

## MEMORANDUM

February 21, 2025

To: Summer Lopez  
Organization: SACOG  
From: Mia Candy, Ellie Gertler, Jeff Ciabotti, Emily Lauderdale, Toole Design Group  
Sabrina Drago, Drago Vantage; Brian Hughes, BBK  
Project: SACOG Regional Trails Implementation Strategy  
**Re: Regional Trail Network Implementation Challenges and Opportunities - DRAFT**

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### 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 of 293 miles of existing trails and 564 miles of planned trails, in addition to 308 miles of trail study corridors (corridors supported by local agencies for future study due to their potential to complete the regional trail network). During Action Plan development, SACOG worked closely with member agencies and right-of-way owners to understand their vision for the region's trail network. SACOG also identified high-level regional trail network implementation barriers that local agencies face. SACOG is now undertaking the 2026 Regional Trails Network Implementation Strategy – the first step in working to overcome identified barriers and move the needle towards implementing a regional trail network.

#### Purpose and Approach

This memorandum builds on the 2022 Action Plan to identify specific challenges to, and opportunities for, implementing the Regional Trail Network. The purpose of this memo is to:

- Document the shared implementation challenges that SACOG and local implementing agencies have experienced; and
- Identify opportunities for overcoming key implementation barriers, creating a “menu” of options from which we will select priority recommendations during *Task 5: Implementation Strategies*.

To develop this memo, Toole Design:

- Reviewed the 2022 Regional Trail Network Action Plan. The 2022 Action Plan identified the following four key challenges: institutional barriers, infrastructure barriers, meaningful engagement, and siloed planning. These challenges have been validated and folded into the shared experiences discussed throughout this memorandum.
- Interviewed SACOG staff to understand internal conversations that have already taken place related to opportunities and challenges.
- Met with the Working Group to facilitate an Opportunities and Challenges exercise.

- Met with the consulting project team's governance and finance consultants (Best Best & Krieger LLP, and Drago Vantage, respectively), to understand governance structure and funding challenges and opportunities; and
- Incorporated local and national case studies to highlight success stories and the creative ways in which jurisdictions have overcome challenges and implemented trail projects.

### **Limitations and Assumptions**

This memorandum reflects as much information as was available to the Toole Design team during writing. Any challenges or nuances not captured can be added based on SACOG or local agency feedback. While there are some opportunities where SACOG may not be the designated lead agency, it is assumed that SACOG would provide support, technical assistance, opportunity for collaboration, and a regional perspective.

### **Partnerships**

Trail implementation typically requires extensive collaboration across organizations and agencies. This memorandum provides a list of the possible organizations and agencies that may need to be involved in trail development projects in the region, depending on the geographic, political, or environmental context. For each challenge and opportunity, we identify key partners. Partnerships fall under the following broad categories:

- Public Sector Agencies (Federal, State, Regional, County, Local, Tribal)
- Regulatory and Environmental Agencies
- Utilities, Infrastructure, and Emergency Service Providers
- Private Landowners and Development Partners
- Elected Officials
- Nonprofits and Advocacy Groups
- Community and User Groups
- Traditional and New Media

### **Shared Experiences**

Based on interviews with SACOG staff, feedback from the Working Group, and feedback from the governance and funding consultants, Toole Design identified the following shared experiences related to regional trail implementation:

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|---|---|
| <b>1. Interface between Rail and Trails</b>                 | <b>5. Funding (this section only includes challenges, with opportunities to come later)</b> |
| <b>2. Right-of-Way and Ownership</b>                        | <b>6. Environmental Constraints, Permitting, and Litigation</b>                             |
| <b>3. Agency Coordination, Partnerships, and Priorities</b> | <b>7. Other Shared Experiences</b>  |
| <b>4. Buy-in and Support</b>                                |   |

## Partnerships

Coordination, collaboration, and consensus building across private, public, non-profit, and institutional partners is critical for every trail development project. Trail projects in the SACOG region require coordination with dozens of partners to ensure implementation success. There are some shared partners that are relevant for all trails in the region, while some will be relevant only at a county or local level. The following is a preliminary list of partners that may need to be involved in regional trail implementation projects. Whether or not these partners need to be involved will differ on a case-by-case basis depending on the land use, right-of-way, jurisdictional, and environmental context along the trail corridor. Throughout the memo, we identify which partners may be most critical for each implementation challenge/opportunity. This list will be expanded during the project timeline, and more customized partners will be identified for the top ten priority projects.

### *Public Sector Agencies*

- Federal
  - » U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
  - » Bureau of Land Management (BLM)
  - » U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (if near waterways)
  - » National Park Services (NPS)
- State Agencies
  - » California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) – District 3
  - » California State Parks
  - » California Department of Fish and Wildlife
- Regional Agencies
  - » Sacramento Area Council of Governments (SACOG)
  - » Sacramento Metropolitan Air Quality Management District
  - » Sacramento Regional Transit District (SacRT)
- Sacramento Transportation Authority (STA)
- Placer County Transportation Planning Agency (PCTPA)
- El Dorado County Transportation Commission (EDCTC)
- Yolo Transportation District (YoloTD)
- Tahoe Regional Planning Agency (TRPA)
- Municipal and County Agencies
  - » City and County departments of planning, public works, transportation, environmental review, and parks and recreation
- Native American Tribal Councils
- Universities and Community Colleges

### *Regulatory and Environmental Agencies*

- Bureau of Reclamation (USBR)
- Central Valley Regional Water Quality Control Board
- Sacramento Flood Control Agency
- California Coastal Commission (if applicable)
- California Environmental Protection Agency (CalEPA)
- Local Air Quality Districts
- Departments of Water Resources (one for each SACOG county)
- Local Agency Formation Commissions (LAFCo) (One for each SACOG county)
- Delta Protection Commission

#### *Utilities, Infrastructure, and Emergency Services Providers*

- Pacific Gas & Electric (PG&E)
- Sacramento Municipal Utility District (SMUD) and other utility districts in the region
- Local Water Districts (one for each SACOG county)
- Telecommunications Companies (if crossing utility easements)
- Fire and Police Departments

#### *Private Landowners and Development Partners*

- Rail owners (including Union Pacific)
  - » Passenger and freight rail operators may also be partners (e.g., Amtrak and Sacramento Valley Railroad (SAV))
- Private Property Owners along the proposed trail corridor
- Real Estate Developers with adjacent land interests
- Agricultural Landowners (if crossing farmland)
- Commercial Businesses near the proposed route

#### *Elected Officials*

- United States Congress representatives
- California State Legislature representatives
- Sacramento Area Council of Governments (SACOG) Board of Directors
- Sacramento Transportation Authority (STA) Board of Supervisors
- Special District Boards (e.g., SacRT Board of Directors, Water District Boards)
- County Boards of Supervisors for all six counties
- City Councils for all local governments
- Local and county boards and commissions

#### *Nonprofits and Advocacy Partners*

- Rails-to-Trails Conservancy
- Sacramento Valley Conservancy
- American River Parkway Foundation
- Local Bicycle and Trail Advocacy Groups (e.g., Sacramento Area Bicycle Advocates – SABA, Friends of the El Dorado Trail, Yuba Area Bicycle Advocates – YABA, etc.)
- Environmental and Conservation Groups (e.g., Sierra Club, Friends of the River)
- Historical Societies (if near historic sites)
- Chambers of Commerce (for trail connections into commercial centers)

#### *Community and User Group Partners*

- Local Hiking, Biking, and Equestrian Clubs
- Neighborhood Associations
- Homeowners' Associations (HOAs) near the trail
- Business Improvement Districts, Local Businesses
- Local Schools, Universities, libraries, and research institutions (for educational partnerships)

#### *Traditional and New Media*

- Local Newspapers (e.g., Sacramento Bee)
- Community and Neighborhood Newsletters
- Local TV Stations
- Local Radio and Podcasts
- Local Instagram and TikTok influences (e.g., Sacramento History Museum)

## Shared Experiences: Challenges and Opportunities

### Interface between Rail and Trails

Coordination with rail service providers is integral to trail development in the SACOG region due to the region's extensive rail network. The Rails-to-Trails Conservancy reports that there are 2,400 rail-trails in the US, equaling more than 25,000-miles. California alone has 140 rail-trails with another 58 corridors under development. Rail corridors are sought after for trail development, especially in urban and suburban areas where linear corridors are scarce and in competition for development. Trails along rail corridors, or "rail-trails", are multipurpose public paths created from former railroad corridors. These paths are flat or gently sloping, making them easily accessible and an ideal way to enjoy the outdoors. Rail-trails are suitable for many types of activities—depending on the rules established by the local community—including walking, bicycling, wheelchair use, inline skating, cross-country skiing and horseback riding. Challenges local jurisdictions have faced associated with rail include heavy costs associated with design review process requirements, lack of sufficient resources (time, staff, and funding) to handle requirements, long and unpredictable timelines that can potentially lead to loss of funds, and a disconnected network due to projects falling into "gray areas", or project types that do not fall within limited categories. Given the extent of the rail network in the SACOG region, the agency cannot fulfill its regional trail network vision without close and ongoing coordination with regional rail service providers.



*Cedar Lake Trail, Minneapolis (Credit: Toole Design Group)*



**Table 1: Interface between Rail and Trails - Challenges and Opportunities**

Topic	Challenges	Opportunities	Suggested Partners	Lead Agency/ Partners
Union Pacific Public Projects Manual/ Design Review Process	C1. The Union Pacific Public Projects Manual and Design Review Process is confusing, time-consuming, costly, and resource intensive.	<p><b>O1.</b> Act as a liaison between local agencies and rail providers.</p> <p><b>O2.</b> Set up a trail funding program without the strict requirements and constraints put forth by other funding programs.</p> <p><b>O3.</b> Provide support payments to jurisdictions to cover Design Review Process costs (including the diagnostic fees).</p> <p><b>O4.</b> Provide technical assistance to jurisdictions to navigate the Design Review Process and alleviate jurisdiction time, resource, and financial constraints.</p> <p><b>O5.</b> Bundle and submit priority projects on behalf of jurisdictions to expedite and streamline Design Review Process.</p> <p><b>O6.</b> Create an educational toolkit and/or host a webinar outlining the Design Review Process and Public Projects Manual requirements.</p> <p><b>O7.</b> Leverage partner agency (e.g., Caltrans) support to navigate complexities</p> <p><b>O8.</b> Provide technical assistance to jurisdictions for navigating and understanding what opportunities exist for railbanked segments.</p> <p><b>O9.</b> Compile railbanking resources on SACOG website and host a railbanking webinar to help communities understand how railbanking and rail-with-trail development are complementary efforts.</p> <p><b>O10.</b> Inventory and map all railbanked segments in the region.</p> <p><b>O11.</b> Develop a Tip Sheet and/ or webinar about the relationship between rail status and design or procedural requirements.</p> <p><b>O12.</b> Inventory and map the ownership entity and status of key rail segments in the region to help agencies understand the requirements for trail design based on current segment status.</p> <p><b>O13.</b> Stalled negotiations with rail providers can often be restarted by engaging local, state, and federal elected officials. Elected official engagement with rail providers should be leveraged for high-priority projects. In preparation, SACOG should communicate with the elected official's office on the project's benefits and alignment with local priorities (for example, economic development in their district).</p> <p><b>*O14.</b> Compile and share existing best practices and design guidance resources on SACOG's website. This could include resource such as AASHTO Bikeway Design Guidelines, ADA standards and requirements, PROWAG, etc.</p>	Caltrans Rail Owners and Operators	SACOG
Railbanking, Rail Preservation and Rail Trails	<p><b>C2.</b> Some jurisdictions indicate uncertainty about what is possible, feasible, or suitable for railbanked segments within their jurisdictions.</p> <p><b>C3.</b> There can be perceived conflict between rail preservation and rail trail projects.</p>		Rails-to-Trails Conservancy County and Local Agency Staff	SACOG
Rail Segment Status	<p><b>C4.</b> The distinction between active, inactive, abandoned, out-of-service, and decommissioned railways may sometimes be unclear. Consequently, agencies may not understand what alignments, design standards, or crossing treatments are required for their trail project.</p>		Caltrans Rail Owners and Operators	SACOG
Access/ Alignment	<b>C5.</b> Rail companies may reject trail projects that cross over rail lines or run along their ROW, citing liability, design, or feasibility issues. Trail projects that are re-routed to bypass rail property can end up with a less safe alignment (for example, along high-speed, high-volume, or high collision roadways).		Caltrans Regional, County, and Local Agency Staff	SACOG

## Case Studies

### *Encinitas Coastal Rail Trail*



*Encinitas Rail Trail (credit: SANDAG)*

The Encinitas Coastal Rail Trail is a 1.3-mile constructed segment of the Coastal Rail Trail. The Coastal Rail Trail is a planned 44-mile continuous walking and biking route through San Diego County between the City of Oceanside and downtown San Diego. First envisioned in 1989, the San Diego Association of Governments (SANDAG) has spearheaded the construction of the Coastal Rail Trail in coordination with local governments.

The Encinitas segment, which connects the City of Encinitas and Cardiff-by-the-Sea, is the only piece of the Coastal Rail Trail built within the railroad right-of-way. Constructing this segment of trail required close coordination with the railroads that operate on the corridor, known as the Los Angeles-San Diego-San Luis Obispo (LOSSAN) Rail Corridor, the second busiest intercity passenger rail corridor in the US. Railroads operating on this section of the corridor include Amtrak and North County Transit District (corridor owner and operator of the COASTER commuter train), but also include Class I freight railroad BNSF Railway.

The design and approvals process with the railroads was lengthy and challenging for the Encinitas segments. At-grade crossings presented significant challenges, and the trail proponent was required to pay for railroad crossing improvements. Elements that made this rail-with-trail project successful include the project leadership: SANDAG served as the lead agency responsible for the project, and Caltrans served as the construction contract oversight manager. Both agencies worked closely with the City of Encinitas, the California Coastal Commission, North County Transit District, and other stakeholders and organizations involved with the project. Engineering and construction of the Coastal Rail Trail are funded by State active transportation funds (State Senate Bill 1 Active Transportation Program) and local funds, including TransNet, the regional half-cent sales tax for transportation administered by SANDAG. Most of the funding for the Encinitas project was drawn from TransNet funds.

Completed in 2019, the Encinitas Coastal Rail Trail provides biking and walking connectivity to community destinations, including business districts, beaches, local parks, and schools. It is an excellent example how strong project leadership and persistence from regional and state agencies pays off to provide a trail facility with outstanding community benefits.

*Sources:* Carterette, Chris. SANDAG. Interview. 2 July and 22 August 2024.

### ***Railbanking and the Nickel Plate Trail***



*Bicyclists on the Nickel Plate Trail (credit: Nickel Plate Trail, Inc.)*

The Nickel Plate Trail is a 40+ mile rail trail corridor in north-central Indiana that runs from Kokomo in Howard County to Rochester in Fulton County. The railroad, which operated since the mid-1800s, was preserved for trail use through a process called “railbanking” in 1999. Established in 1983 as an amendment to the Section 8(d) of the National Trails System Act, railbanking is a voluntary agreement between a railroad company and a trail agency to use an out-of-service rail corridor as a trail. Railbanking allows for a trail to be constructed as an “interim use”, preserving the option for the corridor to be reactivated as a railroad in the future.

When the segment connecting Cassville, Peru, and Rochester was railbanked and bought by the Indiana Trails Fund, ownership of the track was transferred to the Port Authority, which proceeded to coordinate rail salvage of equipment and materials, excluding bridges, tunnels, and culverts. Today the trail connects 10 communities in north central Indiana and takes trail users through scenic woodlands and wetlands.

#### *Sources:*

Rails-to-Trails Conversions: A Legal Review, Andrea C. Ferster, General Council, Rails-to-Trails Conservancy, 2017

Nickle Plate Trail. <https://www.nickelplatetrail.org/>



## Right-of-Way and Ownership

Securing ownership or legal right to development (via easements, for example) is an essential part of every trail development project. Right-of-way (ROW) and ownership factors determine where a trail can be built, how it can be used, and who is responsible for maintenance, among others. Navigating these complexities across multiple jurisdictions is especially critical for a regional network. Because SACOG's region includes six counties and dozens of local municipalities and other landowners, all trail implementation in the region requires navigating complex ROW and ownership scenarios. It is essential that jurisdictions understand who owns all the property along a planned trail alignment, even (and especially) if a trail only crosses another owner's ROW at discrete locations. Jurisdictions also need to understand options for acquiring or leasing land not already within their ownership, and how to manage illegal encroachments into their own ROW.



*Trail users in the SACOG region (Credit: Ellen Baker)*

**Table 2: Right-of-Way and Ownership - Challenges and Opportunities**

Topic	Challenges	Opportunities	Suggested Partners	Lead Agency/Partners
<b>Right-of-Way Acquisition</b>	<p><b>C6.</b> Local agencies embarking on trail development processes may not be aware of all the options available to them for acquiring right-of-way.</p> <p><b>C7.</b> Jurisdictions may not know or understand the right-of-way acquisition process for different entities.</p>	<p><b>O15.</b> Create and host a regularly updated map of the different ownership entities within the region and how they overlap with the planned regional trail network (including federal, state, regional, and local jurisdictions/agencies, utility companies, school districts, land management agencies, conservation areas, waterways, etc.).</p> <p><b>O16.</b> Build partnerships with key ownership entities and major landowners (including industries with large land holdings, i.e., agriculture, aviation, etc.) so that when surplus land becomes available, trail projects are top of mind for land donation.</p> <p><b>O17.</b> Provide technical assistance to help jurisdictions navigate different acquisition processes, including securing easements for trails segments and/or crossings. Technical assistance could be one-on-one for specific cases, or collective, in the form of a webinar or resource.</p> <p><b>O18.</b> Work with ownership entities to advocate for flexible acquisition policies and processes.</p>	<p>Public and private landowners, developers, and utility companies</p>	<p>SACOG County and local agency staff</p>
<b>Private / Unauthorized Encroachments</b>	<p><b>C8.</b> It is common for private residences or businesses to encroach public owned right-of-way (ROW) that could be used or is designated for trail development.</p>	<p><b>O19.</b> Develop flexible right-of-way/encroachment policy and/or work with jurisdictions to develop their own flexible local right-of-way/encroachment policy. Successfully navigating encroachments may require working with homeowners or local businesses on a case-by-case basis to resolve conflicts.</p> <p><b>*O20.</b> Bundle projects with additional amenities (i.e., lighting, shade, fencing, seating, etc.) that benefit residents, local businesses, or others that are directly adjacent or share a property line with the trail alignment.</p> <p>See <i>the Arcade Cripple Creek Case Study for a success story related to navigating encroachments.</i></p>	<p>SACOG Residents, Neighborhood Associations, Local Businesses, Business Improvement Districts</p>	<p>County and local agency staff</p>
<b>Inter-Jurisdictional Trail Crossings</b>	<p><b>C9.</b> Even when the lead development agency owns all possible parcels along a trail corridor, trails may still need to cross external ROW (for example, a state highway). Safety at these crossings is often cited as a reason that the trail project is infeasible, or that the design requirements would be prohibitively expensive.</p>	<p><b>*O14.</b> Compile and share existing best practices and design guidance resources on SACOG website. This could include resource such as AASHTO Design Guidelines, ADA standards and requirements, PROWAG, etc. The latest iteration of the AASHTO Design Guidelines includes a new chapter on best practice design for trail crossings at roadways.</p> <p><b>O21.</b> Provide technical assistance to help jurisdictions navigate different acquisition processes, including securing easements for trails segments and/or crossings.</p>	<p>County and local agency staff</p>	<p>SACOG Caltrans</p>



## Agency Coordination, Partnerships, and Priorities

Agency coordination, partnerships, and aligned priorities are essential for trail project implementation because they ensure efficiency, resource sharing, and broad community support. In the SACOG region, trails often cross multiple jurisdictions, requiring collaboration between local, regional, state, and federal agencies to secure funding, land, and necessary permits or approvals. Partnerships with public agencies, nonprofits, advocacy organizations, and others can help jurisdictions leverage expertise, funding sources, and community engagement, making projects more feasible and impactful.



*Elliott Bay Park, Washington (Credit: Toole Design Group)*

**Table 3: Agency Coordination, Partnerships, and Priorities Challenges and Opportunities**

Topic	Challenges	Opportunities	Suggested Partners	Lead Agency/ Partners
<b>Consensus About Priorities</b>	<b>C10.</b> It can be challenging to establish consensus on trail project priorities across jurisdictions. When different agencies do not have a unified voice on trail projects, it can hinder progress and erode hard-earned support.	<b>*O22.</b> Establish a Regional Trails Working Group Collaborative or Coalition modeled after the Bay Area Trails Collaborative (BATIC). The group can be an extension of the current Working Group and can help facilitate region-wide coordination and consensus building. Subcommittees can focus on building consensus for smaller geographies, or on topics like tracking policy or strategizing for shared funding opportunities etc.  <b>O23.</b> Use the Regional Trail Network framework to build and reinforce consensus between agencies. Continue to manage and regularly update the database of regional trails priorities, in coordination with local implementing agencies.	All	SACOG
<b>Interagency and Interjurisdiction Coordination</b>	<b>C11.</b> Trail projects spanning multiple jurisdictions require complex interjurisdictional coordination (especially in terms of right-of-way acquisition, funding, and maintenance).  <b>C12.</b> Even projects within a discrete geography (for example, totally within City or County boundaries) can require cross agency coordination (often related to right-of-way acquisition, utilities, and working with regulatory agencies).  <b>C13.</b> Jurisdictions report challenges balancing the roles and responsibilities between small and large parties.	<b>O24.</b> Create and maintain a regional Partnerships Database that can be shared with SACOG member jurisdictions and partners. The database should collect, store, and regularly update contact information for key regional partners that are typically involved in trail development projects in the region.  <b>O25.</b> Help local agencies inventory and manage partnerships and relationships that may not be captured in a regional Partnerships Database. These may include local parks and recreation districts, school districts, landowners, and neighborhood associations among other.  <b>O26.</b> Establish strategic relationships within staff at key funding, implementation, and regulatory agencies (Caltrans, water quality control board), especially with staff who are advocates for active transportation and trails.  <b>*O22.</b> Establish a Regional Trails Working Group Collaborative or Coalition modeled after the Bay Area Trails Collaborative (BATIC). The group can be an extension of the current Working Group and can help facilitate countywide coordination and consensus building. Subcommittees can focus on building consensus for smaller geographies, or on topics like tracking policy or strategizing for shared funding opportunities etc.	All	SACOG
<b>Conflicting Approaches to Managing Trail User Conflicts</b>	<b>C14.</b> Some entities that do not implement trail or transportation projects are concerned about user-conflict on shared-use paths and cite this as a reason for declining to coordinate on a trail project (e.g. regulatory agencies, state or federal agencies).	<b>O27.</b> Compile and share existing best practice, design guidance, and policy resources for accommodating difference users on trails and shared-use paths.  <b>O28.</b> Establish a communications campaign to encourage safe and compatible shared use of trails. See Marin County's " <a href="#">Slow and Sav Hello</a> " campaign and resources.	County and local agency staff, parks and recreation departments or districts, landowners, emergency management	SACOG Caltrans
<b>New Development/ Developers</b>	<b>C15.</b> Some jurisdictions have experienced reluctance from developers to incorporate trail projects in new development areas/projects.	<b>O29.</b> Provide technical assistance to local jurisdictions to help them develop local ordinances or policies requiring developers to construct trails when the project boundaries overlap with priority trail corridors.	Landowners and developers	SACOG County and local agency staff



## Case Study

### *The Circuit Trails*



*Schuylkill Banks River Trail part of the Circuit Trails (Credit: Laura Pedrick/AP Images)*

Located in Greater Philadelphia and New Jersey, the Circuit Trails is a network that, once complete, will include over 800 miles of trails. With more than 300 miles of trail already constructed, the benefits of this network are already being enjoyed by the nine-county region across Pennsylvania and New Jersey. The Circuit Trails Coalition, which launched in 2012, has brought together nonprofit organizations, foundations, and agencies to advocate for the trail network completion and raise awareness about trails and their many benefits. The Coalition was created to follow up on successful collaborative efforts across multiple organizations, which together, were able to secure a \$23 million USDOT TIGER grant in 2009. This success highlighted the need to build an ongoing collaboration instead of continuing with haphazard or opportunistic collaborative efforts.

The Coalition was founded with over 35 member organizations, each of which have some kind of connection with the multi-use trails that accommodate all types of trail users in the nine counties of the Greater Philadelphia Region. Each member organization has benefits and responsibilities, including the ability to vote for members of the Circuit Trails Coalition Steering Committee and the obligation to exhibit and promote the Circuit Trails branding and the organization's participation in the Circuit Trails Coalition.

#### *Sources:*

The Circuit Trails. *The Circuit Trails Coalition- Basic Governance Framework.*

<https://www.circuittrails.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/TheCircuitCoalition-GovernanceDocument-2019.2.14.pdf>

Rails to Trails Conservancy. *The Circuit Trails.* <https://www.railstotrails.org/trailnation/the-circuit-trails/>

## Buy-in and Support

Buy-in and support for trail projects is crucial for successful project implementation, especially for regional networks. Project buy-in and support can lead to more successful project outcomes, including meeting community needs, fostering a sense of stewardship, a smooth approval process and conflict reduction, resource sharing and partnerships, and long-term sustainability.



*Community members at a trail event in the SACOG region (Credit: Ellen Baker)*

**Table 4: Buy-in and Support - Challenges and Opportunities**

Topic	Challenges	Opportunities	Suggested Partners	Lead Agency/Partners
<b>Community Pushback to Trail Development</b>	<p><b>C16.</b> Residents often express resistance to trails projects for a variety of reasons including perceptions of unintended trail project impacts (i.e., crime, environmental impacts, personal safety, trash and debris).</p>	<p><b>*O30.</b> Create a Communications and Marketing Toolkit that includes strategies, language, best practices, and case studies for communicating trail benefits and value, conducting trail outreach and engagement, gaining elected official buy-in and support, and increasing public awareness and shifting public perception about trails.</p> <p><b>*O20.</b> Bundle projects with additional amenities (i.e., lighting, shade, fencing, seating, etc.) that benefit residents, local businesses, or others that are directly adjacent or share a property line with the trail alignment.</p> <p><b>O31.</b> Co-locate trails with other local/community attractions and destinations.</p> <p><b>O32.</b> Create a public outreach/messaging campaign highlighting trail amenities directly benefiting the greater community/neighbors, and communicating trail benefits (i.e., economic benefit, connection to nature, landscaping, fencing, shade, lighting, playgrounds, etc.)</p> <p><b>O33.</b> Conduct outreach or host engagement activities to communicate trail project amenities and address perceptions/community concerns early in the project process. Engagement can include trail tours (bike rides, walking tours, etc.). Cater tours toward the group that is being impacted (i.e., cater talking points, length based on the group, i.e., families and children, rail advocates, active/recreation enthusiasts, elected officials.) During these tours, identify potential project champions and key partnerships.</p> <p><b>O34.</b> Include or require Safety and Maintenance Plans as part of trail implementation projects, addressing concerns related to crime, environmental impacts, personal safety, debris removal, etc. The Safety and Maintenance Plan can show what systems are in place to address these issues once projects are implemented.</p>	<p>Nonprofits and Advocacy Groups, Community and User Groups, Elected officials, Media</p>	<p>SACOG County and local agency staff Caltrans</p>
<b>Lack of Interest or Enthusiasm for Trails</b>	<p><b>C17.</b> There can be an imbalance of trail-user engagement vs. pro-rail advocates, particularly in communities with strong attachments to recommitting rail lines despite its potential infeasibility</p>	<p><b>O35.</b> Buy-in from local elected officials can smooth trail implementation. SACOG and implementation agencies can seek political support from local, regional, state, and sometimes federal elected officials. Their involvement can help secure competitive funding, educate communities on the benefits of trails, and overcome regulatory or right-of-way barriers. To secure political buy-in, staff should highlight project benefits that best align with the priorities for each elected official (for example, economic development in their district).</p> <p><b>O36.</b> Leverage trail projects to increase visibility of and exposure to local communities and businesses across the region (for example, via wayfinding and discovery strategies). In doing so, trail developers can help make the case for the economic development benefits of trail projects for small or rural communities and businesses.</p> <p><b>O37.</b> Conduct a technical study or analysis to show the efficacy of trails and active transportation in reducing emissions via Vehicle Miles Travelled (VMT) reductions. This will connect trail implementation to climate action, including the requirements under Senate Bill (SB) 743 VMT Mitigation<sup>1</sup>.</p>		

<sup>1</sup> California SB 743 VMT Mitigation shifts transportation impact analysis from Level of Service (LOS) to Vehicle Miles Traveled (VMT) to promote sustainable land use and reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

## Case Studies

*City of Citrus Heights – Arcade Cripple Creek Trail*

*Placeholder – to be completed as part of the Final Memorandum.*



***El Dorado County – El Dorado Trail***

***Placeholder – to be completed as part of the Final Memorandum.***

***City of Sacramento – Del Rio Trail***

***Placeholder – to be completed as part of the Final Memorandum.***

### ***Dry Creek Greenway***



*Dry Creek Greenway, Roseville (Source: City of Roseville)*

The City of Roseville's Dry Creek Greenway Trail Project supports efforts to create regional and interconnected trails networks in Placer County and Sacramento County. Ultimately, the Dry Creek Greenway Trail will be a part of a planned 70-mile loop trail making it a significant part of the active transportation network in the greater South Placer and Sacramento community.

Roseville's portion of the Dry Creek Greenway Trail was divided into two trail projects: Dry Creek Greenway East (DCGE) and Dry Creek Greenway West. The City began planning for the East trail as early as 2008. It was decided to construct the trail in three phases. Construction for Phase 1 began in 2023 with estimated completion in Winter 2025.

DCGE Phase One includes two miles of Class I trail meandering through the natural space along three creeks. It connects mature neighborhoods from the downtown central Roseville area to businesses, parks, schools, and neighborhoods in the southwestern portion of the City. In addition, it includes three new bridges, three roadway undercrossings, and a trailhead parking area with restroom facilities. A challenge Roseville faced was the time span between receiving original grant funding to construction. COVID-19 and other regulation challenges also impeded project progress. By the time the project was ready for construction, material prices had skyrocketed, and more transportation funding was needed. Placer County Transportation Planning Association was instrumental in helping the City advance funds so that the project could get underway and meet grant deadlines.

Throughout the project process, community outreach and engagement kept the community involved and invested. The public involvement process helped identify community needs and priorities, provided coordination among stakeholders, and established a plan to guide development. Partnerships with local schools, bicycle advocacy groups, and neighborhood associations were vital in keeping the enthusiasm for the trail strong.

Successful construction and dedicated future maintenance of the trail can be attributed to the cooperation between different departments within the City of Roseville. Departments involved in this project included teams from Environmental Utilities; Parks, Recreation, and Libraries; Public Works; Electric; Fire; Police; and Finance. This collaboration allowed for more guidance, enhanced supervision, and contributed to lower project costs. Additionally, a strong working relationship with Caltrans also contributed to the project's success.

Currently, the City of Roseville is in Phase 2 (Design) DCGE and plans to start construction in late 2026/2027.

*Source: City of Roseville*

## Funding

Funding is essential for the success and implementation of trail projects, as funding is required for every phase of a project, including planning, land acquisition, construction, on-going maintenance, and project sustainability. Currently, many challenges exist related to trail project funding. This section outlines the various challenges that local jurisdictions face. Funding opportunities will be presented at a later stage.



*Bicyclists on the Jedidiah Smith Memorial trail (Credit: Ellen Baker)*



**Table 5: Funding - Challenges**

Challenges
<b>C19.</b> Jurisdictions with fewer disadvantaged communities (as defined by many grant programs) may be less competitive for grant funding.
<b>C20.</b> Competitive discretionary funding programs supporting active transportation and trail projects are oversubscribed, funding timelines have strict requirements, and funding availability fluctuates.
<b>C21.</b> Smaller jurisdictions may not have the capacity to pursue grant opportunities.
<b>C22.</b> Jurisdictions struggle to secure matching funds to pursue larger programs.
<b>C23.</b> There is uncertainty in how federal funding priorities will shift after each election and when/if discretionary programs will be re-authorized.
<b>C24.</b> In general, jurisdictions face a lack of funding opportunities (including ongoing maintenance funds and matching funds) for trail projects.
<b>C25.</b> Local jurisdictions with conflicting project priorities may diminish funding competitiveness for multiple active transportation projects if they all pursue funding sources independently.
<b>C26.</b> Effectively communicating project benefits and building support amongst the public, agency stakeholders, and elected officials, all with differing priorities, motivations, and needs can be a barrier to acquiring funding.
<b>C27.</b> Large trail projects may require a significant investment to complete, which can be intimidating for jurisdictions.
<b>C28.</b> The governance structure of a newly formed trail-specific entity may influence how funding is pursued.
<b>C29.</b> Funding sources tend to prefer commuter trails versus recreation trails. Not all jurisdictions are created equal specifically related to commuter trail feasibility.

## Case Studies and additional information

### ***Factors that Increase Trail Project Funding Competitiveness***

- Project goals and objectives are strongly aligned across government and public stakeholders.
- Project directly benefits vulnerable and under-resourced communities (for state-administered programs).
- Public engagement efforts actively involved members of under-resourced populations, and the project's design reflects the community's input and feedback.
- Project fills active transportation network gaps and improves network connectivity.
- Project reduces barriers to accessing core community amenities and destinations, such as schools, parks, employment centers, shopping/dining areas, transit, mobility hubs, and public services.
- Project creates safer and lower-stress conditions for active modes, particularly in high-collision areas, near schools, and where street design discourages active travel.
- Project improves the local land use-transportation relationship.
- Project encourages a shift to active travel and, potentially, transit.
- Project reduces vehicle emissions and air pollution.
- Project aligns with public health initiatives and contributes to improved community health outcomes.
- Project enhances overall community livability and quality of life.

### ***Great Rivers Greenway***



*Boschert Greenway part of the Great Rivers Greenway Network (Credit: Great Rivers Greenway)*

Great Rivers Greenway is a public agency that administers funds collected for the 135+ miles of trails in the St. Louis region. The funds are collected through a sales tax that was created by a citizens' vote in St. Louis City, St. Louis County, and St. Charles County in 2000 to support parks and greenways. Great Rivers Greenway is governed by a 12-member appointed Board of Directors that represent the region. The agency is led by 44 staff who work with 265+ partners and are accountable to the taxpayers through annual reports, collaborative 5-year regional plans, and ongoing community engagement.

Projects funded by the sales tax are wide-reaching and include planning and construction of new trail segments, parks, and trailheads, as well as stream bank restoration projects and improvements to existing sections of trail. In addition to Great Rivers Greenway's mission to build trails, they also implement conservation projects that create or improve natural habitats along greenways and support stormwater management.

*Source:*

Great Rivers Greenway. <https://greatriversgreenway.org/>

## Orange County (OC) Loop



*Bicyclists on the OC Loop (Credit: OCTA)*

The Orange County Loop, or OC Loop, is Orange County's vision for 66 miles of seamless connections between scenic coastal beaches and inland reaches. 58 of the 66 miles use existing off-street trails along regional rivers, creeks, and the coast. Currently, 88% of the OC Loop is already in place, and 80% of the work is completed. The origin of the OC Loop dates to the 1950s, when local jurisdictions, OCTA, OCCOG, Caltrans, community advocates and groups, and the UP Railroad all contributed to its development. The Loop traverses 17 cities, 200 parks, 170 schools, with 650,000 residents and 340,000 jobs all within 1 mile of the Loop.

Local jurisdictions, OCTA, and the County have undertaken planning for the loop in several plans and studies. OCTA recently completed the OC Loop Gap Closure Feasibility Study, which identified the remaining gaps in the Loop. In addition to identifying an expansion of the loop, the study builds off prior collaborative studies such as the OC Loop 70/30 Plan (2015), which, at the time hoped to complete the remaining 30% of the Loop. Other studies and plans include OC Active (2019), and regional strategies and feasibility studies for each of the five supervisorial districts in the county. The OC Parks department has its own studies to complete its segments.

The County of Orange Parks and local jurisdictions have been the lead agencies for implementing the different segments of the Loop, with the earliest, Segment N, completed in 1985 and the following segments, O, P, & Q, completed in late 2025. CTC ATP funds funded segments P & Q in the amount of \$45.9M with \$72M in total secured. Current segments in progress include segments A & B by the Cities of La Habra and Brea, which are in the final design and ROW phase. Both cities have secured approximately \$55M in funding out of the \$76M required to complete the segments, utilizing funding sources from OCTA BCIP and CTC ATP. Segment D is being constructed by the County, and segment T is currently under review by Caltrans. Segments C, E, F, G, H, I, J, K, N, R, and S have all been completed.

Potential and previously utilized funding sources include Caltrans ATP, Caltrans STPG, CTC ATP, SCAG programs, OCTA BCIP grant, HSIP funds, CMAQ funds, STBG-TA funds, BUILD grants, Land and Water Conservation funds, Recreational Trails Program grants, TIFIA loans, FTA Section 5310 5303, 5304, and 5305 funds, LPP grants, STIP funds, SHOPP funds, LSRP funds, SCCP grants, CA OTS grants, EEM grants, Prop 68 grants, TDA funds, and local M2 (OC GO) program funds.

OCTA provides funding, guidance, and overall support to local jurisdictions for the completion of the loop. Regional coordination amongst regional, state, and local jurisdictions, and community partners have contributed toward the continued development of the Loop and future loops, with the original OC Loop nearing full completion.

*Source: Drago Vantage*



## Environmental Constraints, Permitting, and Litigation

Understanding California's stringent environmental and permitting regulations is crucial for trail project implementation and will help ensure compliance, protect natural ecosystems, and prevent user/resource conflicts, and future litigation. Many trails in the SACOG region pass through sensitive habitats, wetlands, or protected lands, requiring careful planning to minimize environmental impacts. Permitting processes help address concerns such as erosion control, water quality, wildlife protection, and vegetation management, ensuring the trail is sustainable and does not harm the surrounding environment.

Additionally, legal challenges related to trail project implementation can arise for various reasons and is not uncommon for trail implementing agencies in the SACOG region. Legal challenges can arise from property owners, environmental groups, or other stakeholders concerned about land use, environmental impact, or public access rights. Proactively addressing and pre-empting these issues through thorough planning, community engagement, and compliance with legal and regulatory requirements helps mitigate risks and build support for trail projects. Clear documentation, stakeholder collaboration, and legal due diligence ensure that disputes are resolved efficiently, reducing the likelihood of costly lawsuits that could halt or alter the trail's development. By addressing potential legal challenges early, trail projects can move forward smoothly while maintaining public trust and long-term viability.



*Pedestrian and dog walking along a trail near a waterway in the Sacramento region (Credit: Ellen Baker)*



**Table 6: Environmental Review, Compliance Permitting, and Litigation - Challenges and Opportunities**

Topic	Challenges	Opportunities	Suggested Partners	Lead Agency/Partners
Environmental Review, Compliance, and Permitting	<p><b>C30.</b> Navigating and understanding project requirements/limitations across different government-owned/managed land (i.e., Federal, State, Regional, etc.) and/or environmentally protected areas is complex.</p> <p><b>C31.</b> There are situations where jurisdictions do not have the capacity or in-house skills to undertake environmental permitting requirements (i.e., NEPA and CEQA).</p>	<p><b>*O50.</b> Create factsheet and/or host a webinar (or similar) explaining environmental protections and requirements related to trail projects.</p> <p><b>O51.</b> Provide technical assistance to support communities with NEPA/CEQA and other environmental permitting requirements.</p> <p><b>O52.</b> Promote and advocate for reduction in trail project permitting and CEQA requirements on legislative agendas.</p>	Regulatory and Environmental Agencies	SACOG County and local agency staff
	<p><b>C32.</b> Trails located along or near sensitive areas (i.e., evacuation routes, defensible space, ingress/egress locations) have added requirements.</p>	<p><b>*O50.</b> Create factsheet and/or host a webinar (or similar) explaining environmental protections/requirements related to trail projects.</p> <p><b>O53.</b> Include interpretive and educational elements in trail project designs related to natural habitats, sensitive areas, conservation, endangered species, etc. to engage and inform the public.</p> <p><b>O54.</b> Map and regularly update sensitive areas in the region, including evacuation routes, defensible space, ingress/egress locations, native plants, and protected/sensitive habitat areas..</p>		SACOG
Litigation Against Trail Development	<p><b>C33.</b> California's stringent environmental regulations and policies are often mis-used by project opponents to sue the lead agency for trail development projects.</p>	<p><b>O55.</b> Pre-empt litigation using the following strategies:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Preparing Environmental Impact Reports (EIRs), even when not strictly required.</li> <li>▪ Conduct strong feasibility studies</li> <li>▪ Host robust and frequent public workshops and educational sessions</li> <li>▪ Partner with opposing entities early in the process</li> </ul> <p><b>O56.</b> Provide technical assistance to jurisdictions for navigating legal threats and developing strategies to overcome and/or pre-empt threats.</p> <p><i>The City of Sacramento may be able to provide a success story for successfully overcoming litigation through pre-emptive measures. City staff have offered to provide the settlement documents that ruled in the City's favor.</i></p>	<p>Regulatory and Environmental Agencies</p> <p>SACOG Caltrans County and local agency staff</p>	SACOG County and local agency staff

## Case Study

### *Technical Assistance and the Santa Clara River Loop Trail*



*Santa Clara River (Credit: Nina Danza)*

The Santa Clara River Loop Trail (SCRLT) is a proposed 8-mile shared use path along the north and south banks of the Santa Clara River that connects the cities of Ventura and Oxford, CA. The Santa Clara River is a special natural feature to the region because it is one of the few unchannelized coastal rivers in southern California. Leadership from the Friends of the Santa Clara River applied for technical assistance through the National Park Service's Rivers, Trails, and Conservation Assistance (RTCA) Program for help with trail planning and incorporating environmental education into project.

In 2020, RTCA assisted the Friends group, along with Sierra Club, in conducting a study for the SCRLT to further protect and preserve the value of the Santa Clara River. The goal of the study was to see the SCRLT raise environmental literacy and instill a larger movement toward stewardship of the river. RTCA staff were able to advance the efforts of the Friends group by convening key stakeholders and the community to gather input and feedback on conceptual design recommendations for the trail.

#### *Sources:*

National Park Service. Rivers, Trails, and Conservation Assistance Program. *Conservation and Outdoor Recreation Community Assistance Projects: Santa Clara River Loop Trail.*

<https://nps.maps.arcgis.com/apps/MapTour/index.html?appid=27a3ce5187ab4b6a8edbf46c45d0e15>

Friends of the Santa Clara River. *Santa Clara River Loop Trail.* <https://fscr.org/river/projects/santa-clara-river-loop-trail/>

## Other Challenges and Opportunities

Jurisdictions indicated a handful of other challenges that do not fall into one centralized theme. Table 7 discusses those challenges and related opportunities.

**Table 7: Other Challenges and Opportunities**

Topic	Challenges	Opportunities	Suggested Partners	Lead Agency/ Partners
<b>Staffing</b>	<b>C34.</b> Jurisdictions report a lack of dedicated trail planning staff.	<b>O57.</b> Provide staff augmentation/support to local jurisdictions.	Non-profits and Advocacy Groups	SACOG
<b>Design Compliance</b>	<b>C35.</b> Jurisdictions report challenges ensuring they are compliant with all design requirements and standards (i.e., CA MUTCD, ADA, PROWAG, etc.).	<b>O14*.</b> Compile and share existing best practices and design guidance resources on SACOG website. This could include resources such as AASHTO Design Guidelines, ADA standards and requirements, PROWAG, etc.	Public Sector Agencies, Regulatory and Environmental Agencies	SACOG Caltrans



*Bicyclists along a trail in the SACOG region (Credit: Ellen Baker)*