

Planning Process for the El Dorado Trail

All existing pertinent planning documents call for completion of a paved Class 1 bike/pedestrian trail in the SPTC corridor from Folsom to Placerville in their respective jurisdictions:

- 2020 El Dorado County Active Transportation Plan
- 2022 Sacramento County Active Transportation Plan
- 2022 SACOG Trail Network Action Plan
- 23 miles are yet to be paved. Narrow width and rugged terrain are constraints.
- The SPTC JPA, owner of the rail corridor, supports all three uses the entire length of the corridor - excursion rail, unpaved natural trail, and paved trail,
- **A planning process is needed to determine how all uses can fit in the rail corridor given the constraints. Failure to plan is a plan for failure.**
- According to experts, building a trail alongside the railroad track using conventional construction methods (replicating the cut and fill of the railroad track), would be prohibitively expensive because of the rough terrain, and therefore would not qualify for grant funding and would be impossible to build.
- Various alternative construction methods have been suggested and need to be evaluated:
 - 16 ft. railroad ties to construct a cantilever trail structure next to the railroad track.
 - Extending the shoulders of the railroad bed with fill.
 - Composite grid decking or rubber matting on, between, or next to the rails,
 - Packed sand between the rails and/or on the shoulders of the rail bed
 - Paving over the railroad track with rubber strips in the flangeways that compress under the weight of rail cars but not bikes or pedestrians so trains can still run.
- Parts of the unpaved natural trail have been paved over as paved trail construction has proceeded, displacing multiple user groups:
 - Mountain bikers
 - Equestrians – horses don't do well on pavement
 - Runners/hikers who prefer dirt to pavement, often for health reasons.
 - Construction methods mentioned above would prevent additional loss of unpaved trail.
- A 2015 study indicated that a continuous paved bike path from Folsom to Placerville would generate:
 - 800,000 uses per year
 - nearly \$12 million in annual economic benefit.
- Trails generate significant health benefits for users. Studies have shown that walking and hiking are the most popular exercise activities for people over 65, and that group's participation has doubled over the past decade.
- Proximity to trails increases property values and hence real estate tax revenue.
- Actual use and economic benefits could be even higher because of:
 - The recent surge in popularity of E bikes

- The potential to run shuttle buses carrying bikes and riders from Folsom to various points along the trail.
- Shuttle buses are very popular and successful in various places:
 - Mammoth Lakes - downtown up to Lake Mary, 5.5 miles with 1000 feet of elevation gain.
 - The buses have trailers and can carry 18 bikes, so people can ride back down the paved trail.
 - Buses run every half hour - two buses run continuously in peak season.
 - Often additional buses must be placed in service to handle demand.
 - Virginia Creeper Trail – 34 mile rail trail in a remote area of western Virginia.
 - 8 bike shops rent bikes and run shuttle vans in a county of only 50,000 people. One shop has a rental fleet of 200 bikes.
 - Route of the Hiawatha Trail – 15 mile rail trail in a remote area of Idaho
 - local ski resort operates shuttle buses and rents bikes.
 - 4 to 7 buses operating continuously seven days a week during the season, carrying an average of approximately 350 bikes and riders per day.
- The trails above are relatively far from population centers, while 2.5 million people are less than an hour from the El Dorado Trail with another 7.5 million 1 to 2.5 hours away.
 - **The tourism potential for a user-friendly trail is huge!!**
- Buses or vans with bike trailers could potentially be operated by bike shops, rafting companies, the Coloma Shuttle, or El Dorado Transit.
- Renting bikes and running shuttles could be a significant source of revenue for bike shops, which have been losing business to internet retailers.
- To attract tourists, an improved, mostly downhill trail with amenities is needed.
 - **We need a plan for how to accomplish that.**

Connections:

- East - connecting to the Pony Express Trail at Pacific House would potentially create a trail all the way to Lake Tahoe.
- West - connecting to paved trails in Folsom would create a paved trail route to the American River Bike trail and on to Old Sacramento, and down the Sacramento River Trail to Freeport, an 80 mile paved bike route, with branches to Granite Bay, Sloughhouse, Mather, Rio Linda/Elverta, and, once the Capitol SE Connector is completed, to Elk Grove.
- The Great California Delta Trail, currently in the planning stages, would connect the above trails to bike trails in the Bay Area, creating a cross-state trail network.

The Trail as a Living Museum

- The railroad corridor is an irreplaceable linear time capsule — converting it into an improved trail preserves the physical footprint of history rather than letting it decay or be demolished, giving future generations a tangible connection to the past.
- Interpretive signage, mile markers, and heritage stations along the trail can tell the story of the railroad's construction, its economic impact, and the communities it built — turning every walk or bike ride into an educational journey.
- The rail bed itself, including original ties, bridges, trestles, and cuts through the landscape, can be incorporated into trail design as authentic artifacts that no museum could replicate.

Honoring the Surrounding Area's Story

- A trail following the railroad path reconnects communities to the geographic and economic logic that shaped their towns, agriculture, and industries.
- Heritage panels and rest stops can highlight watershed crossings, former depots, agricultural lands, historical, and industrial sites that the railroad once served, creating a narrative arc across the entire region.
- The trail becomes a platform for local historical societies, schools, and cultural organizations to share stories that would otherwise be confined to archives — bringing regional history into everyday public life.

Recognizing Distinguished Historical Families

- Prominent families who financed, built, or were shaped by the railroad deserve permanent recognition — named trailheads, commemorative plaques, and dedicated heritage nodes ensure their legacies endure in a place of public pride rather than fading from memory.
- Acknowledging distinguished families by name along the trail creates a sense of community identity and continuity, reminding residents that today's infrastructure and prosperity rests on specific human contributions and sacrifices.
- Family histories tied to the railroad — from landowners who donated right-of-way to laborers who laid the tracks — reflect the full social fabric of the era and give descendants a meaningful place to connect with their roots.

The time is NOW

- Railroad infrastructure is actively deteriorating — every year of inaction means lost bridges, washouts, overgrown rights-of-way, and encroachment that permanently erases options. Converting now is an act of preservation, not just recreation.