

Published March 27th, 2013

Baby Steps for Potential Path Connector

By Cathy Tyson



Photo Cathy Tyson

The dilemma: how to connect two well-used trails so that bicyclists and pedestrians can enjoy both safely? If linked, a new portion generally near Olympic Boulevard would complete a trail network that connects most of Lamorinda, Central Contra Costa County and the San Ramon Valley that's safer and more convenient for everyone.

Currently the Lafayette Moraga Trail (LMT) runs for over seven miles on a path that was once used by mule trains to carry redwood from Oakland to Sacramento, later converted to steam trains. Then it became a utility easement, and now a paved multi-use recreational trail, according to the East Bay Regional Park District that maintains and operates it. Some residents enjoy it from start, at Pleasant Hill Road and Olympic Boulevard, to finish at Valle Vista staging area on Canyon Road - about 7.5 miles. Families, dog walkers, and kids on bikes are frequent users of this popular trail.

The Iron Horse Regional Trail was once a busy railroad route; it now runs between Concord and Dublin following the Southern Pacific Railroad right-of-way established in 1891 and abandoned in 1977. It's still not fully complete -

ultimately it will be 33 miles long going all the way from Livermore to Suisun Bay. It's also managed by the East Bay Regional Park District.

In 2012 the Contra Costa County Department of Conservation and Development applied for and received a \$195,000 grant from Transportation for Livable Communities that will fund a study to identify feasible alignments for a pedestrian and bicycle facility connecting the two trails, explained a staff report from October 15, 2012. Because any proposed improvements would involve three entities, the cities of Lafayette and Walnut Creek, along with part of unincorporated Contra Costa County, it became clear that spelling out specifics would help clarify the responsibilities of each party.

At a recent city council meeting a memorandum of understanding was approved to cooperate with the study, which will identify challenges and help with long range plans for all involved. The Olympic Corridor Trail Connector Study will ultimately recommend a range of improvements to be implemented in phases, according to John Cunningham, senior transportation planner with the Contra Costa County Department of Conservation and Development.

On a sunny afternoon last Friday Pat Rudebusch of Orinda, who happened to be walking with her daughter's dog Maggie on the Lafayette Moraga Trail, commented that any future trail improvement that will keep people healthy, walking and enjoying the outdoors is "a good thing."

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