



March 4, 2019

Councilmember Jay Schenirer
Sacramento City Council
915 I Street, 5th Floor
Sacramento, CA 95814

Subject: The South Land Park Neighborhood Association Supports the Del Rio Trail.

Dear Mr. Schenirer:

The South Land Park Neighborhood Association (SLPNA) submits this letter in strong support of the Del Rio Trail Project (Project). We are a volunteer-run nonprofit neighborhood association in an area of approximately 14,000 residents. Most of the Project lies within our boundaries, and SLPNA has been involved in the City's community outreach. SLPNA conducted a poll in our area in 2015. Approximately 83% of respondents supported the Project.

SLPNA strongly supports the design and construction of a trail and greenbelt that becomes an asset for the local neighborhood, the City, and the region at large. The City has been listening to the ideas and concerns of all involved, and has done one complete re-design of the plan for the purpose of historical preservation. The current design not only preserves 98% of the abandoned rails, but eliminates a separated pedestrian trail to avoid further impact to the rails. While we are disappointed that the latter changes sacrifices a safety feature of the original design in an attempt to satisfy those supporting a return of trains, the plans now before the City Council still represent a good project both for the local neighborhood and the City.

In 2017, Valley Vision produced a report entitled “Regional Attitudes about Civic Amenities.” When asked to rank the single most important civic amenity to their quality of life, 54% of respondents ranked parks and trails as #1. A distant second was science and history museums at 9%. Urban parks and greenbelts were the single most frequently used amenity by the respondents. Parks and trails are relatively inexpensive compared to other amenities. The City, and the region, gets its biggest “bang for the buck” with projects like the Del Rio Trail.

Project Context in the Regional Trail Network

SLPNA believes the Project is important at the neighborhood, City, and regional levels. The Del Rio Trail will not be an isolated trail used only by the local neighborhood. The Project is an important connector south of the downtown core in both the City’s Bicycle Master Plan (2016), and Sacramento County’s Bikeway Master Plan (2011). The Project is listed as a priority for near-term implementation in the City’s Draft Bicycle Master Plan Implementation Plan (2018).

The American River Parkway is the “backbone” of our region’s Class 1 multi-use trail network (about 29 miles from Old Sacramento to Folsom). Two other existing Class 1 trails serve north Sacramento and Rio Linda (together about 12 miles). From downtown, the Sacramento River Parkway trail extends 3.5 miles south. The Del Rio Trail, would extend the network another 4.5 miles south, and connect to an existing 2.5 mile trail serving the Pocket neighborhood, and the new Delta Shores Project trail network that is already approved. From Day 1, the Del Rio Trail will be part of a 50+ mile Class 1 trail framework connecting much of the region.

New trails planned soon in Delta Shores and Pocket/Greenhaven will directly complement the Project and further expand the network to serve more residents and neighborhoods. The network will extend from Folsom to Freeport, with only a few short breaks in the Class 1 off-street trail. With the Del Rio Trail connecting large areas in the south of the City, the regional trail system will gain a size and connectivity that makes it one of our premier assets and attractions. In August 2018, the San Francisco Chronicle ran an article promoting bicycle tourism in Sacramento (www.sfchronicle.com/travel/article/On-a-Roll-Ditch-the-car-and-explore-Sacramento-13178241.php). The Sacramento River Bike Trail was the very first example in the article. The Del Rio Trail would connect directly to that trail and extend it 4.5 miles.

Wide Range of Expected Users

SLPNA expects, and is excited, that the Del Rio Trail will be well-used. We expect several general classes of users. The Project, in combination with the existing Sacramento River Trail, will create a direct Class 1 trail into downtown for bicycle

commuters. The Project, embedded in neighborhoods, will also be a recreational amenity for adults and children, dog-walkers, and runners. More advanced cyclists will use it on long-distance rides to reach rural Delta roads via the Freeport Bridge. Due to the access the Del Rio Trail will provide to multiple grocery-anchored shopping centers (2 are immediately adjacent to the Project), we also expect more use by local “errand-runners” than exists on some other trails. One adjacent neighborhood was constructed without sidewalks. The Project will improve pedestrian mobility there. The Project will provide about 2 miles of off-street path along Freeport Boulevard, where pedestrian/bicycle safety is a serious concern to the City.

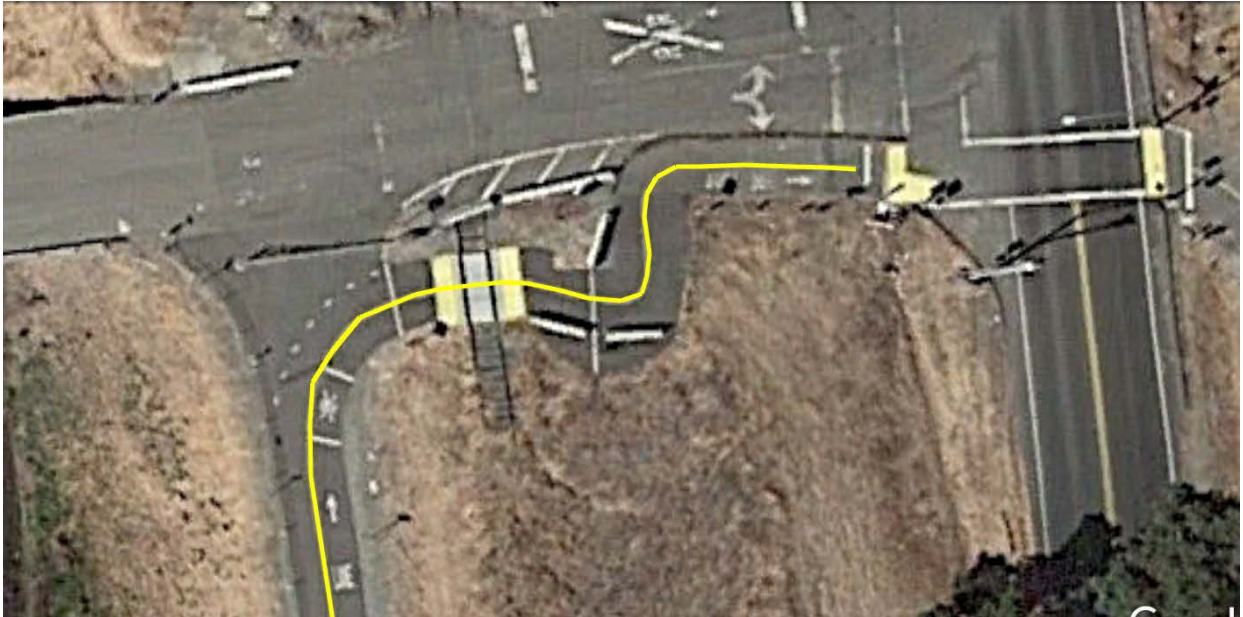
Trains and the False Issue of Historic Preservation

The abandoned “Walnut Grove Branch line” is not a railroad of specific historical importance. [Walnut Grove Branch Line Feasibility Study, Ca. Dept. of Parks and Recreation, 1980] The tracks have been deemed a historic resource because they are “representative” of California’s railroad history and linked Sacramento to the Delta, promoted settlement and development there, and carried agricultural products from Delta farms to Sacramento and distant markets. To some Sacramento residents, it seems a silly standard for historic designation. Virtually all old railroads went somewhere, promoted development, and carried an economic product. Nevertheless, SLPNA has consistently acknowledged the railway’s historic designation, encouraged incorporation of the track’s history into the Project Design, and expressed the hope that funding might be available in the future to enhance the Del Rio trail with interpretative design elements.

The objections of the California State Railroad Museum Foundation (CSRMF) and other train supporters is not really about historic preservation. That is merely a useful weapon for the intent to return train traffic to the tracks. “The Foundation’s goal is not just preservation of the rails, but to prevent the City from altering the rails in ways *that would preclude all future use of any kind or nature.*” (Letter, CSRMF to City; Jan 3, 2019; Comment 7 in draft EIR, p. 709); emphasis added.] The CSRMF wants to expand operation of the existing Old Sacramento excursion trains into the Delta [town of Hood] and sees the need for a contiguous link into Old Sacramento as essential to that project. California State Parks reviewed the return of trains to the Del Rio Trail in the 2014 Old Sacramento 20-year General Plan, and rejected the return of trains due to unmitigable impacts and neighborhood opposition. The State agency responsible for the existing Old Sacramento excursion train similarly rejected the return of trains from its own 20-year general plan, and wrote a Del Rio Trail EIR comment letter thanking the City for considering the historic protection of the track, and suggesting cooperation after this EIR is certified. CSRMF wants the Del Rio Trail to be designed entirely around a project that was expressly rejected by its own responsible State agency. And it is willing to urge design changes that sacrifice public safety to achieve its ultimate goal.

Trail Design

When pedestrian/bicycle facilities are designed around trains, they inevitably suffer due to the realities necessary for train traffic. Every other transportation mode needs to be designed around the train. A bike trail crossing just south of the Del Rio Trail Project, noted by train supporters, illustrates the problem. In the picture below, the centerline of the bike trail is in yellow. The tracks are visible at the bike trail crossing. The tracks are unused, and buried in asphalt and soil on either side of the crossing. Yet the bike trail has been built with three 90° turns in only 100 feet because of the constraints of the tracks. The driveway is used. The trail is used but less safe for bicyclists. The tracks are unused, inoperable, and will be for many years into the future, if not forever, but everything has been designed around them.



Example of a trail designed around an inoperable train route just south of the project area. This odd zig-zag pattern sacrifices trail safety and design for no purpose.

An even more difficult location to design is the Project's Del Rio Road crossing, due to the differences in existing grade there. The tracks are several feet higher than the adjacent roads, and Del Rio Road crosses the tracks at a skewed angle. In addition, the City has to comply with Americans with Disabilities Act requirements, and the spot is regularly used by children going to and from nearby Sutterville Elementary. The City knew the spot was a design challenge, and proactively held a community meeting solely for this intersection with only the nearby residents in June 2017. About two dozen attended. Those nearby residents decided at that meeting nearly unanimously in favor of the intersection design in the EIR, including lowering the grade immediately south of the intersection, to improve visibility and access for children and the disabled. Nevertheless,

train supporters would like that design eliminated, the intersection designed entirely around a train project rejected by State Parks, and even the Del Rio Road crossing abandoned altogether --with traffic rerouted through winding neighborhood streets to the next through crossings a half-mile or more away. This is exactly the kind of nonsense the City must end. It is poor policy and the City should no longer make design sacrifices for a train project that was rejected by the very State agency that owns it.

SLPNA is disappointed that the Project design has already been sacrificed for a train idea rejected by State Parks. The original City design incorporated large-radius meanders, a more complete greenbelt, and additional recreational and planting areas. These were partially removed in order to move from 50% track retention to 98%. Train supporters were not satisfied. The separated pedestrian path was then removed. Train supporters are not satisfied. Train supporters claim the removal of even 1 foot of track is unacceptable, even though a letter to the City from CSRMF (dated 19 January 2018) acknowledges that about 75 yards of track is already removed. This exposes the fallacy that, decades hence, if a train project is ever approved, the tracks would not need to be completely rebuilt with substantial design considerations at the road crossings, regardless of the Del Rio Trail. The tracks have been abandoned and decaying for 40 years while the City has grown around them. Nearly all of the safety equipment at the 8 road crossings has been removed, and the intersections designed solely for vehicle traffic since 1978. State Parks has rejected plans to return trains, and yet the City sacrifices the design of a real project for current residents and the larger community, for a train dream that couldn't even be built for decades, if at all.

The City's design honors the principles of historic preservation by retaining nearly 98% of the existing tracks. Historic preservation doesn't mean 100% or nothing at all. If that were the case we would no longer have a Crocker Art Museum, a Memorial Auditorium, a D.O. Mills building [*the Bank*], most of Old Sacramento, or City Hall itself. The issue isn't historic preservation; the issue is whether you allow uncompromising train advocates to derail a valuable public resource to maintain the folly of their distant dream.

Closing Comments

Regardless of lost design opportunities, the Del Rio Trail Project is an improvement to our neighborhood, the City overall, and an important extension of our region's Class 1 trail network. It is overwhelmingly supported by local residents, state and federal lawmakers, and the trail will facilitate recreation, connect residential to commercial areas and schools, and increase the ability of all to move around without a car. SLPNA thanks the City for its pursuit of this Project, even if we do not agree with every decision made.

SLPNA and its Board of Directors strongly supports and is excited about the Del Rio Trail, and encourages the City Council to approve the Project.

Thank you,



Brian Ebbert
President
South Land Park Neighborhood Association

cc: Mr. Jesse Gothan, City of Sacramento
Members of the Sacramento City Council