



BOARD OF SUPERVISORS
AGENDA LETTER

Agenda Number:

Clerk of the Board of Supervisors
105 E. Anapamu Street, Suite 407
Santa Barbara, CA 93101
(805) 568-2240

Department Name: Public Works
Department No.: 054
For Agenda Of: May 17, 2022
Placement: Departmental (5/17/22)
Estimated Time: 120 minutes on 5/17/22
Continued Item: No
If Yes, date from: N/A
Vote Required: Majority

TO: Board of Supervisors
FROM: Department Director: Scott D. McGolpin, P.E., Public Works Director, 568-3010
Contact Info: Christopher Sneddon, Deputy Director, Transportation 568-3064
SUBJECT: Santa Maria River Levee Trail Study; 5th Supervisorial District

County Counsel Concurrence

As to form: Yes

Auditor-Controller Concurrence

As to form: N/A

Recommended Actions:

That the Board of Supervisors:

- a) Receive and file the Santa Maria River Levee Trail Study;
- b) Provide direction to staff on next steps related to the trail; and
- c) Find that this action is exempt from the provisions of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) under State CEQA Guidelines Section 15262 because it consists of a feasibility study for a future trail that the Board has not approved, adopted, or funded and that will not result in any direct or indirect physical changes in environment.

Summary Text:

This item includes a presentation of the Santa Maria River Levee Trail Study (Study) for your Board to provide direction on next steps. The Study is a conceptual-level study that explores the general opportunities and constraints to developing a multi-purpose trail on top of the Santa Maria River Levee in the unincorporated area of the Santa Maria Valley. The Study focuses on community engagement and identifying elements that could be included in a trail, as well as constraints and issues to be addressed if future work is directed.

The Santa Maria River Levee System (levee) is a 17-mile stone-revetted levee located along the south side of the Santa Maria River. The levee was designed to convey peak flows on the Santa Maria River from the confluence of the Cuyama and Sisquoc Rivers downstream to Highway 1 near the City of Guadalupe. The United States Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) constructed the levee in 1963 and later transferred ownership and maintenance to the Flood Control District (District). The Study area consists of an approximately 6.7-mile-long segment of the levee that stretches from the western terminus of the Tom Urbanske Multi-Purpose Trail in the City of Santa Maria to the City of Guadalupe. This

segment of the levee is surrounded by agricultural lands on the south side with areas of farmland north of the levee within the riverbed. The levee is a highly regulated facility that protects life and property in the Santa Maria Valley. Therefore, the USACE must grant permission, via a Section 408 Permit, for any physical improvements or proposed use of the levee to determine if the trail will impair the usefulness of the levee as a USACE civil works project.

As part of the study, the team reached out with adjacent landowners, growers and operators, agencies, advocacy groups, and the general public. The Study team held two virtual stakeholder meetings and three in-person outreach events in Summer 2021. Additionally, over 500 surveys were collected in English and Spanish.

Results from the outreach efforts indicate that the trail is broadly supported by most of the residents who participated in the Study. Some of the key benefits of the proposed trail identified in the survey include opportunities for education and engagement, improving access between cities, tourism and economic development, improving access to recreation, and promotion of healthy activities and well-being. Safety and maintenance were cited as top concerns among survey respondents.

During stakeholder meetings, the agricultural community raised a number of concerns with the proposed trail and were mostly opposed to the trail due to potential conflicts with surrounding agricultural operations. Agricultural stakeholders expressed concerns that existing issues around food safety and trespassing could increase with the proposed trail. Other concerns centered around impacts to agricultural operations and long-term maintenance of the trail. The Grower-Shippers Association provided a comment letter (Attachment B) to staff on the draft Study which details many of the concerns the study team heard during stakeholder outreach. In response to some of the comments raised in the comment letter, the study team released a Revised Draft Study on May 2, 2022 (Attachment A).

The Study team also worked with operations and maintenance staff from Flood Control District. District staff conduct on-going maintenance along the levee which could present challenges for the proposed trail. Other design elements, such as fencing and lighting, will require approval from the USACE, Los Angeles District. Other stakeholders consulted included agency staff, Sheriff and Fire, advocacy groups and non-profits.

The Study team used results from the survey, input received from the stakeholder meetings, and related case studies to help inform the Study. To facilitate discussion, the Study includes an Amenities Toolkit (Chapter 5) which provides a menu of trail elements that could be incorporated into a future trail. The Study team attempted to balance community feedback with some of the constraints identified in the stakeholder meetings when identifying two potential design options for the trail. Option 1 is the lower cost option and includes minimal improvements to the levee surface, post and rope fencing with minimal signage and no placemaking features or lighting. Option 2 is the more expensive option and includes resurfacing the levee, more substantial fencing and signage, lighting and other features. Ultimately, the USACE must approve any proposed changes to the levee. The Study includes estimated construction costs associated with each option as a reference. Costs associated with planning and environmental review, design, and maintenance are not included in the estimates.

The Study is intended as an informational tool rather than a prescriptive set of standards. If further work on the trail is directed, additional engineering and coordination may need to take place prior to finalizing a trail design. Roles and responsibilities related to constructing and maintaining the trail also need to be defined. The goal of the Study is to engage the community and help identify constraints and opportunities associated with the trail.

Background:

On June 2, 2020, your Board accepted a \$40,000 grant from the California Coastal Conservancy to study the feasibility of developing a trail on the Santa Maria River Levee. At the meeting, the Board directed staff to focus on outreach, particularly to landowners and stakeholders in the agricultural community.

The proposed trail is not a new concept and is identified or referenced in previously adopted plans and policies in the region. This Study is separate but related to a study prepared by the California Coastal Conservancy that studies potential trail alignments for a trail from the City of Guadalupe to the beach.

Staff worked with the consultant, KTUA, to develop a website, survey, outreach materials, and the draft Study. Staff also collaborated with the Santa Barbara County Promotores Network and CAUSE for additional outreach and Spanish-translation support. The Study team hosted two virtual stakeholder meetings and three in-person outreach events in Summer 2021. Additionally, over 500 surveys were collected in English and Spanish. The results from the survey and the input received from the stakeholder meetings helped inform the Study. No additional technical analysis (i.e., preliminary engineering, surveying, environmental analysis) beyond what is presented in the Study has been completed at this time.

Fiscal and Facilities Impacts:

Budgeted: n/a

Attachments:

Attachment A: Santa Maria River Levee Trail Study – Revised Draft

Attachment B: Grower-Shippers Association Letter

Authored by:

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