

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation
December 4, 2014

SAN CLEMENTE COASTAL TRAIL

File No. 00-098-04
Project Manager: David Hayes

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Authorization to disburse an amount not to exceed one hundred thousand dollars (\$100,000) to the City of San Clemente for preparation of designs, environmental analysis and permit applications for a one-third mile extension of the California Coastal Trail in San Clemente.

LOCATION: City of San Clemente, Orange County (Exhibit 1)

PROGRAM CATEGORY: Public Access

EXHIBITS

Exhibit 1: [Project Location](#)

Exhibit 2: [Map of Trail](#)

Exhibit 3: [Photos of Trail](#)

Exhibit 4: [Project Letters](#)

RESOLUTION AND FINDINGS:

Staff recommends that the State Coastal Conservancy adopt the following resolution pursuant to Sections 31400-31410 of the Public Resources Code:

“The State Coastal Conservancy hereby authorizes the disbursement of an amount not to exceed one hundred thousand dollars (\$100,000) to the City of San Clemente (the City) for preparation of designs, environmental analysis and permit applications for a segment of the California Coastal Trail that will extend the San Clemente Railroad Corridor Pedestrian Beach Trail.

Prior to the disbursement of any Conservancy funds, the City shall submit for review and approval of the Executive Officer of the Conservancy a work program, budget, schedule, and the names of any contractors to be employed in carrying out the work.”

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 project is consistent with the current Project Selection Criteria and Guidelines.
2. The proposed authorization is consistent with the purposes and objectives of Chapter 9 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code, regarding a system of public accessways to and along the coast.
3. The proposed project will serve a greater-than-local need.”

PROJECT SUMMARY:

Staff requests authorization to disburse up to \$100,000 to the City of San Clemente for the preparation of designs, environmental analysis and permit applications for a one-third mile extension of the San Clemente Railroad Corridor Pedestrian Beach Trail (“San Clemente Coastal Trail”), which is part of the California Coastal Trail.

The current 3 mile-long San Clemente Coastal Trail runs along the San Clemente shoreline from North Beach to Calafia State Beach (Exhibit 1), and is accessible for persons with disabilities, including wheelchair users. The proposed project will provide an additional 1,600 feet of wheelchair accessible trail from Calafia to the San Clemente State Beach campground and will provide a point of access from the proposed trail under the railroad tracks to the beach. This undercrossing will provide easy, safe access from the trail to the beach.

The trail is located inland of the railroad tracks in the railroad right-of-way owned by the Orange County Transit Authority (OCTA). In order to provide adequate separation of pedestrians from the railroad tracks, the trail has been set back as far from the tracks as possible. Rustic fencing and landscaping with native vegetation provide for clear visual and physical separation from the tracks along the entire length of the trail. The trail is composed of natural materials, either compacted earth or decomposed granite, for most of its length but consists of elevated boardwalk in two locations to avoid impacts to wetland areas (Exhibit 2).

The OCTA railroad tracks run along the entire shoreline in San Clemente and are part of the nation's second busiest rail corridor, running up to 52 trains a day by Amtrak, freight, and regional rail transit train companies. The tracks thus constitute a significant barrier and hazard to coastal access. For decades, the public used the railroad corridor informally as a trail, crossing the tracks haphazardly to get to the beach. This situation was not only dangerous; it was only available to the adventurous and able-bodied and did not constitute adequate beach access for the general public. Completion of the first construction phase of the San Clemente Coastal Trail solved a longstanding public safety issue and provided a regional recreational amenity.

Site Description: The San Clemente shoreline is characterized in most places by a relatively narrow sandy beach backed by high bluffs. Space on the beach is further constrained by the presence of the railroad tracks, which are constructed upon an embankment that is elevated 10 to 25 feet above the beach and reinforced on the ocean side by a massive rock revetment. The tracks are in regular use during the day by Amtrak, freight, and regional rail-transit trains. As a result the railroad corridor has represented a significant barrier between the beach and the rest of the City. However, the railroad corridor is also the only place along the San Clemente shoreline where the California Coastal Trail could be located. The existing trail is extremely popular and receives extensive public use (Exhibit 3).

Project History: Since 2000, the Conservancy has provided three grants for a total of \$1 million (plus \$59,000 for design) to the City of San Clemente to construct the San Clemente Coastal Trail. The first grant of \$500,000 was matched with \$7.4 million of City and other public funds. The second grant of \$500,000 was matched with \$3.4 million of other funds.

The San Clemente Coastal Trail is an exceptionally popular section of the California Coastal Trail, with an estimated 1.8 million hikers, joggers and bike riders annually. The extension of the San Clemente Coastal Trail south for an additional one-third mile will be of particular use to the approximately 350,000 annual visitors to Calafia State Park and will add another piece to the California Coastal Trail.

The completion of the San Clemente Coastal Trail will represent the culmination of more than twenty years of negotiations and planning on the part of City staff and elected officials, the railroads, and community members.

PROJECT FINANCING:

San Clemente Coastal Trail Extension:

Coastal Conservancy	\$ 100,000
City of San Clemente	100,000
Total Project Cost	\$200,000

The anticipated source of funds for this project is the FY 2012/13 appropriation to the Conservancy from the Safe Drinking Water, Water Quality and Supply, Flood Control, River and Coastal Protection Bond Act of 2006 (Proposition 84, Public Resources Code Section 75001 *et seq.*). Proposition 84 funds may be used for the protection of beaches, including projects that promote access to and enjoyment of coastal resources, consistent with the Conservancy's enabling legislation, Division 21 of the Public Resources Code. (Public Resources Code Section 75060). The proposed project will promote access to and enjoyment of the ocean and shoreline along the coast in San Clemente. The proposed project is consistent with the provisions of Division 21 (see "Consistency with Conservancy's Enabling Legislation" section below). Accordingly, the proposed project is an appropriate use of Proposition 84 funds.

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY’S ENABLING LEGISLATION:

The proposed project is consistent with Division 21, Chapter 9, of the Public Resources Code (Sections 31400-31405), regarding public access and enjoyment of coastal resources. Section 31400 states that the Conservancy shall have a principal role in the implementation of a system of public accessways to and along the state’s coastline. Through the proposed action, the Conservancy would continue its role in supporting the development of an important public accessway along a major segment of the California coast.

Section 31400.1 allows the Conservancy to award grants to a public agency for the development of lands for public access to and along the coast. Grants to local agencies may only be awarded for accessways that serve more than local public needs. The proposed project will facilitate development of an accessway both along the coast and across the railroad tracks to the beach from parking areas already designed to support regional public use. The trail and associated railroad crossing will also provide a link between state and region-serving parks (such as San Clemente State Beach and the extensive parking facilities at the City’s Calafia Beach Park), making more of the beach readily accessible to the public. The proposed project will extend an accessway that serves thousands of visitors every year and thus will serve greater than local needs.

Consistent with § 31400.2, staff recommends approval of this project after evaluating the amount of funding provided by the Conservancy in light of the total amount available for coastal public accessway and urban waterfront projects, the fiscal resources of the grantee, the urgency of the project relative to other eligible projects, and the application of factors prescribed by the Conservancy for the purpose of determining project eligibility and priority, as described in the “Consistency with Conservancy’s Project Selection Criteria & Guidelines” section, below.

Section 31400.3 authorizes the Conservancy to assist public agencies in developing and implementing a system of public accessways to and along the state's coastline. Funding the proposed project will help the City of San Clemente complete a segment of California Coastal Trail in a heavily-visited coastal area as part of a comprehensive public access plan.

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY’S 2013 STRATEGIC PLAN GOAL(S) & OBJECTIVE(S):

Consistent with **Goal 1, Objectives C**, of the Conservancy’s 2013-2018 Strategic Plan, the proposed project would design a new trail segment of the California Coastal Trail. Consistent with **Goal 2, Objective C**, the proposed project would improve an existing recreational facility by extending the existing San Clemente Coastal Trail and adding another railroad crossing.

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

The proposed project is consistent with the Conservancy's Project Selection Criteria and Guidelines, last updated on October 2, 2014, 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:** The proposed project has enthusiastic support from a wide variety of groups and individuals, including the citizens' group PEDal, Sierra Club, the Surfrider Foundation, Coastwalk, San Clemente Green, the Orange County Transportation Authority, and State Parks. Letters received in support of the proposed authorization are attached in Exhibit 4.
4. **Location:** The proposed project is located within the coastal zone of the City of San Clemente.
5. **Need:** The City has been very successful in tapping a wide variety of funding sources in order to complete the proposed project. The proposed Conservancy grant is matched by the City and will enable the City to complete the designs, environmental analysis and permit applications by January 2016.
6. **Promotion and Implementation of State Plans and Policies:** This project is consistent with *Completing the California Coastal Trail*, the strategic plan prepared by the Coastal Conservancy, in consultation with the California Coastal Commission, the California Conservation Corps and State Parks, pursuant to Senate Bill 908 of 2001.
7. **Greater-than-local interest:** More than 2,000,000 people per year use the San Clemente coastline, making it a major recreational asset for Orange County and all of southern California. The proposed project would link existing city, county and state beach parks and access facilities in adjacent jurisdictions into a coordinated access system of regional and statewide significance. As such, the proposed project would serve greater than local needs.
8. **Sea level rise vulnerability:** The trail improvements are 20 feet above mean high tide. NOAA sea level rise projection maps show the project is not vulnerable. Riprap guards the rail line and the trail on the ocean side.

Additional Criteria

8. **Resolution of more than one issue:** The proposed project would help complete the construction of a new section of the California Coastal Trail, would provide much-needed additional coastal access in the City of San Clemente, and would alleviate an existing public safety hazard.
9. **Leverage:** The city proposes to match Conservancy funding with its own funding.

12. **Readiness:** The City is ready to begin the project in January 2015.
13. **Realization of prior Conservancy goals:** As discussed in the “Project History” above, the proposed project is the implementation of a planning effort funded in part by the Coastal Conservancy. In addition, the proposed project also serves to achieve broader Conservancy goals regarding completion of the California Coastal Trail. Completion of the San Clemente Coastal Trail is one of the specific projects for Orange County named in the “Recommendations for Action” section of the report “*Completing the California Coastal Trail*,” published by the Conservancy in January 2003. The proposed project would also fulfill Statewide Policy Initiatives for the Coastal Trail by increasing accessibility to State recreational facilities (Initiative #3).
15. **Cooperation:** The proposed project is the result of a cooperative effort between the local community, the City, OCTA and the California Public Utilities Commission, all of which agreed to the proposed trail and accessway improvements.
18. **Minimization of greenhouse gas emissions:** The project will encourage non-motorized transportation to and along the shore.

CONSISTENCY WITH LOCAL COASTAL PROGRAM POLICIES:

The City of San Clemente does not have a certified Local Coastal Program (“LCP”). The Coastal Element of the City’s General Plan was certified as the Land Use Element of its LCP in 1981, as amended 1995. The Coastal Element enumerates specific policies to enhance coastal access. These include Access Policies #7 and #9.

Access Policy #7 states: “The City of San Clemente shall promote not only increased access to the shoreline, but increased safety of access . . .”

Access Policy #9 states: “The City shall seek funding from non-local sources to finance actions to amplify access.” These actions include beach access for the handicapped and improved pedestrian railroad crossings.

As discussed above, the proposed project is consistent with these policies.

COMPLIANCE WITH CEQA:

The proposed project is statutorily and categorically exempt from the provisions of the California Environmental Quality Act, Public Resources Code section 21000 et seq. (“CEQA”). California Code of Regulations (“CCR”) title 14, § 15262 sets forth a statutory exemption from the requirement to prepare an environmental impact report or negative declaration for preparation of feasibility and planning documents for future actions that have not yet been approved or funded. 14 CCR § 15306 establishes a categorical exemption from CEQA for basic data collection and resource evaluation activities that will not result in serious or major disturbance to environmental resources. The proposed project consists of preparation of feasibility and planning documents as well as data collection and resource evaluation activities for future actions that have not yet been

approved or funded. The proposed project will not have an impact on environmental resources. Accordingly, the proposed project is exempt from CEQA. Staff will file a Notice of Exemption upon approval of the project.