



Santa Cruz County Regional Transportation Commission **Monterey Bay Sanctuary Scenic Trail Network**

Fact Sheet
November 2009

Background

Interest in constructing a network of trails that takes advantage of the magnificent Pacific coastline, the Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary and the surrounding environment in Santa Cruz County has



been steadily growing over the past decade. A variety of multi-use trail projects such as the Wilder Ranch Pathway in Santa Cruz and the Watsonville Wetlands Trail Network have recently been built by local jurisdictions. Two regional efforts are key to the development of such a continuous network of trails. First is to acquire the Santa Cruz Branch Rail Line right-of-way as a preliminary step towards creating an accessible trail for bicyclists and walkers along portions of the 32 mile rail line. Second is securing additional funding, conducting a Master Planning process and finally, constructing a Monterey Bay Sanctuary Scenic Trail Network. These efforts will ultimately result in a network of continuous multi-use recreational, interpretive and transportation pathways spanning the Monterey Bay that will also be an important piece of the 1,300 mile statewide California Coastal Trail.

Evolution of the Monterey Bay Sanctuary Scenic Trail (MBSST) Network

Over the span of several years, related local coastal trail projects have been proposed, funded and/or constructed. These include the Wilder Ranch Bicycle and Pedestrian Path, the Watsonville Slough Trails, the Rail/Trail, and the Monterey Bay Sanctuary Scenic Trail. All these projects share the goal of developing accessible bicycle and pedestrian trail facilities on or near the coast. For improved planning, administration, coordination with state and federal entities, improved connectivity to existing facilities, and to benefit from the economies of scale, the Monterey Bay Sanctuary Scenic Trail (MBSST) Network was envisioned.

Monterey Bay Sanctuary Scenic Trail Network

Initially conceived by the Santa Cruz County Sanctuary Interagency Task Force, and championed by Congressman Sam Farr, the Monterey Bay Sanctuary Scenic Trail (MBSST) Network will be a multi-use system of bicycle and pedestrian facilities that allows the public to enjoy and experience the Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary from the vantage point of the shoreline. Trail markers and interpretive exhibits that will enhance the trail experience from Lovers Point in Monterey County to the San Mateo/Santa Cruz County line and that will unify the trail as it passes through several jurisdictions have already been designed. Installation of the first 9 MBSST exhibits has already been completed.

Potential Trail Alignments

If the RTC is successful in its rail line acquisition efforts, part of the network may be built within the rail line right-of-way. The Santa Cruz Branch Rail Line right-of-way extends 31.8 miles from Davenport to Watsonville Junction (Pajaro) in Monterey County. Union Pacific currently runs three freight round trips per week on the branch line. Any trail segments on the rail line right-of-way will be constructed adjacent to (not in place of) the rail line, so that freight service may continue and so as not to preclude potential future passenger rail service.



Master Planning for the MBSST Network

For efficiency and cost effectiveness, RTC staff is working on a comprehensive Master Planning process that will include: developing goals and objectives; identifying and assessing possible segments; setting design options; soliciting and incorporating input from interested parties and the community at large; preparing cost estimates for segments; and conducting environmental analysis of the Plan. Part of the process will also be to inventory existing trail segments and assemble all previous work done by a variety of entities. In addition to identifying new trails, the MBSST Network is intended to link together (and upgrade where needed) trail segments that already exist and to fill in gaps in the existing trail system.



The project will involve significant public outreach. At the conclusion of the process, the RTC will identify a future network of trails that meets the needs of different users. Rather than a single route, this network of both “leisurely” and “express” routes will appeal to both commuters and recreational users alike as well as to people with various levels of physical ability. The process will identify both the opportunities and constraints of various segment alternatives taking into account considerations such as accessibility, managing traffic on mixed use trails, environmental constraints, and agricultural impacts. The result will be a list of short and long term projects to be constructed by the jurisdictions they pass through as additional funding becomes available. Consultant proposals were solicited for a Master Plan and Environmental Review in the fall of 2008. After careful review and interviews, a preferred consultant was identified. The consultant was recommended to the RTC in the Spring of 2009 and the RTC approved awarding a contract at that time.

Project Cost

A rough cost estimate to construct the Monterey Bay Sanctuary Scenic Trail (MBSST) Network is one million dollars per mile, assuming no right of way acquisition costs and/or significant environmental constraints. Depending on the requirements, characteristics and constraints of individual segments the cost may be significantly higher. The length of trail segments to be developed will be determined as part of the MBSST Network Master Planning process.

Funding

To date, over \$6 Million has been secured for the Monterey Bay Sanctuary Scenic Trail (MBSST) Network project in Santa Cruz County. Of that amount, approximately \$4 Million has been secured through federal appropriations and earmarks thanks to Congressman Sam Farr.

Public Input

As always, the Santa Cruz County Regional Transportation Commission will make public input an integral part of development of the MBSST Network. An extensive public outreach program will be included as part of the development of the Master Plan.

Timeline of Activities

The approximate timeline for completion of the MBSST Network Project is 5 to 10 years:

Purchase Rail Right-of-Way	2009
Master Plan/Environmental Screening/Public Input	2009-2010
Obtain Funding	Ongoing
Detailed Design	1 to 2 years
Construction	2 to 6 years, beginning 2011

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