

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation
September 25, 2008

ARCATA COASTAL RAIL WITH TRAIL

File No. 08-030-01
Project Manager: Su Corbaley

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Authorization to disburse up to \$1,065,000 to the City of Arcata to prepare final designs, complete environmental review, and obtain permits for a 3.8-mile section of the Coastal Trail from the northern end of Arcata south to Bracut Marsh on Humboldt Bay.

LOCATION: Arcata, Humboldt County (Exhibit 1)

PROGRAM CATEGORY: Public Access

EXHIBITS

Exhibit 1: [Project Location and Site Map](#)

Exhibit 2: [Proposed Trail Segments](#)

Exhibit 3: [USFWS and NCRA Letters of Cooperation](#)

Exhibit 4: [Project Letters](#)

RESOLUTION AND FINDINGS:

Staff recommends that the State Coastal Conservancy adopt the following resolution pursuant to Sections 31400 *et seq.* of the Public Resources Code:

“The State Coastal Conservancy hereby authorizes disbursement of an amount not to exceed one million sixty-five thousand dollars (\$1,065,000) to the City of Arcata to prepare final engineering designs and environmental documents, and obtain permits for the construction of 3.8 miles of coastal trail from northern Arcata through the city and extending south toward the City of Eureka ending at Bracut Marsh. Prior to disbursement of any funds, the Executive Officer shall approve in writing a work plan, budget and schedule, and any contractors to be employed in these tasks.”

Staff further recommends that the Conservancy adopt the following findings:

“Based on the accompanying staff report and attached exhibits, the State Coastal Conservancy hereby finds that:

1. The proposed Arcata Coastal Rail with Trail Project is consistent with Chapter 9 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code.
 2. The proposed project is consistent with the Project Selection Criteria and Guidelines adopted by the Conservancy on September 20, 2007.
 3. The proposed project will serve greater than local needs.”
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PROJECT SUMMARY:

The proposed authorization would enable the City of Arcata (“the City”) to complete planning, engineering design and permitting for 3.8 miles of coastal trail in and around the City. 2.8 miles of the proposed trail lie within the city limits, and 1.0 mile of trail is along Humboldt Bay from the City’s southern limit to the Highway 101 - Bracut intersection along the west side of the Highway 101 corridor. The City has agreed to undertake the planning for the 1.0 mile located outside its city limits because of the proximity to the City trail, and the connectivity it will provide to future south-leading trail segments. Where possible, the City will link the new rail corridor trail sections with another 1.25 miles of existing trail segments within City parks/greenways, for a total of approximately 5 miles of continuous trail.

The Arcata Coastal Rail with Trail Project was initially reviewed through the recent *Humboldt Bay Trail Feasibility Study: Eureka to Arcata 2007*, a plan funded by the Humboldt County Association of Governments (“HCAOG”), in which Conservancy staff participated. While the study identified the possibility of the trail, and raised public awareness and enthusiasm for such a trail, the scope of work did not include preparing final designs or exact trail-bed alignments for the trail corridor. Therefore additional design and review is necessary, as discussed below, to determine the exact trail alignment within the anticipated route, identify permitting constraints and complete engineering design for the entire trail.

With the proposed Conservancy funding, the City would complete the following tasks:

- environmental review, special status species surveys, topographic surveys and wetland delineation
- public outreach and meetings
- preparation of detailed topographic maps overlain with special status species and wetland details
- final route alignment based on environmental review
- detailed engineering studies including soil analysis, and structural and materials evaluations for the bridges at Gannon Slough and Jacoby Creek (totaling 255 feet), and, if necessary as an alternate route, the bridge at Butcher’s slough (50 feet)
- detailed engineering designs
- project permitting (consultations with agencies, application packages and revisions)
- draft bid documents for construction
- execution of a lease agreement with the North Coast Rail Authority (“NCRA”).

Much of the anticipated trail route would lie within the NCRA railroad right of way, and the NCRA’s support for the proposed trail is therefore a vital component of the process. The NCRA

has provided a letter (Exhibit 3) indicating its interest and willingness to participate in the project. The trail must be planned to accommodate both rail and trail within the right-of-way. Preliminary assessment indicates that there are few constraints to constructing the trail located within the city limits along this route, as there appears to be ample room to accommodate the trail alongside the rail line. However, the preliminary analysis conducted by HCAOG for the route south of Arcata to Bracut Marsh found that there may be several physical and biological constraints that could make the design for the southern portion more challenging. Those constraints include the presence of wetlands in some locations that could result in narrowing the available bed prism for a trail; potential impacts to avian wildlife present on the bay during certain times of the year; and the need to upgrade or replace two bridge crossings at Gannon Slough and Jacoby Creek. Due to these constraints, engineering design costs for the southern portion of the proposed project are proportionally higher than the northern portion.

Preliminary analysis indicates that the bridge at Gannon Slough could be used with some modifications to accommodate pedestrians and bicycles, but that the bridge at Jacoby Creek likely will require major upgrades, or possibly a separate pedestrian-bicycle bridge will need to be constructed. In order to answer these questions, each bridge will require full engineering evaluation, including soil analysis and in-depth structural analysis prior to final design. The wetland constraints may require limiting the trail-bed width at certain points, which would require a higher level of design to work within a narrow prism at certain points. Some of the trail alignment may be within U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (“USFWS”) property along the shore of Humboldt Bay, and the USFWS has also provided a letter of interest. Based on preliminary discussions with USFWS, it is anticipated that any impacts to avian wildlife may be avoided through trail design.

This trail was also identified in the *2004 Arcata Pedestrian and Bicycle Master Plan*, which recognized the trail’s potential to provide connectivity between recreational areas and the city, including Arcata parks, the local pool, tennis courts, the Arcata Plaza, the Arcata Marsh and Wildlife Sanctuary, and Humboldt Bay. The trail will serve several daily commuter destinations and will increase commuter connections outside the city to the north and east to the Hammond Coastal Trail or the Annie and Mary Trail, respectively. Therefore the project, when constructed, will help to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. The City’s 2007 Green House Gas Emission Inventory attributes one-third of the community’s overall annual emissions (or 34,465 tons of CO₂) to the transportation sector, making transportation changes the primary target of the City’s Greenhouse Gas Reduction Plan.

The City is amply qualified to undertake and complete the proposed project. In addition to maintaining approximately 16 miles of bike lanes and 20 miles of existing off-road trails, the City has designed and constructed three additional miles within the last four years, and has completed \$2 million of active transportation improvements over the last eight years. In recognition of Arcata’s commitment to accommodate bicycle transport, in May 2008 the City was awarded the Bronze Bicycle Friendly Community designation by the League of American Bicyclists. Also, City staff has previous rail design and construction experience from positions with State Parks, National Park Service and as trail construction contractors. It is anticipated that when the final design and environmental review is completed for the project in 2010, the City will be poised to immediately begin trail construction, and will seek funds from a number of sources, including the Conservancy, for construction of the trail.

It should be noted that as part of a larger effort in Humboldt County, other coastal trail planning

and implementation development projects are underway in the immediate Arcata vicinity. Redwood Community Action Agency (“RCAA”), a local leader in coordinating regional collaboration among agencies and interest groups to study, plan and construct trails throughout Humboldt County, is actively involved in trail analysis north and south of Arcata. In order to avoid redundant efforts or omissions in trail planning, the City will continue its close working relationship with RCAA to jointly review and compare all studies and recommendations for final trail routes to ensure they are positioned for contiguous and functional connections.

Project History: The Conservancy has worked for thirty years to assist with the development of the coastal trail in the Humboldt Bay area of Humboldt County. One of the earliest efforts began in 1978 with the initial planning for the Hammond Trail. After several final planning and construction phases, the most recent ending in November 2007, the Hammond Trail extends 5.5 miles from Clam Beach to the south end of the Mad River Bridge.

In 2001, the Conservancy granted funds to RCAA to plan and design the Annie and Mary Rail-Trail, a 6.8-mile trail from the town of Korbel to the east to Arcata. The proposed project would provide connectivity to the Annie and Mary Rail-Trail.

In 2002, the Conservancy granted funds to RCAA for an analysis of 11 potential trail routes to connect the south end of the Hammond Trail to the city of Arcata and to prepare the “Hammond Coastal Trail, Hammond Trail South Implementation Strategy Report”, which identified two priority routes that would connect (via City roads/walkways) to the proposed trail route.

Since 2006, Conservancy staff has participated in a regional planning effort organized by HCAOG to engage stakeholder interest groups to evaluate the need, feasibility and potential alignment of a multi-modal transportation trail between, and into, the cities of Arcata and Eureka. The product of that effort was the *Humboldt Bay Trail Feasibility Study: Eureka to Arcata 2007*, discussed above, which suggests that a trail along the rail corridor between the City and Eureka and connecting to trails in the City would be feasible, based on preliminary analysis.

PROJECT FINANCING:

Coastal Conservancy	\$1,065,000
City of Arcata	<u>82,000</u>
Total Project Cost	\$1,147,000

The anticipated funding source for this authorization would be Proposition 40, the “California Clean Water, Air, Safe Neighborhood Parks and Coastal Protection Fund.” The project is consistent with this funding source in that it would be carried out consistent with the Conservancy’s enabling legislation, specifically with regard to public access and the development of land and water resources along the coast. The project is also consistent with the funding source in that it includes matching funds. Arcata continues to seek other funds to increase its match for the proposed project. It is anticipated that the project will be highly competitive for construction grant funding from a variety of sources.

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S ENABLING LEGISLATION:

The proposed project would be undertaken pursuant to Chapter 9 (Sections 31400 *et seq.*) of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code. Section 31400 states the Legislature's intent that the Conservancy have a principal role in the implementation of a system of public accessways to and along the state's coastline. The goal of the proposed project is to design a trail within and adjacent to the city of Arcata that will connect to current and future trail segments extending south and north of the city. The proposed funding authorization is thus consistent with §31400.

Section 31400.1 allows the Conservancy to award grants to public agencies to develop land for public access purposes to and along the coast where the accessway will serve more than local public needs. Humboldt County is a destination for visitors from around the country. Therefore the proposed project will serve more than local needs and is thus consistent with this section.

Section 31400.2 allows the Conservancy to provide up to the total cost of the initial development of public accessways by any public agency. The Conservancy will pay most of the project cost, with the City of Arcata providing the remainder. It is expected that the City will seek funds from a number of sources, including the Conservancy, for project construction.

Section 31400.3 allows the Conservancy to aid local agencies in establishing a system of public coastal accessways. The City of Arcata, a local agency with jurisdiction to plan, construct and maintain the trails, will carry out the proposed project. The proposed thus is consistent with the requirement of §31400.3

The proposed project is also consistent with §31408(a), which directs the Conservancy to coordinate the development of the California Coastal Trail, and §31409, which authorizes the Conservancy to award grants and provide assistance to establish and expand inland trail systems that may be linked to the California Coastal Trail. The northern section of this trail is designed to provide connectivity through Arcata to the Hammond Coastal Trail and inland to the Annie and Mary Rail-Trail. The southern section of the trail will bring trail users to and south along Humboldt Bay, providing access to the bay front.

The proposed project is also consistent with Section 31111 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code, which allows the Conservancy to award grants to public agencies to undertake plans and feasibility studies. The City of Arcata, a public agency with jurisdiction to undertake feasibility review and design studies, will prepare the final planning documents for the 3.8 miles of trail.

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S STRATEGIC PLAN GOAL(S) & OBJECTIVE(S):

Consistent with **Goal 1, Objective C** of the Conservancy's Strategic Plan, the proposed project will result in the design of approximately 3.8 miles of trail within public ownership.

Consistent with **Goal 1, Objective E** of the Conservancy's Strategic Plan, the proposed project will result in the design of 3.8 miles of regional trail that connects with inland trail routes.

**CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S
PROJECT SELECTION CRITERIA & GUIDELINES:**

The proposed project is consistent with the Conservancy's Project Selection Criteria and Guidelines adopted January 24, 2001, in the following respects:

Required Criteria

1. **Promotion of the Conservancy's statutory programs and purposes:** See the "Consistency with Conservancy's Enabling Legislation" section above.
2. **Consistency with purposes of the funding source:** See the "Project Financing" section above.
3. **Support of the public:** This project has broad public support and is endorsed by Congressman Mike Thompson, Senator Patricia Wiggins, Assemblymember Patty Berg, and individual members of the public. See letters of support in Exhibit 4.
4. **Location:** The project would be in the City of Arcata in County of Humboldt. The proposed project would improve public access to resources within the coastal zone by providing a connection to two other trails: the future Annie and Mary Trail to bring visitors to the coast, and the completed Hammond Trail along the coast.
5. **Need:** With the recent completion of the Hammond Trail connection at Widow White Creek in McKinleyville, more individuals are using alternate transportation to commute south to Arcata, and there is a dramatic increase of recreation users of the entire length of the Hammond Trail. The proposed project is needed to accommodate the increase in trail use in the region to provide safe and enjoyable experiences and alternatives to motorized transportation.
6. **Greater-than-local interest:** Humboldt County, with its beautiful scenery of vast beaches and panoramic bluffs and mountains, is a recreational destination for many visitors from within the State and the nation, particularly given its proximity to several State and National parks and recreation areas (*e.g.*, Humboldt Redwoods State Park, Redwood National Park). Developing a trail within Arcata that connects inland and south along the bay will provide superior recreational opportunities to visitors to the area. Based on recent local trail surveys, the City estimates that 200-250 Arcata residents and 50-70 non-residents will use the trail daily. School groups, coastal trail travelers and summer activities will increase trail use during the summer months.

Additional Criteria

11. **Innovation:** This project provides a unique opportunity to develop a trail along an unused railroad corridor and connect pedestrian recreational opportunities along the immediate shore of Humboldt Bay. The bay provides stellar opportunities for wildlife viewing and interpretation.
12. **Readiness:** As discussed in the Project Summary section, the city of Arcata has the staff and resources available to undertake the activities to complete the proposed project.
13. **Realization of prior Conservancy goals:** The Conservancy has a long history of assisting with the development of the Coastal Trail and its spur trails in Humboldt County, and has for

more than two years participated in planning efforts to develop a trail from the Mad River Bridge, through Arcata, to Eureka. The Conservancy also previously funded the development of a feasibility study for the Annie and Mary Trail. The proposed project is consistent with the Conservancy report “Completing the California Coastal Trail” (2003) which includes a recommendation in Humboldt County to complete the extension of the Hammond Trail from the Mad River Bridge south, developing links to Arcata and Eureka.

15. **Cooperation:** The project will involve the cooperation of the NCRA, the USFWS, RCAA and the City to address special resource and land use needs and concerns.

CONSISTENCY WITH LOCAL COASTAL PROGRAM POLICIES:

The City’s General Plan, adopted by the City in 1987, and certified by the California Coastal Commission in 1988, is the Local Coastal Plan (“LCP”) for the City. The proposed project is consistent with the following policies of the LCP:

- Parks and Recreation Policy - Goal II A.3 which encourages adequate pedestrian, bicycle and bus transportation to all recreation facilities and programs
- Public Facilities Policy 2 which states that the City should emphasize alternative transportation
- Public Facilities Policy 5 - Support bicycling and walking as transportation modes promoting personal health and recreation

The proposed project is consistent with the City’s newest general plan, “Arcata General Plan 2020”, adopted by the City in October 2000, but not yet certified by the Coastal Commission, and covering the City of Arcata and its sphere of influence. Specifically, the project is consistent with the following policies:

- Policy 2.8, T-1: to create a balanced transportation system with choice of modes that will reduce the percentages of trips that are made by automobile and provide the opportunity and facilities to divert trips from automobile to other modes and directs the City to coordinate with regional partners to provide facilities to support non-vehicular intercity travel
- Policy 2.8, T-5: to create a complete, interconnected bicycle and pedestrian circulation system, increase the percentages of person trips via walking and bicycling, and provide a pedestrian and bicycle system which serves commuter as well as recreational travel
- Policy 4.2, OS-4b: maintaining coastal access corridors to Arcata Bay and public trust lands within the coastal zone
- Policy Parks and Recreation Element - Goal II A.3 Encourage adequate pedestrian, bicycle and bus transportation to all recreation facilities and programs.

The proposed project is also consistent with certain objectives of the plan entitled “City of Arcata Pedestrian and Bicycle Master Plan” that was adopted by the City in November 2004, covering the City of Arcata and connections to neighboring communities. Specifically, the project is consistent with the following objectives of the master plan:

- Objective B, to complete a network of bikeways that are feasible, fundable, and that serve bicyclists needs, especially for travel to employment centers, schools, commercial districts, transit stops, and institutions

- Objective C, to complete a network of walkways that serves pedestrian needs, especially for short trips to employment centers, schools, commercial districts, transit stops, and institutions
- Objective F, to increase the number of bicycle-transit trips

Additionally, the project is specifically listed in Table 7 – “Priority Bikeway Projects” as part of the Annie and Mary Rail-Trail.

The proposed project is also consistent with the following policies of the 2006 Humboldt County Regional Transportation Plan:

- Policy D-1- Develop a cohesive system of regional bikeways that provides access to, and between, major activity centers, public transportation, recreation and other destinations, and eliminate barriers to pedestrian and bicycle travel.
- Policy D-2 - Encourage an interconnected transportation network.
- Policy D-9 - Recognition of the high level of public support for provision of a dedicated bicycle and pedestrian facility between Arcata and Eureka

COMPLIANCE WITH CEQA:

The planning and design of the Arcata Coastal Rail with Trail project within the Arcata city limits and southward to Bracut Marsh is statutorily exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) under 14 Cal. Code of Regulations Sections 15262, because it involves only feasibility or planning studies for a possible future action which the Conservancy has not approved, adopted, or funded. The proposed project is categorically exempt under Section 15306 because it consists of basic data collection and resource evaluation activities which will not result in a serious or major disturbance to an environmental resource. Staff will file a “Notice of Exemption” upon approval of this project.