

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

REGIONAL TRAILS MASTER PLAN PURPOSE

The main purpose of the 2010 Humboldt County Regional Trails Master Plan is to promote the development of a regional active transportation system. The Humboldt County Association of Governments (HCAOG) funded this plan in response to a growing and intensified interest on the part of Humboldt County residents for enhanced development of a non-motorized, hereafter referred to as ‘active’, transportation facility network. A regional active transportation system is of particular interest in this region because there are limited options for active travel between north coast communities, other than small narrow two-lane county roads and/or highway shoulders.

HCAOG is a Joint Powers Agency (JPA) comprised of the seven incorporated cities (Arcata, Blue Lake, Eureka, Ferndale, Fortuna, Rio Dell, Trinidad), the County of Humboldt, and through the Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) has tribal, Caltrans and local transit provider representation. As a result, the Humboldt County Regional Trails Master Plan is a long-range coordinating and resource document that provides the framework to guide the planning and implementation of a regional active transportation system that ensures safe and equitable access for non-motorized users. This plan was not an effort to document previously unidentified trail needs, but rather to compile existing trail and active transportation planning information.

The Regional Trails Master Plan is designed to promote active transportation facility connections *within* and *between* communities. While the focus is primarily off-street trail development, on-street bikeways are included in order to develop a comprehensive and seamless active transportation system. Relatively little data exists for pedestrian facilities, therefore these important connections are not included in this effort. Integral to the Regional Trails Master Plan is the development of a regional trails vision, an outline of the existing and proposed active transportation system, tools to strengthen regional coordination and trail implementation, and the codification of ‘Humboldt People Powered Pathways’.

Regional Trails Vision

Creating a regional trails vision is critical for community buy-in and for our rural region to prioritize, finance, and implement active transportation improvements. Active transportation projects and programs are receiving more state and federal transportation funding priority, and these funding sources remain competitive. The Regional Trails Master Plan presents a unified vision for a safe, comprehensive, and interconnected active transportation system in Humboldt County that demonstrates local community support and jurisdiction readiness. Completion of this system will make accomplishing shorter trips by active modes of travel more appealing, and travel between communities safer and more feasible, for people of all ages, abilities and financial means.

Existing and Proposed Active Transportation System

Previous trails and bikeway planning efforts have been developed by independent entities and HCAOG members with a localized project focus. The Regional Trails Master Plan consolidates these planning efforts and further defines the existing and proposed active transportation system in Humboldt County. Developing an interconnected and active transportation system will allow residents and visitors to move safely and efficiently within and between communities.

Strengthen Regional Coordination

The involvement of multiple jurisdictions, with differing trail- and active transport-related goals and strategies, make planning an active transportation system more complex. There is a great deal of disparity between the trail development foundations laid by jurisdictions; a few jurisdictions are actively engaged in trail planning and development, whereas others are not. The situation is further complicated by a lack of funds and staff necessary to support trail development. Strengthening coordination and collaboration between local entities (i.e., the County of Humboldt, the seven incorporated cities, tribal governments, special districts, and advocacy groups), as well as state agencies (e.g., Caltrans, Coastal Commission, Coastal Conservancy, etc.) is necessary to develop and prioritize regionally significant trail and bikeway facilities. This plan is the first step towards developing an active transportation framework that will strengthen regional capacity to seek and secure funding for implementation.

Trail Development Tools

The Regional Trails Master Plan provides tools to assist municipalities in the development of a regional, uniform and consistent active transportation system. The tools include: a prioritized list of trail projects; local, state, and federal active transportation and recreation funding options; and trail design guidelines to assist in the development of a uniform and consistent active transportation system.

Humboldt People Powered Pathways

The current Federal Transportation legislation, the Safe Accountable Flexible and Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU) authorized \$244 billion nationwide for transportation between 2005 and 2009. SAFETEA-LU established a new Non-Motorized Transportation Pilot Program, authorizing a total of \$100 million through 2009 for four communities to fund pilot projects to construct non-motorized transportation infrastructure.

In conjunction with other cities and counties across the nation, the County of Humboldt, the seven incorporated cities and tribal governments developed a ‘case statement’, called the Humboldt People Powered Pathways (or HP3), for the 2010 Campaign for Active Transportation. The 2010 Campaign for Active Transportation is a national effort aimed at the inclusion of a program that provides funding for non-motorized systems (vs. singular projects) as a permanent program in the federal transportation legislation reauthorization. This campaign was introduced in February 2010 as the ‘Active Community Transportation Act’ marker bill, proposed to be included in the transportation legislation reauthorization.

The HP3 case statement was developed to demonstrate the diversity and depth of Humboldt County’s non-motorized transportation culture, identified needs and readiness to meet those needs. HP3 included preliminary maps of existing and proposed trail and bicycle infrastructure and infrastructure construction cost estimates. HP3 garnered support from the jurisdictions involved in proposal development, as well as Caltrans, the State Coastal Conservancy, and local advocacy groups. The Regional Trails Master Plan builds upon the HP3 framework to increase local jurisdiction eligibility for state and federal funds.

PLANNING PROCESS

The Regional Trails Master Plan content development involved four-steps: literature review, stakeholder interviews, active transportation system map development, and community outreach. These four steps are summarized below.

Literature Review

Review of more than forty existing plans and other background information provided insights into prior trail and active transportation planning efforts. This review covered federal, state and local plans and regulations that relate to trail planning, design and construction.

Stakeholder Interviews

Interviews were conducted with stakeholders responsible for trail system stewardship and oversight. The planning team met with planning and public works staff from local jurisdictions to discuss how they are facilitating trail development and to define trail development opportunities and constraints.

Active Transportation System Maps

Extensive countywide maps illustrating existing and proposed non-motorized facilities that comprise the active transportation system were compiled. Local and regional trail and bicycle facility data was collected to construct the maps. The municipalities were asked to review the maps to ensure they reflect proposed plans. The maps are a visual tool that jurisdictions and community members can use to develop, refine and prioritize non-motorized connections within and between communities.

Community Outreach

A series of community workshops were conducted to solicit public input. Community workshop participants were asked to provide their regional trails vision and discuss trail development priorities. Preliminary maps illustrating the existing and proposed active transportation system were available for participants to review. Public input was also obtained from residents that could not attend the workshops via email and mail.

DOCUMENT ORGANIZATION

The 2010 Humboldt County Regional Trails Master Plan is comprised of seven chapters as described below.

Chapter 1: Introduction

The introduction describes the Regional Trails Master Plan purpose, and provides an overview of the planning process and document organization.

Chapter 2: Planning Context

Chapter two includes a description of Humboldt County's regional characteristics, active transportation system benefits, goals and policies, and literature review.

Chapter 3: Community Input

Chapter three is an overview of the format, goals and outcomes of the community workshops held to solicit resident input for the Regional Trails Master Plan. This chapter also includes the community's vision for an active transportation system.

Chapter 4: Active Transportation System

Chapter four addresses trail system classification framework and outlines the existing and proposed active transportation system at a local and regional level.

Chapter 5: Implementation

Chapter five includes a constraints analysis and trail implementation strategies. Prioritization criteria are utilized to rank proposed trail projects for the region. Information is provided about non-motorized funding sources and proposed trail projects are evaluated relative to their ability and readiness to leverage funding.

Chapter 6: Design Guidelines

Chapter six includes design guidelines for trails, trailheads, trail crossings, and a variety of trail support facilities.