

FIRST PUBLIC MEETING SUMMARY

On October 11, 2017, the County of Marin, the Transportation Authority of Marin (TAM), and Steven Grover & Associates (SGA) conducted the 1st Public Meeting for the Southern Segment of the North-South Greenway Gap Closure Project.

The project team conducted the following outreach activities to promote the meeting:

- Posting on the project website: www.nsgreenwaygapclosure.com
- Email blasts to over 270 recipients on September 12 and October 4
- Newspaper print advertisement in the Marin Independent Journal on October 4
- Posting on County of Marin current project webpage
- Posting on City of Larkspur Regional Projects webpage

The meeting was held from 6:30-8:30 PM at the Central Marin Police Authority, with approximately 50 people in attendance. Attendees had the opportunity to hear a project status update, learn about the alignment alternatives being considered for this segment of the North-South Greenway Gap Closure Project, understand the design challenges of the alternatives, ask questions, and provide input on the project's design priorities.

Presentation materials consisted of graphic boards and a slide presentation, and a community survey booklet was handed out to each attendee. The project team provided self-addressed stamped envelopes to attendees who wanted to mail back their hard-copy surveys and stated that an online version of the survey is available on the project website until October 26.

R.J. Suokko, Senior Civil Engineer for the County of Marin, began the meeting by recognizing the elected officials in attendance: Diane Furst, Mayor of Corte Madera; Dan Hillmer, Vice Mayor of Larkspur; Rhonda Kutter, Aide to County Supervisor Dennis Rodoni; and Mary Sackett, Aide to County Supervisor Damon Connolly. Mayor Furst was invited to provide opening remarks. She discussed encouraging bicycle use as a way to reduce traffic and alleviate congestion. In particular, she encouraged Safe Routes to School and providing comfortable and safe routes for kids to ride to school. Mayor Furst identified the Southern Segment Project as a very valuable connection that will help people get from the new Northern Segment Project to the Sandra Marker Trail. Vice Mayor Hillmer, invited to provide additional comments, indicated he agreed with Mayor Furst's remarks and welcomed all the attendees. The meeting was then turned over to Steven Grover, who gave a presentation that discussed the project's need, purpose, context, history, existing conditions, and design challenges. The presentation concluded with a review of a public input survey, which was then distributed to attendees, and the project's next steps and anticipated timeline. Following the presentation, Steven Grover, with R.J. Suokko and Bill Whitney, opened the meeting to comments, questions, and answers.

A summary of key points provided by and discussed with the public is provided below, followed by a summary of notable questions and answers.

KEY DISCUSSION TOPICS & SUMMARIES

Use of the Railroad Right-of-Way (ROW)

No formal poll was taken, however it appeared that most attendees supported using the railroad ROW for the Southern Segment Project, with the “vision of the North-South Greenway” as a primary cause for support. Attendees connected the vision to rails-to-trails plan from the 1970s, to the 2004 Larkspur and 2007 TAM N-S Greenway planning studies, and to the intent of the Bay Trail project. One attendee, having been involved in the 2004 Larkspur study, stated that to give up the new bridge over Corte Madera Creek was a huge compromise, and to not use the railroad ROW would be another huge compromise: “It’s taking us further and further away from our vision; if you choose Old Redwood Highway, don’t call it the North-South Greenway.” Maureen Gaffney stated that not using the railroad ROW would be “getting farther and farther away from the original intent of the Bay Trail, which is to be as close to the bay as possible.” She added, “This project is already funded; let’s keep the vision.” Her comment was applauded by the majority of attendees.

Use of Old Redwood Highway

It was stated during the presentation that relatively early on, after the project team’s initial analysis, it became apparent that there are very significant right of way challenges associated with the project. Simple prudence, and in light of these right of way unknowns and environmental process considerations, indicated that the team would need to assess a range of alternatives that meet the project purpose and need. Accordingly, the project team looked again at pathway options along Old Redwood Highway, in more detail than previous North-South Greenway Gap Closure feasibility studies were able to get into, given their scope.

Use of the Old Redwood Highway (ORH) alternative appeared to receive less support by the attendees, based on a variety of comments that characterized ORH as having terrible traffic, having too many “invited conflicts” at crosswalks and intersections, never being comfortable and attractive, and being “sketchy” to bike around Cost Plus Plaza.

The S-curve along ORH at the Corte Madera Creek Bridge Southern touchdown was identified by one attendee and nearby resident as being particularly dangerous for cyclists and pedestrians due to the limited visibility at the curves. The attendee observed that many drivers unfamiliar with the area often end up there after believing it would provide a parallel connection to US 101 N.

Connection Through Private Property

Several attendees indicated they are willing to live with an east-west connection that potentially requires compromises on design priorities, such as user experience and visibility, to get to the railroad ROW. As one attendee stated, “A compromise of 260 feet, that is not ideal, is much better than losing the trail [along the railroad ROW],” and that there are fewer cars on the S-curve than at the freeway ramps and ORH intersections. One attendee and resident of the RV park pointed out that the rear of her lot, adjacent to the Booth and Little Roofing property, will flood, and that this should be considered by the project team, since one alternative connection which is being studied would pass through there.

Protection of Environmental Resources

One attendee, Barbara Salzman, stated that the environmental constraints on the project need to be made completely clear to the public, as a pathway along the railroad ROW would impact bird habitat. She added that a project goal shouldn't merely seek to mitigate environmental impacts, but rather avoid them. The project team shared that a preliminary environmental constraints study was conducted for the project which notes important species in the area, and which will be made publically accessible on the project website. Ms. Salzman expressed concern that a pathway along the railroad ROW would go into the marsh. The team clarified that based on a preliminary environmental constraints study, the path is unlikely to intersect the marsh and that the design will also consider access control measures to protect sensitive areas.

New Bridge Across Corte Madera Creek

In combination with the lasting vision of using the railroad ROW for the Southern Segment project, there appeared to be general agreement among attendees that a new bridge should still be built across Corte Madera Creek. Mayor Furst, commenting on the costs of implementing a new bridge, stated that when the Central Marin Ferry Connector bridge was designed, it left room for a new bridge to be connected to it in the future, but that current regulatory and cost hurdles preclude that option at this time.

Public Outreach and Engagement

Several attendees, particularly residents from the Marin Park mobile and RV communities, stated that they have not been adequately engaged and informed about the project and process. One resident reported that they inadvertently learned about the public meeting, and not from the property owner. The residents stated that while they are not opposed to the railroad ROW pathway, nor to strangers using the pathway, they are the ones currently using it the most, so they would like to be involved in the process and for their access to the pathway to remain. One attendee observed that most people attending the meeting seemed to be from the bicycle community and that "bikers are mainly influencing the decision," and encouraged the project team to solicit more input from non-bikers and the wider community.

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

Q: Is the bridge across the creek off the table? How did that happen?

A: *Based on permitting challenges and high cost estimates, building a new bridge across the creek is currently not being considered as an option. The 2007 TAM study confirmed the findings of the 2004 Larkspur study and estimated that the new bridge option would cost approximately \$25M (See 2007 TAM Central Marin Ferry Connection Feasibility Memorandum, Table 1). Based on the Caltrans Quarterly Bridge Cost Index, the \$25M estimate in 2007 escalated to 2016 dollars would be approximately \$44.8M. At the direction of the Metropolitan Transportation Commission, TAM diverted \$20M from the Greenbrae Interchange Improvement Project to the North-South Greenway Gap Closure Project and was directed by the MTC to use the NB 101 off-ramp for the new bike/ped connection across Corte Madera Creek.*

Q: What is the cost of the project?

A: An alternative along ORH is one-third as long as an alternative along the railroad ROW, and the construction cost is somewhat proportional to length; however, design and environmental costs are comparable for both options. We anticipate that as long as amenities are kept to a minimum, either alternative can be completed within budget. This budget includes ROW acquisition costs.

Q: How wide will the pathway be?

A: Minimum width requirements (e.g., Caltrans Highway Design Manual Chapter 1000) state that a two-way Class I pathway shall be 8 feet wide, with 2-foot shoulders provided on either side. However, opportunities for a wider pathway will be explored to be consistent with current best practices that recommend: "Where heavy bicycle volumes are anticipated and/or significant pedestrian traffic is expected, the paved width of a two-way bike path should be greater than 10 feet, preferably 12 feet or more" (Caltrans Highway Design Manual, p. 1000-5).

Q: Will private property be acquired through eminent domain?

A: Eminent domain is not being considered at this time.

Q: What are the next steps?

A: The project team will continue preliminary engineering, work with stakeholders (i.e., community members, agencies, and cities), work with property owners to assess ROW challenges, begin environmental document processes, assess the environmental impacts of the alternatives, meet with the public in late January 2018 to review the project status and alternatives assessments.