



COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT AGENCY

TRANSPORTATION DIVISION

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Date: August 18, 2015

To: Board of Supervisors

From: Matthew D. Smeltzer, Deputy Director, Engineering *MDS*

Subject: Agenda Item 15-0911 Staff Report

Discussion/Background:

On July 11, 2014, the Community Development Agency, Transportation Division (Transportation) received funding through the Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality (CMAQ) Improvement Program, administered through the El Dorado County Transportation Commission, to proceed with environmental and design work to construct a Class I bike path from Missouri Flat Road to El Dorado Road as part of the El Dorado Trail. On September 17, 2014, Transportation received additional CMAQ funding to proceed with environmental and design work for a bike/pedestrian overcrossing at Missouri Flat Road to connect the proposed trail with the existing Class I trail from Missouri Flat Road to Forni Road. The total length of proposed Class I trail improvements between both Projects is approximately 2.5 miles.

Both Projects will be located entirely within the Sacramento Placerville Transportation Corridor-Joint Powers Authority (SPTC-JPA) right of way. The Projects, as part of the extension of the Class I El Dorado Trail system, are recognized as "Tier 1" projects in both the 2010 El Dorado County Bicycle Transportation Plan and the 2012 El Dorado County Parks and Trails Master Plan. Both Projects are also included in the Community Development Agency's 2015 Capital Improvement Program, as approved by the Board on June 16, 2015.

Transportation staff (staff) has conducted a preliminary evaluation of potential trail alignments and their respective estimated costs. This analysis has considered existing terrain, drainage improvement needs, and potential environmental impacts to oak tree woodlands, wetlands, and aquatic habitats. From this evaluation, staff has characterized the Project area into two general segments:

- *Segment 1 - Missouri Flat Road to Blanchard Road:* This section includes a high density of native oak trees, and the existing topography greatly limits the trail options at several locations. Additional earthwork and rock excavation would be required where previous slope cuts were made to accommodate the railway. A number of residences also exist at close proximity to the SPTC-JPA right of way and may be affected by a limited clearance from the proposed trail.
- *Segment 2 - Blanchard Road to El Dorado Road:* This section contains more open areas that would require less earthwork to accommodate the proposed trail. An existing service road that runs parallel on the south side of the railway could be utilized for the proposed trail, greatly reducing environmental impacts. This section also includes the proposed site of the Railroad Park.

Over the past several years, the Board has been asked to consider a number of proposed uses and concepts for the SPTC-JPA corridor. On March 28, 2011, the Board adopted a map of the SPTC-JPA establishing priority uses. The rail section from South Shingle Road to Missouri Flat Road was prioritized for joint multi-use activities, including excursion rail. As part of this action, and to facilitate trail development, the Board requested the other SPTC-JPA member agencies consider removal of a 16+ mile section of rail from the county line to Shingle Springs. This request was denied by the other SPTC-JPA agencies, citing concerns of protecting the continuity of the rail corridor.

Alternatives Analysis:

Staff has identified the following trail alignment options in order to proceed with environmental and design work:

- *Option A: Construct Class I trail adjacent to existing rails for entire Project length (Segments 1 and 2)*

This option would protect all existing rails in place, constructing the Class I trail adjacent to the railway. This option would result in a greater amount of environmental impacts and earthwork, affecting approximately 7 acres total of SPTC-JPA corridor land. The total estimated Option A trail Project cost (not including the pedestrian overcrossing) is \$4.5 million.

- *Option B: Construct Class I trail on existing railbed for Segment 1 and adjacent to existing rails for Segment 2*

This option would utilize the existing railbed within Segment 1, and retain the existing rails within Segment 2. This option would protect the existing rails for 1.07 miles of the 2.49-mile Project length. This option would result in a reduced amount of environmental impacts and earthwork, only affecting approximately 2.5 acres total of SPTC-JPA corridor land. The total estimated Option B trail Project cost (not including the pedestrian overcrossing) is \$1.8 million.

A further analysis of Option A vs. Option B is as follows:

- The anticipated construction costs for Option A and B are \$4.5 million and \$1.8 million, respectively. A lower construction cost results in a higher overall project cost-effectiveness, making the Project(s) more competitive in obtaining grant funding for construction. For this reason, Option B is preferred.
- Grants typically require an 11.47% local match. Given the estimated construction costs, Option B would result in a cost savings of approximately \$300,000 in County matching funds over Option A. For this reason, Option B is preferred.
- The overall Project footprints for Option A and B are 7 acres and 2.5 acres, respectively. A smaller Project footprint will reduce the environmental impacts of the Project, including tree and vegetation removal. For this reason, Option B is preferred.
- The natural trail, currently utilized by many trail users is an important feature of the existing corridor. Option A will replace approximately 70% of the natural trail with the Class I bike path within the Project limits. Option B will preserve approximately 70% of the natural trail within the Project limits; the remaining 30% would be located adjacent to the Class I bike path. For this reason, Option B is preferred.
- Option A will require approximately 1200 linear feet of retaining wall adjacent to the rail embankment at areas where the corridor width is narrow. This wall would need to be constructed in accordance with Federal Railroad Administration standards, and could become very costly and complex in nature, requiring significant temporary shoring. This retaining wall is not necessary for Option B. For this reason, Option B is preferred.
- Option A will require a minimum of 3 trail/rail at-grade crossings, whereas Option B will require 1 crossing. It is desirable to limit such crossings, as they have safety implications and involve increased maintenance costs. For this reason, Option B is preferred.
- Option A will have a greater cumulative impact to the value of adjacent properties due to the proximity of the Class I trail and the need for temporary and permanent easements. Option B will minimize these impacts and reduce the number of properties affected. For this reason, Option B is preferred.

The primary advantage to Option A is the preservation of the entire 2.49 miles of rail within the Project limits. This rail line, as part of the former Southern Pacific Railroad, was previously evaluated for historical significance in preparation of the *Initial Study/Mitigated Negative Declaration* for Transportation's *El Dorado Trail Improvement Project from Forni Road to Missouri Flat Road*. From that evaluation, it was determined that the existing railroad alignment is not eligible for the National Register of Historic Places. Nevertheless, the remaining abandoned railroad line is viewed by some to have local historical value. An additional benefit to preservation of the rails is the possibility of extending future excursion rail to Missouri Flat Road, as Option B would terminate the rail near Blanchard Road.

Staff Recommendation:

On June 18, 2015, staff presented this item to the El Dorado County Parks and Recreation Commission (Commission), requesting a recommendation to the Board. The Commission voted 4-0 in favor of Option A. Staff has considered both alignment options and respectfully recommends the Board consider Option B as it provides the greatest multi-use benefit to the public for the lowest cost. In addition, Option B: (1) preserves the existing rails throughout the proposed Railroad Park site, allowing for future excursion trail use, as well as Railroad Park development; and (2) maintains a continuous rail facility from the county line to Blanchard Road.

In discussion with County Counsel and SPTC-JPA CEO John Segerdell, staff has determined the removal of 1.42 miles of rail in Segment 1 would not constitute an abandonment leading to reversion due to the "railbanking" provisions of the National Trails System Act [16 USC § 1247(d)] (Act), since the corridor would remain preserved for the future reactivation of rail service. Removal of the proposed segment of rails in order to construct the proposed Class I bike path facility, per Option B, is consistent with the purpose of said Act in that it: (1) preserves established railroad rights-of-way for future rail use; and (2) encourages energy efficient transportation use while allowing the rail corridor to be used for interim trail purposes.

Based on Transportation's topographical survey of the 2.5 mile Project length, staff recognizes the El Dorado townsite off Oriental Street as best suited for the Railroad Park, as is currently proposed. Existing topographical features, corridor width, and vehicular access greatly limit the amount of land available for uses such as excursion rail maintenance yards and/or terminals eastward beyond the proposed Railroad Park site. In an effort to facilitate the development of the Railroad Park and improve its access from the town of El Dorado, Transportation will consider pursuing grant opportunities to construct a pedestrian bridge adjacent to the Oriental Street bridge, as well as constructing pedestrian improvements along Oriental Street.

The 5.8 miles of track from the Shingle Springs Depot to the El Dorado Station provide an opportunity for experiencing living history between the two sites. Option B allows for the multi-use of railroad, bicycles, mountain bikes, pedestrians, hikers, and equestrians in a feasible and affordable Project that can result in a great County tourism and recreational facility, including a Class I bike path, natural trail, and railroad leading to a historic town and Railroad Park. For these reasons, staff recommends planning and development efforts continue to focus on the El Dorado site for the proposed Railroad Park and that the Board consider the rail segment from Shingle Springs to El Dorado as the most appropriate segment for future excursion rail.

Summary:

The following options are available for the Board to consider today:

- 1) Direct staff to continue with environmental and design work with Option B as recommended by staff. Total estimated trail Project cost (not including pedestrian overcrossing) is \$1.8 million.
- 2) Direct staff to continue with environmental and design work with Option A. Total estimated trail Project cost (not including pedestrian overcrossing) is \$4.5 million.
- 3) Select a “no project” alternative. Transportation will request the project grant be cancelled and funding de-programmed.

I can be reached at extension 5912 should you have any questions.