



2026 Regional Trail Implementation Strategy Update

Receive & File

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Attachments: Yes

Referring Committee: Transportation

Issue:

This item is an update on the implementation of the 2022 Regional Trail Network Action Plan through the recently launched 2026 Regional Trail Implementation Strategy.

Request:

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Recommendation for Board:

None; this is for information only.

Recommendation for Committee:

None; this is for information only.

Background:

In 2022, the SACOG Board adopted the Regional Trail Network Action Plan. The regional trail network was collaboratively identified in partnership with local agencies, special districts, public health professionals, and community-focused organizations. The 2022 Action Plan is meant to further goals of environmental justice, all ages and abilities, economic vitality, health, safety, and recreation. The final trail network, which included over 1,000 miles of trails, focused on equitably creating regional trail connectivity and increasing access to the destinations that support the vitality and livability of the region. Most identified connections (over 250 miles of existing trails and more than 800 miles of planned trails) were selected from local plans for their potential to make connections across boundaries in the region. Over 300 miles of trail study corridors— connections identified for further study in future planning documents, planned connections with known implementation challenges, and high-concept connections— were also identified for their potential to connect via trails or trail-like facilities across the region, including 50 miles of on-road separated bikeways. Concurrent with the approval of the trail network, the Board approved a prioritization framework to focus regional coordination efforts. The framework was designed to elevate trail connections that demonstrate regional potential through different combinations of performance outcomes. Recommendations for projects were then grouped into tiers based on each project's readiness to move forward so the recommended actions would build on locally driven efforts.

A key next step in advancing trails in the region was to develop a clear strategy to guide implementation of the prioritized network. SACOG, as a regional convener, supporter of interagency coordination, and technical assistance provider, is committed to supporting agencies in their trail implementation efforts. Thus, in 2024, the Board authorized the release of the 2026 Regional Trail Network Implementation Strategy request for proposals. SACOG contracted with Toole Design Group to develop the 2026 Strategy and launched the project in October 2024. The 2026 Strategy is an 18-month effort that will outline implementation strategies and next steps for SACOG, develop individual strategies for up to ten agencies, and provide implementation technical assistance for up to ten agencies and tribal organizations throughout the region.

Discussion/Analysis:

As identified in the Board-adopted 2022 Action Plan, there are many types of barriers that jurisdictions face in implementing trail projects. One of the first tasks of the 2026 Strategy is to develop a clear memo describing

- The challenges that trail implementers, within the SACOG region, encounter
- Partnerships that are necessary or would be beneficial for implementing trail projects, and
- Opportunities for SACOG to support implementers and jurisdictions as they build out the regional trail network.

To gather this information, SACOG held interviews with trail implementers from around the region, input was collected from SACOG's trail working group (which involves agencies from all six counties, and special partners like Rails to Trails, Caltrans District 3, and Trail Advocates), historical knowledge was gathered from SACOG staff, SACOG's legal consultant and this project's governance lead (Best, Best, and Krieger) was consulted, Toole Design Group's funding subconsultant, Drago Vantage, was consulted, and the 2022 Action Plan was reviewed (see Attachment A for more details).

During this process, staff and the consultant noticed that there are trends in the implementation challenges that are shared across the region. Some of the major challenges identified throughout this process were:

- Interface between Rail and Trails
- Right-of-Way and Ownership
- Agency Coordination, Partnerships, and Priorities
- Buy-in and Support
- Funding
 - This memo (Attachment A) only lists the challenges for funding, however both the challenges and opportunities of funding will be shared with the Transportation Committee later this year.
- Environmental Constraints, Permitting, and Litigation
- Governance
 - This item is to be included as part of a separate memo and will be shared with Transportation Committee later this year.
- Other Shared Experiences

Attachment A goes in depth into each of these challenges and provides potential opportunities and partnerships to address them. It also provides trail case studies from around the country and our region.

Looking Ahead

Over the next year, the Transportation Committee and Board will weigh in on updating and rerunning the network prioritization, selecting ten agencies to receive detailed trail implementation strategies, and hearing updates on content that will be a part of the final 2026 Regional Trail Network Implementation Strategy. In the end, the goal is to have a strategy that will outline next steps for SACOG with a menu of options for

funding and governance, implementation strategies for ten agencies that will provide concrete next steps for implementing the regional network, and a replicable technical assistance program for future trail implementation technical assistance.

Technical Assistance

The trail implementation technical assistance program application is open now! Applicants can visit the SACOG website (link included in Attachment B) to apply. The application closes on March 21, 2025. Spaces in this iteration of the trail technical assistance program are limited, but SACOG staff intend to offer more trail technical assistance in the future. More information can be found on the website. Office hours are available every Thursday from 4-5 pm until the application closing date.

Fiscal Impact/Grant Information:

Staff time is included in OWP/Budget and consultant budget was approved by the Board in April 2024.

List of Attachments:

1. Attachment A: Trails Implementation Opportunities, Challenges, and Partnerships Memo
2. Attachment B: PowerPoint Presentation