Prioritizing the Regional Trail Network

What are the Regional Trail Network Tiers?

Planned trail projects from the Regional Trail Plan are sorted into tiers based on their potential to: **achieve trail network goals** of transportation safety, health, environmental justice, economic vitality, all ages and abilities, and recreation; and **further regional goals** of crossing infrastructure boundaries, collaborating with partners, supporting critical connections, and filling in trail network gaps. The complete prioritization framework is available in Appendix A. Tier 1 projects were weighted between 60 and 100 points through the prioritization framework, Tier 2 projects between 41 and 59 points, and Tier 3 projects with 40 or fewer points.

Tier 1

Tier 1 includes trail projects that demonstrate strong potential to move the region closer to the Regional Trail Plan performance metrics, such as increasing household access to longer trails and providing safe parallel connections to avoid high-crash roadways. These projects also frequently show strong potential to fill in trail network gaps and overcome physical barriers to biking and walking. These projects are at different stages of development based on local efforts.

Regional coordination efforts focus on these projects in the zero to five and five to ten-year timeframe to help them either advance to the next stage of development or construction.

Tier 2

Tier 2 projects also demonstrate potential to achieve trail network goals such as creating all ages and abilities active modes networks and creating access to social gathering centers but may not support all the regionalism goals from the prioritization framework. Projects in Tier 2 may, alternatively, show high potential for meeting the region's goals of crossing infrastructure boundaries and providing critical access to job centers, but only further trail plan goals of increasing recreational opportunities and creating all ages and abilities networks.

Regional coordination efforts include Tier 2 projects in the five- to ten-year timeframe and the ten-year-and-beyond timeframe. This is to help set the next generation of trails in motion as in-progress Tier 1 projects are implemented. However, locally driven efforts may get these projects underway or built independent of SACOG coordination.

Tier 3

Tier 3 projects represent the push to complete the planned regional trail network. These projects serve a critical role of connecting the network, stitching communities together, and providing trail connections to the places that make our region a desirable place to live. They also fulfill local needs and desires by providing transportation connections, in addition to their role in the regional trail network.

Regional coordination efforts include Tier 3 projects in the ten-year-and-beyond timeframe. This contributes to the sustained effort to implement the regional trail network and make a regionally significant transportation and quality of life asset. Locally driven efforts may get these projects underway or built independent of SACOG coordination.

Figure: Dispersion of trail connections into Tiers
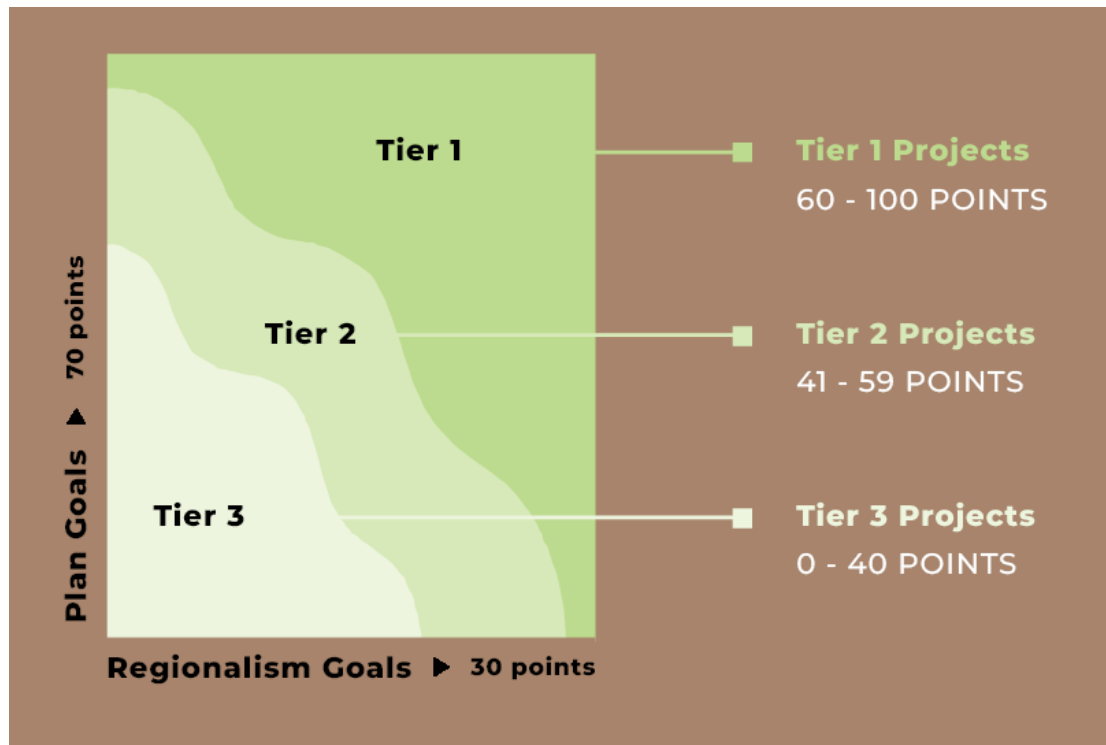
Top Tier study corridors

Top Tier study corridors were weighted between 75 and 100 points through the prioritization framework and demonstrate similar performance potential as the Tier 1 planned trail network connections. However, study corridors are often more conceptual connections that need local assessment and vetting to be included in approved local planning documents. Study corridors may also be on-road study corridors that could provide a trail-like experience (typically a Class IV separated bikeway) and access in areas where there is no option for a trail connection.

Top Tier study corridors are grouped with Tier 1 projects for recommendations in the 0-five-year timeframe, and recommended for additional local-level discussion and vetting to determine their viability to fill a role in the regional trail network.

Lower Tier study corridors

Lower Tier study corridors were weighted with 74 or fewer points through the prioritization framework and demonstrate similar project performance to the Tier 2 and Tier 3 projects. Study corridors serve a vital role in connecting communities and creating access to important

destinations in the region. However, study corridors are more conceptual connections that need local assessment and vetting to be included in approved local planning documents.

Lower Tier study corridors are recommended for additional local-level discussion and vetting to determine if they will be able to fulfill their potential connecting role in the regional trail network.

Evaluating readiness of projects

Each tier of projects was assessed for their readiness to move forward based on the local efforts to-date. With the focus on trails serving residents, project sponsors first share the level of meaningful engagement conducted with communities where the trail would be located and whose residents would potentially use the trail. Support from local leaders is also critical to determine if a project would be able to move forward and clear logistical obstacles that face many trails in their implementation.

With continued conversations to collaborate and co-create with communities and local leaders, projects were then assessed on their completed steps to move towards project development and final design. Most trails can take more than ten years to implement, so the regional coordination efforts can support a sustainable future where trails can serve as critical connections to daily destinations.

By assessing trail projects through this process, SACOG and its partner agencies can identify the next steps needed to move planned trails forward to implementation. This process also supports stronger coordination between agencies, as it can uncover when different trail projects are at similar stages in their development – which can highlight opportunities for collaboration in clearing project development hurdles or securing competitive grant funding.

Resident
Input

Leadership
Support

Project
development

Rights of
way

Final design/
"Shovel-ready"
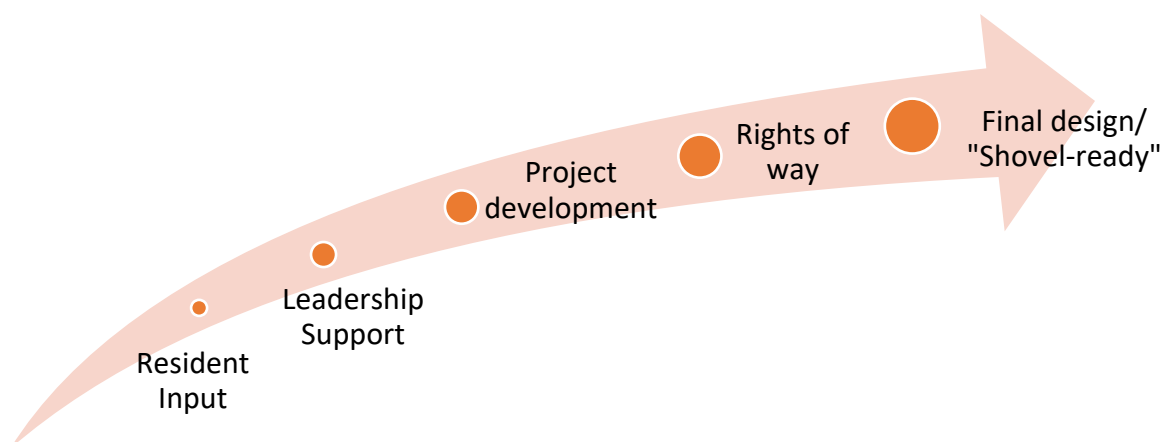
Implementing the Regional Trail Network

This section of the plan is designed to guide agencies as they work towards trail project implementation. Strategic actions for each Tier are based upon a specific project's current

phase and anticipated regional impact. These recommended next steps can guide agencies in addressing common challenges that arise in Regional Trail Network implementation: institutional barriers, meaningful community engagement, infrastructure barriers, and siloed local planning efforts and development.

SACOG's Commitment

Each timeframe of action plan has localized recommendations for agencies and for SACOG. SACOG also recognizes its potential leadership role in implementing the Regional Trail Network and the need for efforts that can support all projects regardless of tier or timeframe. SACOG commits to the below outlined best practices to maximize each of its partner agencies' efforts to bring the Regional Trail Network to fruition, regardless of project tier.

- **Interagency coordination:** Lead coordination efforts between cities and counties in the SACOG region, and with Caltrans, Union Pacific Railroad (UPRR), water agencies, and other federal or state agencies to identify and address major infrastructure or institutional barriers, implement trail projects, and preserve the trail network.
- **Regional convening:** Share trail project ideas and updates with agency staff throughout the region to contribute to the Regional Trail Network narrative and maximize its buildout and resulting impact; provide as-needed guidance to agencies such as conflict resolution, community engagement, and next steps. Engage with regional leaders on the potential of the fully implemented Regional Trail Network.
- **Public information campaign:** Execute a focused campaign on the Regional Trail Network to increase support among elected officials, local staff, and civic leaders. The campaign will provide an overview of the Regional Trails Network through public-facing materials and resources (e.g., webpage content, social media posts, informational videos, fact sheets), and provide tools and information needed for partners to promote, encourage, and fund new trail construction.
- **Monitor and update the Regional Trail Network:** Track the implementation of the Regional Trail Network every two to three years; update the trail network prioritization to account for changing land uses, updated demographic information for the region, and newly opened trails. This monitoring will also provide an opportunity to celebrate progress in support of completing a trail network for the region.
- **Data and GIS:** Provide data and GIS mapping support to partners in support of Regional Trail Network implementation. Maintain an interactive map of all planned and built trails in the region that serve the Regional Trail Network.
- **Grant technical assistance:** Provide support with funding application development, including letters of support, application review, other technical assistance as needed specific to competitive funding programs.
- **Track and share funding sources:** Identify and promote federal, state, and regional grant programs that agencies could apply to for trail project planning and implementation activities. (Appendix E)

- **Support new funding opportunities:** Seek greater flexibility from state and federal sources to support ongoing maintenance investments for trails. Support local agencies in pursuing options to implement new local fees and taxes dedicated to trails.

Partner recommendations

Implementing the Regional Trail Network involves regional coordination and support, but each piece of the Regional Trail Network is first and foremost a local trail connection. To further the efforts identified for project-specific recommendations, partners also can also use best practices to maximize Regional Trail Network benefit while serving residents:
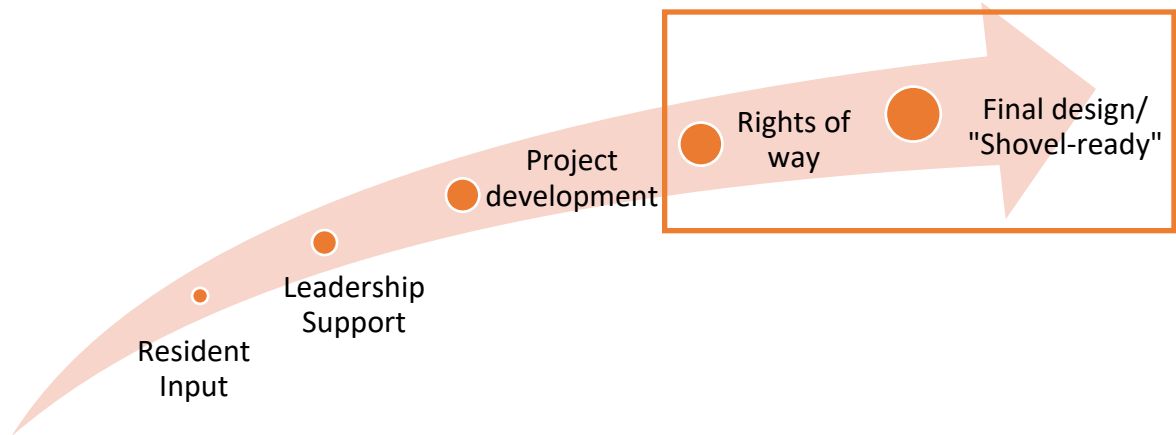
- Maintain and improve existing Regional Trail Network segments, including considerations for safety and security, and new or improved trail access points.
- Improve or establish high-comfort at-grade and grade-separated crossings to connect existing disconnected Regional Trail Network segments.
- Invite neighboring jurisdictions and special districts to have a seat at the table during planning discussions, trail plan updates and feasibility studies, and regional trail implementation efforts.
- Coordinate internally to and ensure regional trail connections are discussed as potential components of changing land use discussions and transportation investments.
- Cultivate partnerships with community groups and social service providers that can help holistically identify approaches for trail safety concerns.
- Work with residents and community groups to define expectations and benefits of trails in their neighborhoods; work proactively to design trails that will meet their needs and serve their desired uses of the trail.
- Work with community groups to plan and execute social events on the regional trail network, or accessible by the regional trail network, to introduce residents to the trail network and increase their comfort and knowledge using the trail.
- Monitor use of the Regional Trail Network to identify local usage trends and support acquiring funding for future trails.

High Regional Impact   [2022-2027]

SACOG efforts in the 0–5-year span focus on advancing the projects in Tier 1. Each project in Tier 1 is at a different stage in its implementation based on local efforts to date. The recommendations reflect the next needed steps to get connections closer to implementation.

"Go"

Your project is shovel ready; the community has demonstrated support through targeted outreach efforts and local elected officials are champions of the project. The project has a completed feasibility study and creates an important connection to key activity centers, employment hubs, and/or community destinations.

Final design/
"Shovel-ready"

Rights of
way

Project
development

Leadership
Support
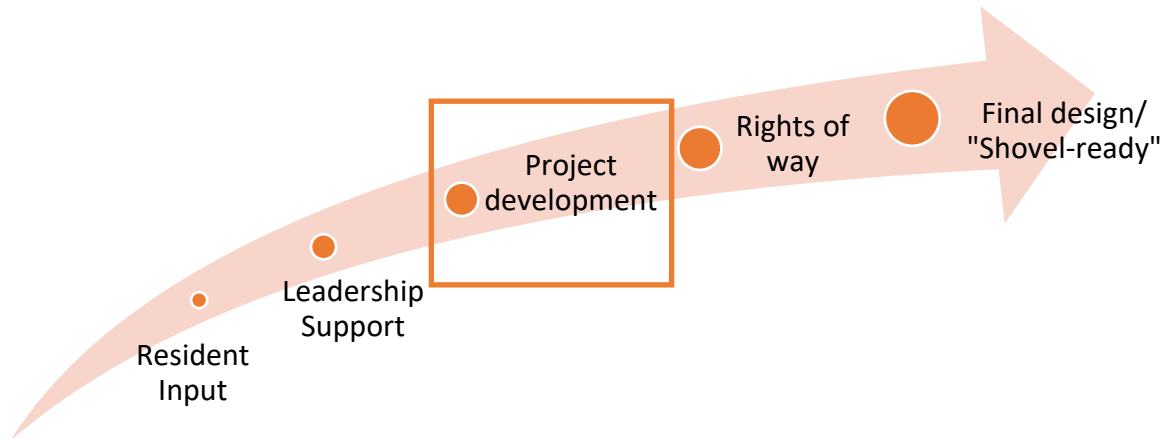
Resident
Input

Partner recommendations

- **Final design:** Finalize the trail design plans and specifications with staff and/or consultant team.
- **Right-of-way acquisition:** Coordinate with appropriate state agency to obtain right-of-way easements and/or work with residents / businesses to clear encroachments on the trail corridor.
- **Permit coordination:** Secure all required environmental, railroad, and/or utility permits or relocations.
- **Natural habitat conservation:** Collaborate with local environmental groups to mitigate anticipated environmental impacts such as preparing a draft tree planting plan.
- **Funding:** Secure grant funding for construction.
- **Community engagement:** Continue providing updates and information to community members and collaborators about work to implement the trail project. Include opportunities for further collaboration where possible, such as the development of a wayfinding signs, input on design options, fine-tuning needed and desired support infrastructure and trail amenities, and other areas of input that may be specific to your community.

SACOG recommendations

- **Leverage regional planning efforts to ensure equitable trail access:** Look for potential opportunities to add a public transit stop, park-and-ride area, and/or rideshare pick-up and drop-off zone to increase access to the project.
- **Leverage data tools to augment trail narrative:** Use regional in-house data and analysis analytic tools in conjunction with qualitative data to develop project-specific fact sheets to promote benefits of trail projects seeking construction funding or other forms of support.
- **Identify coordinated funding opportunities:** Work with partners to identify joint funding opportunities for projects at similar development stages or sharing geographic areas.

"Get Set"

Your project is not quite ready to start construction, but you're setting it up for the final planning phases. Your agency could be developing a feasibility study for the project, or midway through preliminary planning and environmental clearance. Either way, these phases are critical to move the project closer to implementation and public use.

Partner recommendations

- **Feasibility study:** Begin developing a feasibility study for the trail project to evaluate existing conditions along your proposed trail project's alignment, identify potential opportunities and constraints, determine a preferred trail route, and engage community members.
- **Environmental technical studies:** Initiate environmental analysis for the trail project as required by the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) to evaluate the project's potential environmental impacts.
- **Right-of-way acquisition:** Coordinate with your agency's local public works department, utility company, and/or state agency to determine right-of-way easements needed.
- **Project funding:** Identify and pursue grant funding for the trail project.
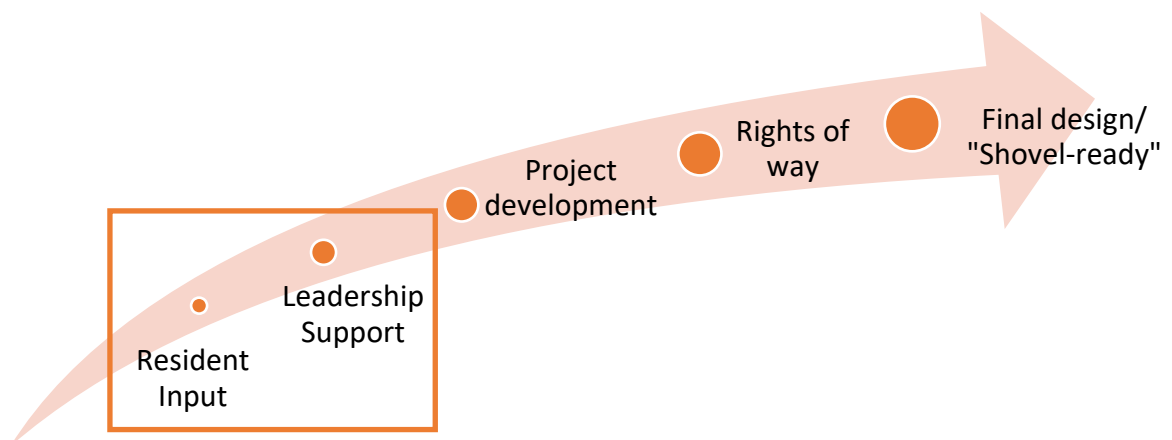
SACOG recommendations

- **Multi-partner project coordination:** Coordinate planned / proposed trail projects with city and county master plans, general plans, and local planning activities.
- **Leverage regional planning efforts to ensure equitable trail access:** Look for opportunities to expand access via mobility hubs, public transit stops, park-and-ride areas, and/or rideshare pick-up and drop-off zones to increase access to the project.
- **Leverage data tools to augment trail narrative:** Use regional in-house data and analysis analytic tools in conjunction with qualitative data to develop project-specific fact sheets to promote benefits of trail projects seeking construction funding or other forms of support.

- **Identify coordinated funding opportunities:** Work with partners to identify joint funding opportunities for projects at similar development stages or sharing geographic areas.

"On Your Mark"

Your project may be in the early planning stages and in the Tier 1 category based on strong potential to enhance much-needed connections in the region. If your project would serve an established community or connect established communities, now is the time to identify whether and how a trail would serve their needs. While these trails are identified for their potential to provide regional benefits through strengthening communities, the trail needs to be wanted by residents and local decision makers if it is going to be built, maintained, and well-used.

Resident Input • Leadership Support • Project development • Rights of way • Final design/ "Shovel-ready"

Partner recommendations

- **Community engagement:** Identify community groups and potential project collaborators the trail would serve and develop a scope of work for community outreach efforts. Conduct targeted community engagement efforts specific to your trail project. This can include both in-person and virtual outreach opportunities including but not limited to focus groups, community meetings, pop-up workshops, online surveys, booths at community events, coordination with neighborhood associations / community-based organizations, media relations, and guided site visits.
  - Depending on your agency's current relationship with residents where the potential trail is located and communities the trail could serve, your engagement efforts may start with building a relationship of trust and mutual respect.
- **Reassess the planned project:** Using what you learned from residents, community groups, and other key collaborators, evaluate if the planned trail or trail-like connection aligns with their needs and desires. The engagement may have uncovered other

pressing community needs aside from the planned trail, or the community may not want the envisioned trail/connection.

- **Assess study corridors:** Vet Trail Study Corridors through local planning processes to ensure they are feasible and well-received by residents.

SACOG recommendations

- **Creating partnerships and enhancing connections:** Identify potential local and regional connections the trail project can provide, and shepherd partnerships between the agencies that can make the connections happen.
- **Leverage data tools to augment trail narrative:** Use regional in-house data and analysis analytic tools in conjunction with qualitative data to develop information/handouts that relay the potential and benefits of projects in this tier.
- **Engagement support:** Assist with identifying potential partners and community groups the agency should connect with early on the trail planning process.

Focused Impact [2027-2032]

In the five-to-ten-year span, SACOG coordination efforts work to support the continued progress of Tier 1 projects while setting Tier 2 projects in motion, if locally driven efforts have not done so already.

Your Tier 1 project you were vetting during the first five years of the action plan is ready to start project development. Your Tier 2 projects that were also being discussed with community groups and key collaborators are also looking to take the next step towards implementation. Your agency is pursuing critical steps to implement the trail project, by developing a feasibility study for the project, or conducting preliminary planning and environmental clearance.

"Go"

Your projects from Tier 1 that were in the "Get Set" stage for the first five years of this action plan are likely ready to construct now. Additionally, your projects from Tier 2 that have been working on environmental clearances through locally driven efforts for the past few years are also ready to secure implementation funding by now. Your community has continued to support and champion the project, as have local leaders.

Partner recommendations

- **Final design:** Finalize the trail design plans and specifications with staff and/or consultant team.
- **Right-of-way acquisition:** Coordinate with appropriate state agency to obtain right-of-way easements and/or work with residents / businesses to clear encroachments on the trail corridor.

- **Permit coordination:** Secure all required environmental, railroad, and/or utility permits or relocations.
- **Natural habitat conservation:** Collaborate with local environmental groups to mitigate anticipated environmental impacts such as preparing a draft tree planting plan.
- **Funding:** Secure grant funding for construction.
- **Community engagement:** Continue providing updates and information to community members and collaborators about work to implement the trail project. Include opportunities for further collaboration where possible, such as the development of a wayfinding signs, input on design options, fine-tuning needed and desired support infrastructure and trail amenities, and other areas of input that may be specific to your community.

SACOG recommendations

- **Leverage regional planning efforts to ensure equitable trail access:** Look for potential opportunities to add a public transit stop, park-and-ride area, and/or rideshare pick-up and drop-off zone to increase access to the project.
- **Leverage data tools to augment trail narrative:** Use regional in-house data and analysis analytic tools in conjunction with qualitative data to develop project-specific fact sheets to promote benefits of trail projects seeking construction funding or other forms of support.
- **Identify coordinated funding opportunities:** Work with partners to identify joint funding opportunities for projects at similar development stages or sharing geographic areas.

"Get Set"

Your Tier 1 project you were vetting during the first five years of the action plan is ready to start project development. Your Tier 2 projects that were also being discussed with community groups and key collaborators are also looking to take the next step towards implementation. Your agency is pursuing critical steps to implement the trail project, by developing a feasibility study for the project, or conducting preliminary planning and environmental clearance.

Partner recommendations

- **Feasibility study:** Begin developing a feasibility study for the trail project to evaluate existing conditions along your proposed trail project's alignment, identify potential opportunities and constraints, determine a preferred trail route, and engage community members.
- **Environmental technical studies:** Initiate environmental analysis for the trail project as required by the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) to evaluate the project's potential environmental impacts.

- **Right-of-way acquisition:** Coordinate with your agency's local public works department, utility company, and/or state agency to determine right-of-way easements needed.
- **Project funding:** Identify and pursue grant funding for the trail project.

SACOG recommendations

- **Multi-partner project coordination:** Coordinate planned / proposed trail projects with city and county master plans, general plans, and local planning activities.
- **Leverage regional planning efforts to ensure equitable trail access:** Look for opportunities to expand access via mobility hubs, public transit stops, park-and-ride areas, and/or rideshare pick-up and drop-off zones to increase access to the project.
- **Leverage data tools to augment trail narrative:** Use regional in-house data and analysis analytic tools in conjunction with qualitative data to develop project-specific fact sheets to promote benefits of trail projects seeking implementation funding or other forms of support.
- **Identify coordinated funding opportunities:** Work with partners to identify joint funding opportunities for projects at similar development stages or sharing geographic areas.

"On Your Mark"

Your project may be in the early planning stages and in the Tier 2 category based on the potential benefits the connection would offer. Your project is more likely to achieve these perceived benefits if it is wanted by the residents it is meant to serve. Local leader and resident support is also critical to help the project overcome obstacles down the road. This is the first step towards creating the next generation of trails.

Partner recommendations

- **Community engagement:** Identify community groups and potential project collaborators the trail would serve and develop a scope of work for community outreach efforts. Conduct targeted community engagement efforts specific to your trail project. This can include both in-person and virtual outreach opportunities including but not limited to focus groups, community meetings, pop-up workshops, online surveys, booths at community events, coordination with neighborhood associations / community-based organizations, media relations, and guided site visits.
- **Reassess the planned project:** Using what you learned from residents, community groups, and other key collaborators, evaluate if the planned trail or trail-like connection aligns with their needs and desires. The engagement may have uncovered other pressing community needs aside from the planned trail, or the community may not want the envisioned trail/connection.
- **Assess study corridors:** Vet Trail Study Corridors through local planning processes to ensure they are feasible and well-received by residents.

SACOG recommendations

- **Consider alternate trail connections:** Work with partners to identify alternative routes or connections for Trail Study Corridors and Tier 1 trails that were studied and determined infeasible or lacked community support from the residents they were meant to serve.
- **Creating partnerships and enhancing connections:** Identify potential local and regional connections the trail project can provide, and shepherd partnerships between the agencies that can make the connections happen.
- **Leverage data tools to augment trail narrative:** Use regional in-house data and analysis analytic tools in conjunction with qualitative data to develop information/handouts that relay the potential and benefits of projects in this tier.
- **Engagement support:** Assist with identifying potential partners and community groups the agency should connect with early on the trail planning process.

Network Completion [2032+]

SACOG coordination efforts in the ten-plus time span include supporting the start of Tier 3 projects that have not already started from locally driven efforts to create transportation connections. Regional coordination efforts will also support continuing Tier 2 projects from the five-to-ten-year phase, and concluding any support needed for projects that were initiated in the zero-to-five-year phase. This will also serve as a point for a revisiting and potential re-envisioning of how residents want to be served by a regionally connected trail network.

Partner actions

- **Agency coordination:** Coordination with utilities and local public works departments to determine if there are critical barriers along or nearby the proposed trail project that may make the project infeasible.
- **Funding:** Develop a high-level cost estimate for the trail project's planning, design, and construction. Then, begin identifying potential funding sources your agency is eligible to apply to.
- **Update local plans:** work with residents and community groups to update local planning documents and discuss new opportunities for trails that could connect to the Regional Trail Network or serve as potential trail expansions for the Regional Trail Network.

SACOG actions

- **Support Tier 3 and Tier 2 projects in implementation:** Leverage regional data, tools, and convening opportunities in support of project implementation and development.
- **Create partnerships and enhance connections:** Identify potential local and regional connections the trail project can provide, and shepherd partnerships between the agencies that can make the connections happen.

- **Re-visit Regional Trail Network goals and outcomes:** Lead (or support alternate project leads) in re-visiting the plan goals, outcomes, and connections identified through this Action Plan to ensure the Regional Trail Network will meet the needs of residents.
- **Community engagement support:** Assist with the identification of potential partners and community groups who would have input early un the trail planning process.
- **Project visioning:** Provide a high-level overview of the Regional Trail Network's goals and vision to help guide the agency's trail project development.