

Notes from the Niles Canyon Trail Walk- 11/21/2014. 11:00 am – 3:00 pm

Prepared by Mike Dubinsky (SNC) with review by other participants.

1. Participants – The trail walk was attended by representatives from a range of stakeholders. Alameda County Water District (ACWD), San Fran Water District, Save Niles Canyon (SNC), Save Our Sunol (SOS), East Bay Bike Coalition, Fremont Freewheelers Bicycle group, Caltrans, Supervisor Valle & staff, Supervisor Haggerty's office (aid was invited could not make it), Alameda Creek Alliance (ACA), East Bay Regional Parks, BKF Engineers. Familiar names to me were Jim O'Laughlin (SOS), John Weed (ACWD), Chris Miley from Supervisor Valle's office, Wynn Kageyama (FFW)
2. Trail Project objectives - (Taken from Feasibility Study RFP)
The study will focus on the development of a Class I paved non-motorized trail connecting Mission Blvd. in Union City to the town of Sunol. Trail design should meet Caltrans Class I standards as contained in Chapter 1000 of the Highway Design Manual, and be a minimum of 10' in width. The project will also include a nonmotorized, natural surface, narrow, trail from the Sunol Water Temple, through the Vargas Plateau, to EBRPD's staging area on Canyon Rd, and it will identify and evaluate a non-motorized trail crossing a railway corridor.
3. Objectives of the Trail Walk- To provide an opportunity for members of stakeholder groups to view first- hand several key areas in the Niles Canyon Corridor that offer challenges to the construction of a multiuse trail; to informally discuss possible alternatives which may be framed out in the draft feasibility study; and to allow the opportunity to hear from stakeholder group representatives as to any points, comments, questions or suggestions they have as they participate in the walk.
4. Walk Organized by - Office of Supervisor Richard Valle, District 2, Alameda County
5. Locations visited / walked – (See Itinerary Map)
 - a. Site 1. - End of Old Canyon Road. Walked from there along the San Francisco Water Department ROW past the Mission Clay grounds and up to where the Secret Sidewalk (Sunol Aqueduct) goes underground on private property. Then we went back to the Niles Canyon Railway (NCR) tracks and followed them to Palomares Road Intersection/Railroad bridge crossing.
 - b. Site 2 – Going east beyond the Alameda Creek Bridge (sometimes referred to as the “Richmond” bridge by local residents) at a pull off where the Secret Sidewalk emerges and near the east end of the active UPRR Rail tunnel. Part of the walk - way was the former Niles Canyon paved road. The group walked east paralleling the UPRR tracks until reaching the Alameda Creek where the pilings for the former bridge could be observed. The pull off is located just at the beginning of a second bridge also termed the “Alameda Creek Bridge in Caltrans documents.
 - c. Site 3 - In Sunol at the intersection of Main Street and Route 84 to the bridge crossing Arroyo de la Laguna. This unplanned stop was made so that Jim O'Laughlin of SOS could provide his view on how to arrange the end of the proposed multiuse trail so that people could either enter Sunol directly or cross over to the Water Temple grounds without actually having to cross Route 84 at street level. The plan to walk from the Vallejo Mill parking area to the rail crossing over Mission Blvd was not taken but the location was discussed since the

Bay Area Ridge Trail, which will cross Niles Canyon and eventually connect to Vargas Plateau, will need to cross the NCR railroad tracks.

6. Notes – The following summary notes are based on personal observation (by Mike Dubinsky), general discussion among the trail walk participants and questions posed to the representatives of the company (BKF Engineers) preparing the feasibility study. A formal wrap up or post mortem after the walk was not held.

Site 1 Section

- a. As the group began the Site 1 walk along a roadway that was on the San Francisco water shed property and was viewed as a logical choice for installing the multiuse trail it was pointed out that for part of the way the UPRR rail line ran on a terrace just above the roadway which was parallel to the creek. The proximity of the path to the train tracks above might present some issues, e.g. noise and erosion.
- b. After walking past the Mission Clay property (which is privately owned) we took a turn south east to where the Sunol Aqueduct or “secret sidewalk” (SS) emerges from the hills and then dies into a hillside which is also on private property. This property is currently undergoing what was described as mine reclamation activity apparently so it could be considered for some possible development. Part of the SS had been destroyed but it gave an opportunity to walk on it and observe first hand its size and mass. The BKF staff indicated that they were probably going to propose an alternative whereby the SS could be expanded, barriers integrated and it be used for a portion of the multiuse trail.
- c. From where the access road ended for the Mission Clay property we moved closer to the Alameda Creek and followed the Niles Canyon Railway tracks east until the tracks crossed the Creek at Palomares via the trestle bridge. When asked, the BKF staff indicated they envisioned the possibility of a parallel multiuse bridge being built next to the train trestle and the multiuse trail continuing up to Sunol paralleling the NCR tracks as one option. In a number of places the possibility of sharing the available ROW (flat ground) is however very limited. Several comments were heard about the proximity to rail line, safety issues & noise. It was pointed out that the NCR train is not fast moving and people will know when it is running. If the trail were installed parallel to the track, the plan would likely recommend a fence separating the uses.
- d. If one stays on the same side of the Creek at this point (south side) about 400-500 ft. around the side of the slope the SS re-emerges and could possibly be linked up to again if a path could be carved out of the slope or a bridge type of structure built. This would take some engineering homework on what is a steep slope.

Site 2 Section

- a. At this location the group was able to walk west for an estimated 100 ft. on the SS. Walking east we paralleled the UPRR Tracks until we came to a rail crossing and on the other side is the end of the aboveground SS. Continuing East on what was once the paved vehicle road we came to the place where the now unused bridge piers remain from an earlier road bridge across the Alameda Creek. The question came up – Could these piers be used to support a new multiuse trail? I.e.

taking the trail to the North side of the Creek at this point instead of the earlier Palomares location?

- b. While visiting this site a UPRR freight train came by. Keeping a safe distance from the UPRR trains would be an entirely different matter than the slow moving NCR tourist train.

Site 3 Location

- a. This was a choice made during the walk because Jim O’Laughlin of SOS had some ideas about the manner in which the multiuse trail might end in Sunol where users might want to visit Sunol the town or the Sunol Water Temple which is on property that the trail is supposed to link up with. Jim explained that if the multiuse trail were to stay on the South side of the Creek (the UPRR track side) it would eventually go under the last trestle bridge before entering Sunol. It could follow an access road that would allow it to come up under the bridge over the Arroyo de la Laguna. People could then use the sidewalk to either go to town or continue to the Pleasanton ridge trail area through town. If they wanted to go to the Water Temple they could then go under the bridge at the east end and not have to cross Route 84 at street level. Route 84 can be very dangerous.

General comments:

- Several times it was mentioned that Caltrans Region 4 really needs to take notice of this initiative because of the Alameda Creek Bridge replacement project they are pursuing. Supervisor Valle indicated that his office has communicated with Caltrans and there were three Caltrans staff members (All Environmental staff) were part of the walk group. It was suggested that Caltrans, in developing their EIR/EIS report for the Bridge Replacement project consider deploying some of their mitigation effort to steps that would support the multiuse trail. Based on the walk it appeared that certain grading steps could be integrated into the bridge replacement which would or might serve the multiuse trail.
- Noise – While not specifically part of the Feasibility study project a number of participants commented on the noise level from the road traffic as potentially having impact on the outdoors experience that the multiuse trail is supposed to support. Just hearing the conversation of the person next to you could be problematic at times during the walk.
- Crossing the creek – Every time the multiuse trail needs to cross the Alameda creek it presents additional environmental and engineering challenges.
- Vandalism – The amount of graffiti and trash present even in the inner reaches of the pathways used for the trail walk was disappointing. The multiuse path would provide both a resource for patrolling the public use area as well as easier access for vandals. A mixed blessing.
- Use of the Roadway when Caltrans does cleanup activities. – The Caltrans staff were asked to take back to their organization an inquiry as to whether they might allow pedestrians and bicyclists might to use the Niles Canyon Road on those days when they close the road to vehicle traffic conduct cleanup activities such as removing unstable rocks.

- Safety concerns – If the multiuse trail is to parallel the rail lines (either tourist rail or the UPRR) the issue of pedestrian and cyclist safety arises.
- Overall challenges – based on the trail walk it seemed the development of a multiuse trail was doable however it faced engineering and ROW challenges in several areas primarily on the availability of a flat piece of ground to build a 14 ft. wide path (10 Ft. paved, 2 ft. on each side unpaved). The concept is very appealing and the objective of tying together Sunol and Niles as well as providing the linkage to other existing trails and the Vargas Plateau will provide significant benefit to the public.

-

Prepared by PMD/SNC Reviewed by SOS, EBRP, BKF