

County of San Luis Obispo



TO: Parks and Recreation Commission

FROM: General Services Agency- Parks, Elizabeth Kavanaugh
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DATE: 5/22/2014

SUBJECT: Chorro Valley Trail Feasibility Study

RECOMMENDATION

Review the Chorro Valley Trail Feasibility Study and support San Luis Obispo Council of Government's Board adoption of the Feasibility Study.

Discussion:

The San Luis Obispo Council of Government (SLOCOG) has received grant funding for, and therefore taken the lead of, the Chorro Valley Trail feasibility study while working closely with County Parks and the cities of Morro Bay and San Luis Obispo. This study is intended to assess the feasibility of a class I trail for bicyclists and pedestrians through an approximately 12-mile corridor between the cities of San Luis Obispo and Morro Bay. This trail would traverse Highway 1 which is designated a Scenic Byway, providing connections to key points such as California Polytechnic State University San Luis Obispo, Camp San Luis Obispo, Cuesta College, and El Chorro Regional Park. It would connect with existing class I or class II bikeways in the cities to the north and south. The proposed trail would be consistent with the County's Parks and Recreation Element, Estero Area Plan, the County Bikeways Plan, and the Scenic Byway Corridor Plan.

Bicyclists currently ride on the shoulder of Highway 1 along this route. The Chorro Valley Trail would generally improve safety conditions for cyclists by enabling them to ride off of Highway 1, thereby reducing the risk of collisions between cyclists and high-speed motorized vehicles, as evidenced by the history of fatal and nonfatal collisions between cyclists and motorists in this segment of Highway 1.

The Chorro Valley Trail Study focuses on a study area bounded by Highland Drive, in San Luis Obispo, to Quintana Road, in Morro Bay. These boundaries adjoin existing bikeways in the cities of San Luis Obispo and Morro Bay. The contiguous Trail Alignment maps (Exhibit A), show the location of the potential trail alignments. The red green and blue lines mark the alignments that are proposed, while the gray alignments are those that were reviewed but rejected.

This trail alignment is unique in that the most of the land needed to create this trail is owned by public agencies. SLOCOG and/or County staff has had discussions with all land holders public or private along the proposed alignments. The state owns Cal Poly, Camp San Luis, the California Men's Colony, Cuesta College, Highway 1 right-of way, and the land north west of Cuesta College. The County owns the land around Kanas Ave and El Chorro Regional Park. There are a few privately held parcels near Morro Bay that are mostly being used for grazing. The fact that most of the trail alignment is held by public agencies is a mixed blessing. For example, Camp San Luis and Cuesta College are excited about this project and open to providing a trail easement at this time. Cal Poly, the rancher near Morro Bay and the California Men's Colony are not.

The public however, is very excited about this project. Two public workshops and one open house have been conducted on this trail project. Most were well attended and most comments were positive and in anticipation of the trail.

Environmental constraints are localized and vary in severity from segment to segment. Where trail alignments cross or abut agricultural lands owned by Cal Poly and private interests, conflicts could arise with agricultural operations, and one agriculture site is under Williamson Act contract. Site-specific design in certain places would be necessary to avoid conflicts with utility infrastructure. In addition, this area is home to some protected endangered species and preventing sedimentation in the areas creeks will be important. Preliminary review of the impacts appears to be mitigatable.

Next Steps

On June 3, 2014, the SLOCOG Board will hear and potentially approved the Chorro Valley Trail Feasibility Study including the: Existing Conditions, Opportunities and Constraints Report (Exhibit A), Financial Feasibility and Implementation Plan (Exhibit B) and Design and Operating Guidelines (Exhibit C). After adoption of the feasibility study, San Luis Obispo County Parks will be the lead agency responsible for eventually developing a master plan, including environmental review, for the trail.

This Feasibility Study provides a relatively general evaluation and analysis of potential trail alignments within Chorro Valley. Construction of actual trail projects will require additional site-specific planning, environmental review, and design development, with a number of subsequent steps. The actual next steps for any specific project will vary in terms of level of analysis, and the time involved completing them. The following typical steps are required for construction of a public trail project requiring detailed planning, design, environmental review, easement acquisition, and project permitting prior to construction:

- Identification of individual projects and programming funds for project implementation.
- Continuing informal discussions of easement acquisition and right-of-way with stakeholders, leading to obtaining Agreements in Principal or Memorandums of Understanding for right-of-way as individual projects or phases move forward towards construction.
- Securing funds for preliminary design and for trail construction (in Phases) as well as for needed mitigation projects such as fish passage barrier removal, roadway soil erosion control and stream and wetlands restoration.
- Preparation of a follow up Preliminary Engineering Design, with greater focus on phases identified for initial design and construction.
- Completion of the required environmental review document(s) (CEQA/NEPA)- Initially a Program Environmental Document on the Preliminary Engineering Design, with a focus on identified first priority phases, and with subsequent follow up environmental review of later phases.
- Negotiation and completion of potential right-of-way (ROW), including easements, and trail use or licensing agreements.
- Preparation of detailed engineering design plans and construction documents.
- Obtaining regulatory permit approvals.
- Publically bidding the project's Construction Plans.
- Construction, including construction oversight of the approved plans by a qualified Contractor to ensure that the project plans, along with all of the CEQA/NEPA mitigation measures and all permit conditions, are followed and implemented as approved.

County Parks is working with SLOCOG to identify future funding for this trail and with the County Agricultural Department and Environmental Department to determine level of environmental review needed for this project to move forward.

The San Luis Obispo County Trails Advisory Council supports the adoption of the Chorro Valley Feasibility Study.

Other Agency Involvement:

County Public Works has reviewed this study

Financial Considerations:

N/A

ATTACHMENTS

Exhibit A- Draft Chorro Valley Trail Feasibility Study

Exhibit B- Financial Feasibility and Implementation Plan.

Exhibit C- Design and Operating Guidelines