

Plotting the rail trail's path

Transportation 2008
\$82M proposed
countywide network
seen as game-changer

By JASON HOPPIN

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SANTA CRUZ — This week the public has a chance to weigh in on what backers see as a great leap forward: 50 miles of connected, paved trails that get cyclists and walkers off Santa Cruz County's cramped roads and make it easier to traverse the coast.

The \$82 million plan isn't cheap and would take years, possibly decades, to finish. But once completed, the Monterey Bay Sanctuary Scenic Trail would give non-motorists a chance to cruise up to remote North Coast bluffs, fly over Capitola Village and one day roll all the way down Monterey Bay to Lover's Point.

"The goal is to provide a continuous network, separated from motor vehicle traffic, with easy access to the coast and desirable destinations," said Cory Caletti, a senior transportation planner with the county Regional Transportation Commission. "We always talk about gaps in the bike and pedestrian network, so the whole idea is a continuous system."

The highly anticipated trail plan is being discussed at a series of community meetings this week. It has long been linked to the county's recently completed \$14.2 million purchase of the 31-mile Branch Rail Line, and while the plan relies on railroad right of way, its scope is even broader.

THE TRAIL

For one, the plan extends beyond the railroad's terminus in Davenport and up past Waddell Creek to the county line. It also includes several pieces — not only along the main rail backbone through some of the densest areas of the county,

SEE TRAIL ON A2



DAN COYRO/SENTINEL

ABOVE: Broken timbers and rotting supports, such as these found on the Moore Creek trestle near Antonelli Pond on the Westside of Santa Cruz, are driving up the \$82 million cost of a proposed 50-mile network of trails for bikes and pedestrians.



LEFT: Monterey Bay Sanctuary Scenic Trail plans would require relocation of some track used by the Santa Cruz & Monterey Bay Railway.

DAN COYRO/SENTINEL FILE

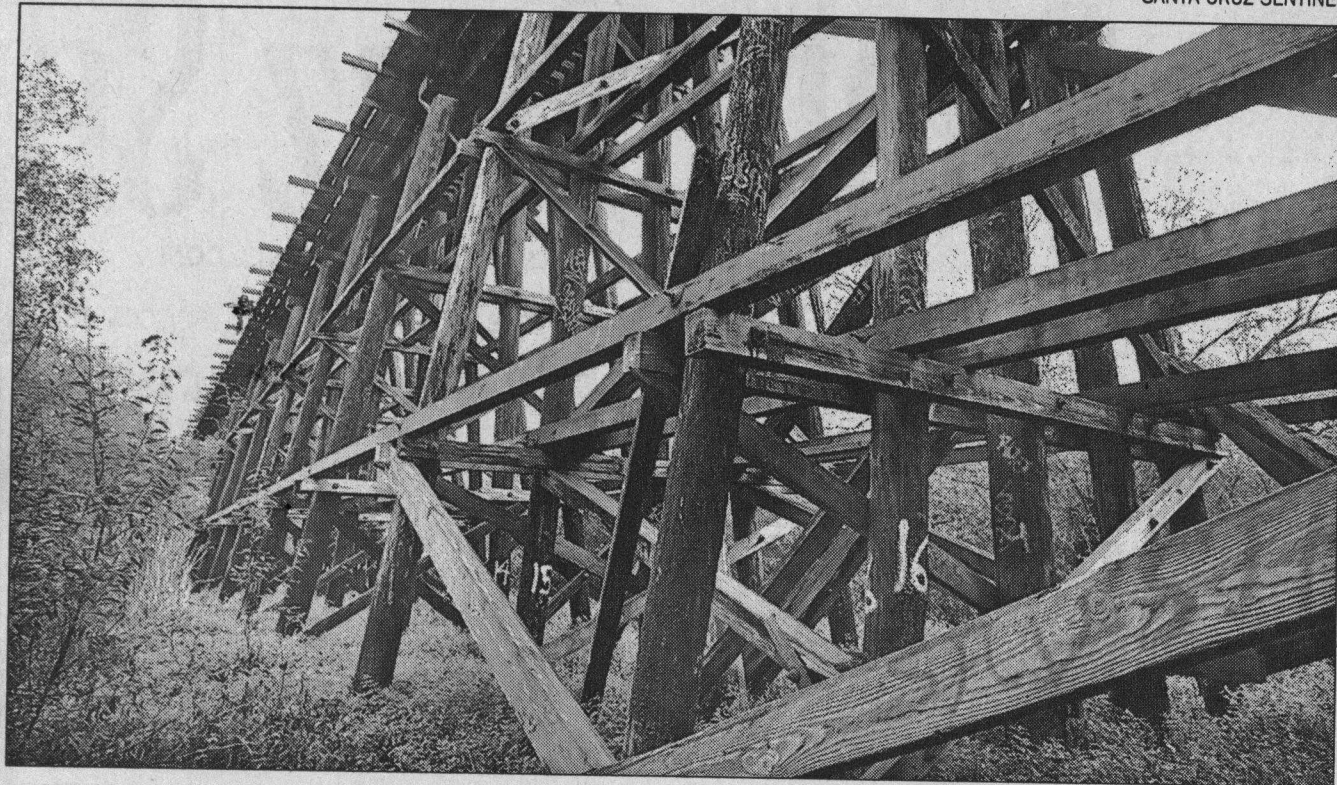
IF YOU GO

SANCTUARY TRAIL
PLANNING MEETINGS

TUESDAY — Davenport, Pacific Elementary School, 50 Ocean St., 6 to 8 p.m.

WEDNESDAY — Live Oak, Simpkins Family Swim Center, 979 17th Ave., Live Oak, 6 to 8 p.m.

THURSDAY — Watsonville, Civic Plaza Community Room, 275 Main St., 6 to 8 p.m.



Trestles like this one over Moore Creek near Antonelli Pond are driving up the \$82 million cost of a proposed 50-mile network of trails because most aren't in good enough shape to support cantilevered trails for pedestrians and bikes. DAN COYRO/SENTINEL

TRAIL

Continued from A1

but separate projects that expand the county's trail system nearer to the coast.

"It will be a great community asset and it's entirely new facilities," Caletti said, saying the cost compares favorably with road construction projects. "You have to look at it that way."

Santa Cruz's unique topography and the age of its railroad infrastructure were not easy on the plan. All major water crossings are going to require work-arounds or new bridges, including a proposed \$1 million walking and biking bridge that runs parallel to the oft-traveled railroad crossing near the Santa

Cruz Beach Boardwalk.

Perhaps most spectacularly, the plan peers into the future and envisions either a new Capitola railroad trestle that includes space for bikes and pedestrians, or a new structure that parallels the existing 700-foot span.

"I've seen some amazing structures that would just be one of the visual highlights of Capitola," Caletti said.

Part of the plan requires relocating track as well. Through a 1 1/2-mile segment in Live Oak, for example, planners say the tracks need to be moved to one side of the narrow right-of-way to make way for the trail.

That kind of thinking excites trail advocates, who worried the trail plan would end up being segmented by cost or political pressures.

Instead, the integrity of the trail is in place, at least through its first test.

"I think they've shown that it's possible, and before that we didn't know it was possible," said Bruce Sawhill, chair of the Friends of the Rail & Trail. "In fact we were pretty sure that it wasn't."

THE DESIGN

Designers behind the plan, the San Luis Obispo-based RRM Design Group, broke the trail down into pieces for planning purposes. Those pieces have been prioritized for development under a scoring system, with trail segments between Davenport and Twin Lakes State Beach winning the highest scores.

But Caletti and Sawhill downplayed the scoring sys-

tem, saying future construction relies on a number of unknown factors, including funding availability. Sawhill said his group, which advocated for the purchase of the line, is now trying to determine what its future is, including how big of a role to take in fundraising for the trail.

"In terms of where to start, it will probably have to do with what communities are most aggressive about fundraising," Sawhill said.

Planners also hope to one day connect the coastal trail with a partly completed trail network in Monterey County, allowing users to begin and end their journey anywhere along the Monterey Bay.

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