail. The most effective use of Measure D funds is to leverage them for larger state and federal grant opportunities.

County of Santa Cruz Segments 10 and 11 Project Description

The Coastal Rail Trail Segments 10 and 11 Project is being led by the County of Santa Cruz (County) in coordination with the City of Capitola and the RTC, as the owner of the Santa Cruz Branch Rail Line right-of-way. The Segments 10 and 11 Project under development by the County is an approximately 4.5-mile ADA-accessible bicycle/pedestrian path that generally extends along the SCBRL corridor from 17th Avenue in Live Oak to State Park Drive in the Seacliff neighborhood. The Segments 10 and 11 Project is currently in the preliminary design and environmental review phase, with an Environmental Impact Report (EIR) scheduled for public review in October 2023 and certification in March 2024. Schematic plans for both an "Ultimate Trail" configuration, where the trail is constructed next to the railroad tracks, and an "Interim Trail" configuration, where the tracks are removed and the trail is constructed in the existing location of the railroad tracks as part of an optional first phase, have been developed.

Consistent with the 2016 Measure D Ordinance and the strategy to use Measure D funding to leverage state and federal grant opportunities, the County of Santa Cruz applied for, and was awarded, \$67.6 million in competitive grant funding from the California Transportation Commission (CTC) through the State Active Transportation Program (ATP) in December 2022 for Coastal Rail Trail Segments 10 and 11. With matching funds from Measure D, this funding is sufficient to fully fund the Ultimate Trail configuration with construction anticipated to start in Fiscal Year 2026/27.

The Ultimate Trail configuration for the Segments 10 and 11 Project is consistent with the MBSST Master Plan and aligns the trail on the inland side of the railroad tracks from 17th Avenue in Live Oak and into the City of Capitola to 47th Avenue. The trail alignment switches to the coastal side of the rail tracks at 47th Avenue and continues on the coastal side of the rail tracks, generally parallel to Cliff Drive, until the eastern end of the City of Capitola public parking spaces. Here, the trail ends at the existing crosswalk that brings pedestrians from the inland to the coast side of Cliff Drive (see Attachment 1, page 2). The Project proposes reconfiguring the public parking spaces in this location to allow for construction of the trail between the rail and public parking and to maintain an uphill bicycle lane on Cliff Drive. The project

also proposes to replace the existing narrow informal staircase from Opal Street to Cliff Drive with a wider staircase, an improved and formalized rail crossing (subject to California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC) approval), and a small trail plaza at the eastern end of the public parking spaces.

The trail starts again at the Monterey/Park Avenue intersection continues to State Park Drive in the unincorporated area of the County, consistent with the MBSST Master Plan. The trail is aligned on the coast side of the railroad tracks from Monterey Ave to Mar Vista Dr. At Mar Vista Dr, the trail alignment switches to the inland side of the railroad tracks until the eastern terminus of Segment 11 at State Park Dr. The project proposes to formalize the existing informal trail from Coronado St. down to New Brighton State Beach. Proposed improvements include an accessible ramp from the Coronado St. and Park Ave intersection to the Rail Trail with a formalized rail crossing (subject to CPUC approval) and a new concrete staircase from the trail to the New Brighton State Beach parking lot.

The approximately 0.5 mile portion of the Coastal Rail Trail between the pedestrian crossing at Cliff Dr to the Monterey/Park intersection is not included in the Ultimate Trail configuration, due to the structural condition of the Capitola Trestle, which spans Soquel Creek and Capitola Village.

Due to structural considerations, the Trail cannot be attached or cantilevered from the Trestle. Additionally, there is insufficient room to build an adjacent trail structure next to the Trestle. Due to these constraints, the MBSST Master Plan considered that Coastal Rail Trail facilities across Soquel Creek would be included in future design plans for a new rail bridge replacement at Soquel Creek and that access the Trail would use existing surface streets and sidewalks to cross Soquel Creek and travel through Capitola Village.

The Interim Trail configuration considered structural reinforcements and replacement of the tracks with a light-weight deck to accommodate bicycles and pedestrians; however, this option is not being pursued due to regulatory issues and RTC's plans to consider Trestle replacement as part of the Zero-Emission Passenger Rail Concept Report and EIR, which will study a new passenger rail system between Pajaro Junction in Monterey County and Natural Bridges Dr. in the City of Santa Cruz, and will also include development of trail segments between Rio Del Mar Blvd. and Pajaro that have not advanced past the planning stage. Work on the passenger rail and trail concept report is expected to start in 2023 and take approximately two years to complete. Once the concept report is completed, RTC will pursue environmental clearance and eventual funding to construct, operate, and maintain the project.

Discussion: Staff has been in discussions with County of Santa Cruz and RTC staff regarding potential bicycle and pedestrian enhancements along the MBSST through Capitola Village.

Staff for the County and RTC have proposed constructing circulation improvements along the MBSST through Capitola Village as part of a separate project rather than including it in the construction of the proposed trail adjacent to the rail tracks. Specific project features have yet to be identified, however, potential improvements could include additional and expanded sidewalks, pedestrian crossings, Class III and/or IV bike facilities, and new striping and signage.

Note that the Project currently does includes some minor improvements along the MBSST through the Village, including signage directing trail users between the two trail ends.

Improvements to the bicycle and pedestrian network within Capitola Village are not part of the County's Segments 10 and 11 Project scope, so would not be eligible for the County's CTC ATP grant funds. However, improvements would be eligible for Measure D active transportation funding to improve the MBSST through Capitola Village. Similar to the Coastal Rail Trail, the most effective use of these funds is to leverage them for a larger grant opportunity.

One option to address the situation would be for Capitola to define desired bicycle and pedestrian enhancements in the Village through a public active transportation planning process. This would be similar to Active Transportation Plans (ATPs) completed by other local jurisdictions in Santa Cruz County with a focus on the Village. RTC staff has indicated the RTC would assist the City in scoping and applying for grant funding to develop a Village ATP. A Village ATP would be useful to improve circulation to and through the Village, regardless of the Coastal Rail Trail. City staff, in coordination with RTC and the

County of Santa Cruz, could pursue several grant funding opportunities. The current proposed funding plan is described below.

| | |
|--------------------|--|
| Winter 2023-2024 | Capitola applies for Caltrans FY 2024-25 Sustainable Transportation Planning Grant to develop a Capitola Village ATP |
| Spring/Summer 2024 | Capitola Project awarded planning funding for Capitola Village ATP |
| Summer/Fall 2025 | Capitola completes Village ATP Plan |
| Spring/Summer 2026 | Capitola applies for a State Active Transportation Plan Grant to complete design, environmental, permitting for projects identified in the Village ATP |
| Winter 2026 | Project awarded construction funding |
| July 2027 | Construction funds allocated |

Between now and applying for FY 2024-25 Sustainable Transportation Planning Grant, City staff would work with the County of Santa Cruz and RTC to better define project needs, preferred options, and general scope and schedule.

Fiscal Impact: The City has not expended any funds to date to identify connections from Coastal Rail Trail Segments 10 & 11 to Capitola Village. Local match funding to support proposed grant applications could include Measure D Active Transportation Allocations.

Attachments:

1. Coastal Rail Trail Segments 10 and 11 in Capitola City Limits

Report Prepared By: Jessica Kahn, Public Works Director

Reviewed By: Julia Moss, City Clerk; Samantha Zutler, City Attorney

Approved By: Jamie Goldstein, City Manager