

MEMORANDUM

May 28, 2025

To: Summer Lopez
Organization: SACOG
From: Mia Candy, Joanna Wang, Toole Design Group
Project: SACOG Regional Trails Implementation Strategy

Re: Regional Trail Network Prioritization Update – Draft Framework

Overview

Background and Context

In 2022, the Sacramento Area Council of Governments (SACOG) adopted the Regional Trail Network Action Plan (Action Plan). The 2022 Action Plan identified a regional trail network including 293 miles of existing trails and 564 miles of planned trails. It also identified 308 miles of trail “study corridors” - corridors supported by local agencies for future study due to their potential to complete the regional trail network.

As part of the Action Plan, SACOG developed a framework to prioritize trail projects for implementation. Prioritization was based on 1) alignment with plan goals, 2) contributions to regional connectivity and coordination, and 3) project phasing and readiness.

SACOG is now undertaking the 2026 Regional Trails Network Implementation Strategy. The goal of the project is to move high priority projects towards implementation through technical assistance and planning. During this project, we will refresh the prioritization framework to produce an up-to-date list of priority projects. Updating the prioritization process will include refining the methodology to meet national best practice, and using current datasets.

Purpose of the Prioritization Update

The purpose of the prioritization update is to produce an up-to-date list of priority trail projects in the region. SACOG will use the prioritization results to help move high-priority projects towards implementation. For example, the top 10 priority projects will each receive a customized implementation strategy as part of the SACOG 2026 Regional Trails Implementation Strategy. SACOG may also provide other types of implementation support such as funding, technical assistance, acting as a liaison with partners like rail operators and Caltrans, and working to generate community and political buy-in for projects. The 2026 Strategy will have recommendations for next steps. SACOG staff will continue the conversation with the Board and Committees beyond the adoption of the 2026 Strategy.

The updated prioritization process will:

- **Retain the 2022 prioritization framework**, which was approved by the SACOG Board and Transportation Committee during the 2022 Strategic Plan process.
- **Refine minor elements of the analytical methodology** to create efficiencies and ensure that SACOG staff can easily replicate the process in the future.
- **Exclude projects that have been constructed** between 2022 and today (those projects will move from “planned” to “existing” in the dataset and will not be included in the prioritization rankings.)

- **Use new datasets** for which there are more recently available data, for example collisions, speeds, and roadway volumes.
- **Include updated project readiness information** that may have changed since 2022, such as the status of community engagement, design, and funding. SACOG staff are working one on one with local agencies to collect this project-specific data.

Prioritization Framework

The 2026 prioritization update retains the following Board-approved 2022 prioritization framework:

- **Phase 1:** Quantitative scoring based on regional trail network and regionalism goals
- **Phase 2:** Qualitative sorting based on project readiness factors

The 2026 process introduces a third phase:

- **Phase 3:** SACOG staff coordination to identify 10 priority projects to receive customized implementation strategies

Phase 1

Phase 1 evaluates the benefits of a trail project by measuring whether projects are likely to make progress towards SACOG's trail network goals and regionalism goals. **Table 1** outlines the Phase 1 prioritization framework, including key goals, evaluation criteria, and relative weighting for each factor. To ensure relevance, importance, and to gauge current alignment with the 2022 Board-approved criteria, this information was presented to the project working group. Some working group members emphasized the importance of safety and alignment with all ages and abilities infrastructure and the role trails play in providing safe off-street routes for both commuters and recreationalists. This was reflected in the 2022 Plan and, just like the other criteria, remains in the 2026 Strategy.

Table 1: Phase 1 Prioritization Framework

Goals	Evaluation Criteria	Weighting	Points
Trail Network Goals (70%)			
Safety	Does the project create parallel trail connections to bypass roadways with high crash occurrences?	High	25
Health	Does this project provide new access to dwelling units that did not previously have trails within a half mile?	Medium-High	20
Environmental Justice	Does the project contribute towards regionally equitable trail access by increasing trail access for residents of lower income communities of color? and/or Does the project connect lower-income communities or communities of color divided by physical barriers (e.g. state highways, waterways, railroads)?	Medium-High	20
Economic Vitality	Does the project connect to social gathering centers (e.g. large or smaller city downtowns, historic districts, entertainment destinations, eateries/ other gathering places? and/or Does the project create access to landmark geographic features (e.g., rivers and waterways, mountains, regionally significant parks?)	Medium-Low	10

Goals	Evaluation Criteria	Weighting	Points
All Ages and Abilities	Does the project create parallel trail connections to bypass high-traffic (relative to the jurisdiction) /high-speed (over 40 mph) roadways?	Medium-Low	10
Recreation	Does the project add to the mileage of connecting trail access to regionally significant parks, open space, and landmark features?	Low	5
	Maximum Points (Capped)		70
Regionalism Goals (30%)			
Collaboration	Does the project provide opportunities to partner/collaborate with another city, town, agency, or organization to further their goals and/or leverage project funding?	Medium-High	20
Strengthening the Network	Does the project fill a gap between existing trail segments to form a longer, continuous trail? And/or Does the project overcome natural, jurisdictional, or infrastructure barriers to connect trails?	Medium-High	20
Critical Access	Does the project serve a unique need for the region by providing critical connections (e.g. access to regional job centers, offering trails in rural areas)?	Low	10
	Maximum Points (Capped)		30

All projects are scored using the criteria and point allocations documented in Table 1. Scores are normalized to a 100-point scale. Based on their scores, they are sorted into different prioritization tiers, as documented in Table 2.

Table 2: Prioritization Tiers

Tier	Points
Planned Trails	
Tier 1	60 - 100
Tier 2	41 - 59
Tier 3	0 - 40
Study Corridors	
Higher Tier	75 - 100
Lower Tier	0 - 74

Phase 2: Sort by Project Readiness

After all projects are organized into tiers based on the total prioritization score, we will assess “project readiness” for each project. Project readiness indicates how close a project is to construction, and includes six factors (community support, alignment with local priorities, project development, right-of-way, funding, and final design). SACOG staff are working one-on-one with local agencies to collect up-to-date project readiness information for each factor. The readiness factors and evaluation questions are documented in Table 3. Projects will be sorted together based on how far along they are in the implementation pipeline (i.e. how many factors are complete or marked “green”).

Table 3: Qualitative Project Readiness Factors

Readiness Factor	Evaluation Question	Status
Community Support	Has the project been meaningfully discussed with the residents who would be affected by it?	Green : Yes, completed. Yellow : In progress, or working through obstacles Red : No, haven't started this phase, or experiencing major obstacles inhibiting progress
Aligned with local priorities	Do key community leaders support the project?	
	Do the necessary implementation partners support the project?	
Prior work – project development	Does the project have a plan-level environmental clearance?	
	Does the project have a feasibility study?	
	Is the project environmentally cleared (i.e., CEQA/NEPA)?	
Prior work – rights-of-way	Does the implementing agency have adequate right-of-way/site control for the project site?	
Prior work – funding	Does the implementing agency have the requisite funding to construct the project?	
Prior work – final design	Is the project "shovel-ready"?	

Phase 3: Identifying 10 projects for implementation plan development

Once SACOG has an updated list of priority projects that are ranked by Tier and sorted by project readiness, SACOG will identify 10 top priority projects to receive customized implementation strategies. The selection of these projects will be based on input from key stakeholders and the SACOG Board and Transportation Committee. Factors like feasibility, cost of implementation, and opportunities for short-term or quick-build implementation will also influence the selection of the top 10 projects. SACOG and Toole Design will work together to refine this process and incorporate any comments, once Phase 1 and Phase 2 are complete.