

Introduction

The Carquinez Strait Scenic Loop Trail (CSSLT) Gap Closure Study is a collaboration between Contra Costa County, the National Parks Service Rivers, Trails and Conservation Assistance Program, the City of Benicia, the Great California Delta Trail, San Francisco Bay Trail, San Francisco Water Trail and the Bay Area Ridge Trail. Project staff propose to hire a consultant to study opportunities and constraints to closing high-priority segments of 18 miles of trail gaps along the CSSLT. The study will be phased into three tasks:

1) Identify any “fatal flaws” related to closing existing identified gaps with bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure. Fatal flaws may include issues such as right-of-way, physical constraints, or financial constraints related to potential alignments. Staff will also consider ADA compliance and sea level rise forecasts. Bay Trail staff (MTC) and Ridge Trail have identified ten existing gaps throughout the CSSLT in the Contra Costa and Solano County sides of the loop. Pending the results of the fatal flaw analysis, the scope of the study will continue to either task 2A or 2B:

2A) Use the information gathered in the fatal flaw analysis to narrow the study’s focus to one or two (depending on task 1 results) high priority trail gaps in greater detail. With a better understanding of the opportunities and constraints related to these gaps, project partners will be able to prepare alignment alternatives and cost estimates needed to apply for project implementation funding.

2B) If the fatal flaw analysis identifies segments of the CSSLT trail alignment that may not be feasible or practical, task 2B includes a revisited study of potential trail alignments in order to identify an improved preferred alignment, focused upon developing a route with greater value and a more expeditious path towards implementation. This task may also include consideration of an interim option or an option for reduced design standard at appropriate locations where a fully ADA compliant trail may be highly constrained.

3) The final task will involve the preparation of outreach materials and an outreach plan to increase awareness about the study and to pursue funding for implementation or further study. Depending on the proposals for this effort, the publications produced from this effort may be restricted to those maps and exhibits prepared by the partner agencies.

Funding request, study schedule, environmental impact

Project partners kindly request \$133,000 to fund this study. If awarded the grant, work would likely begin in August 2019 (three months needed to complete the RFP process) and will be completed by December 31, 2020. We roughly estimate using 183 hours of staff time to implement the study, costing around \$27,900. Per Section 15306 “Information Collection” in Chapter 3 of the CEQA Guidelines,¹ this study is exempt from CEQA.

¹ <http://resources.ca.gov/ceqa/guidelines/art19.html>

Rationale

The 2005 San Francisco Bay Trail Project Gap Analysis Study and 2018 maps of the CSSLT identify ten gaps in the CSSLT. Five are located at or near the North and South entrances of two interstate bridges: the Al Zampa Carquinez Bridge and the Benicia-Martinez Bridge (Interstate 680). These gaps discourage trail users from traveling across CSSLT bridges and from experiencing the full extent of the CSSLT. Closing gaps on Ridge Trail segments would connect trail users to areas such as Crockett Hills Regional Park, Fernandez Ranch, Pinole Valley Watershed, Franklin Ridge Ranches, Mount Wanda, the John Muir National Historic Site and Carquinez Strait Regional Shoreline and beyond. Closing trail gaps will also increase economic activity by encouraging more users to access the five historic downtown areas along the CSSLT: Benicia, Martinez, Port Costa, Crockett, and Vallejo. Promoting trail users' access to these sites increase their exposure to local restaurants, cafes, and other retail sites, as well as shoreline destinations such as the Benicia State Recreation Area, Radke Martinez Regional Shoreline Park, and Carquinez Strait Regional Shoreline.

Implementing projects to close these gaps will create public health, economic, and social equity benefits. The 2005 The San Francisco Bay Trail Project Gap Analysis Study estimates that trail users will grow from 2.3 million annual users to 5.1 million annual users in 2026 due to increasing growth in population and tourism.² Safe and convenient connections to recreation will increase the number of trail users who would've otherwise driven to parts of the CSSLT, reducing GHG emissions and improving public health outcomes due to increased rates of exercise. The health benefits of parks³ and of bicycling and walking are well documented by researchers (Pucher and Buehler, 2010).⁴

Identifying bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure improvements in the CSSLT will also serve disadvantaged communities. The CSSLT passes through MTC-designated "Communities of Concern" Crockett and Martinez. Communities of Concern are census tracts with a majority share of ethnic minorities, and with certain percentages of low-income and rent-burdened households, and other indicators of poverty. In particular, improving the quality of non-motorized infrastructure around the CSSLT will improve traffic safety and mobility outcomes for those who are walking, bicycling, or taking transit out of necessity.

Expected outcomes

Staff anticipate that this study will deliver three key outcomes or deliverables:

- 1) A high-level understanding of barriers to closing trail gaps throughout the CSSLT that will make future grant applications more efficient and successful
- 2) Analyses of one or two (depending on Phase 2 results) gap closure projects that will identify a preferred alternative and will position staff to apply for near-term grant funding opportunities
- 3) Actionable information with which staff can create a new graphic identity for the trail's wayfinding and informational signage and marketing materials

² <http://baytrail.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/Final-Gap-Analysis-Study-2005-09-15-reduced.pdf>

³ http://usahomepagewww.eastshorepark.org/HealthBenefitsReport_FINAL_010307.pdf

⁴ <https://ajph.aphapublications.org/doi/abs/10.2105/AJPH.2009.189324>