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This section provides a detailed description of the Master Plan area with supporting key maps identifying the trail network segments.

SECTION THREE MASTER PLAN SETTING



Harkins Slough

3.1 INTRODUCTION

The Master Plan area stretches the entire length of Santa Cruz County from the Pajaro River in Watsonville to the San Mateo County line north of Davenport. The trail has the opportunity to connect the scenic coastal bluffs in the north county to the urban areas of Santa Cruz, Capitola, and Aptos, and to traverse the rural agricultural and open space lands of south county. As shown in Figure 3-1, the Master Plan area is organized into three large subareas or “reaches:” Northern Reach, Central Reach, and Watsonville Reach.

The Santa Cruz Branch Line right-of-way, now owned by the Santa Cruz County Regional Transportation Commission (RTC), is a defining feature of the area. The railroad corridor will provide the primary spine for the Monterey Bay Sanctuary Scenic Trail Network (MBSST Network) through Santa Cruz County.

The railroad generally runs along the coast, parallel to the Pacific Ocean, except where it turns inland near Manresa State Beach. From there, the tracks run inland toward Watsonville, and ultimately end at the Watsonville Junction in Monterey County. The railroad right-of-way, which is the subject of this Master Plan, is a 32-mile continuous stretch of travel corridor, providing a unique opportunity to create a transportation and recreational link between existing trails and transportation facilities in Santa Cruz County. In addition to the rail corridor, new trails along the coast were also identified, as were on-street facilities, in order to provide connectivity to desirable destinations for bicyclists, pedestrians, and people with mobility impairments.



Santa Cruz Beach Boardwalk



Scenic bluffs north of Santa Cruz



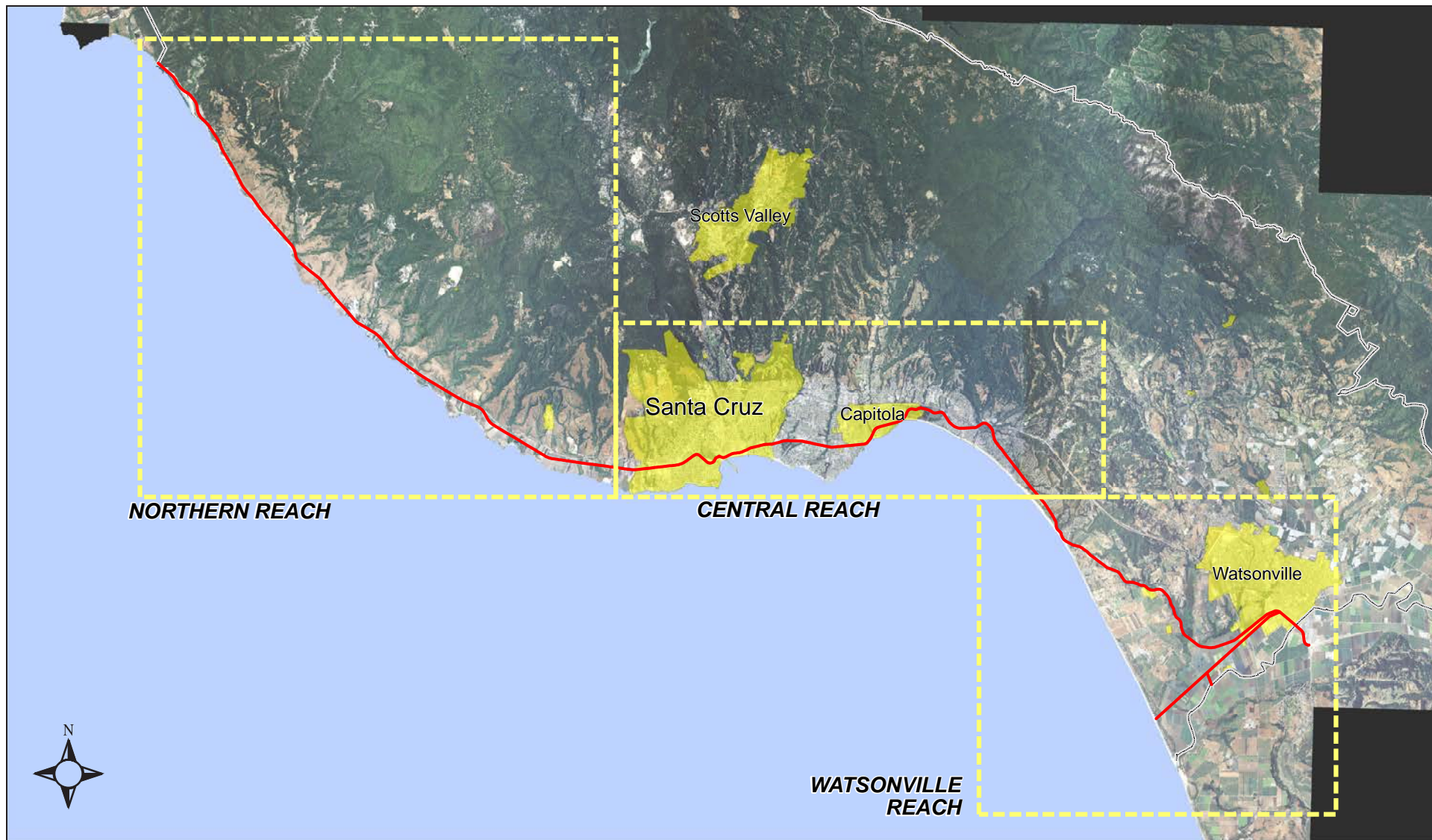


Figure 3-1 Master Plan area

3.1.1 EXISTING BICYCLE TRAILS

Santa Cruz County boasts 215 miles of bikeways, of which 190 miles are bidirectional bike lanes and 25 miles are separated paths. Several projects that benefit bicyclists were constructed over the past decade including a new bike/pedestrian bridge over the San Lorenzo River adjacent to Highway 1, a two-way bike lane on Beach Street, Soquel Avenue bike lanes, and several segments of the Watsonville wetland trails. Additional bicycle projects are under development that will fill critical links in the bicycle network. These include the Broadway/Brommer bicycle and pedestrian path through Arana Gulch, 38th Avenue bicycle lanes in Capitola, and a countywide bicycle route signage and wayfinding program.

Each of the jurisdictions found within the trail plan area have prepared bicycle plans identifying existing routes. Currently, the unincorporated areas of Santa Cruz County have approximately 92 miles of bike lanes and 4 miles of bike paths. The city of Capitola has approximately 14 miles of bike lanes and less than 1 mile of Class I bike paths. The city of Santa Cruz has 48 miles of Class II bike lanes and approximately 10 miles of Class I bike paths. The city of Watsonville has approximately 18 miles of Class II bike lanes and 9 miles of Class I bike paths. The proposed alignment described in Section 4 has taken into consideration the existing trails and recommends connections wherever possible, with the intent of linking as many trails as feasible along one continuous alignment.

3.1.2 EXISTING TRAIL NETWORKS

CALIFORNIA COASTAL TRAIL

The California Coastal Trail is defined as a continuous public right-of-way along the California coastline—a trail designed to foster appreciation and stewardship of the scenic and natural resources of the coast through hiking and other complementary modes of non-motorized transportation. Some of the California Coastal Trail's key objectives are: to provide a continuous trail as close to the ocean as possible with connections to the shoreline, to provide sufficient transportation access to encourage public use, to create linkages to other trail systems, and to use the California Coastal Trail system to increase accessibility to coastal resources from urban population centers. The California Coastal Trail network alignment was developed by the California State Coastal Conservancy in conjunction with the California Coastal Commission, the California Department of Parks and Recreation, and Coastwalk California. The California Coastal Trail network alignment has been incorporated into this Master Plan as shown in the alignment maps in Section 4. The MBSST Network will serve as the California Coastal Trail in Santa Cruz County.

MONTEREY BAY SANCTUARY SCENIC TRAIL

The main goal of the Monterey Bay Sanctuary Scenic Trail (MBSST) is to provide a safe bicycle and pedestrian route between Monterey and Santa Cruz Counties, spanning the entire arc of the Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary. The route was initially conceived by the Santa Cruz County Sanctuary Interagency Task Force as an 11-mile project from Wilder Ranch to Seacliff Beach State Park to highlight the nationally designated bay. The Sanctuary Scenic Trail Standards Manual (June 2005) identified interpretive opportunities and signage types to highlight surrounding communities, marine environments, adjacent farmlands, and natural habitats. This



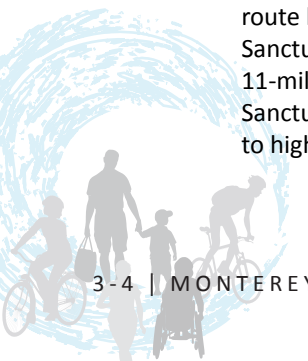
Wilder Ranch multi-use trail



Railroad tracks and Highway 1



Existing Monterey Bay Sanctuary Scenic Trail interpretive signage





Pacific Coast Bike Route



Iowa Pacific Holdings train



Existing multi-use trail south of Depot Park

initially defined “core alignment” has been incorporated into this Master Plan as shown on the alignment maps in Section 4. The MBSST was later expanded into a trail network plan by the RTC to include additional transportation alignments, namely the 32-mile Santa Cruz Branch Line Railroad right-of-way, as well as on-street facilities, to ensure coastal and community connectivity. The vision of the project is to create a continuous, safe and accessible scenic trail for pedestrians, bicycles, and people with mobility impairments that is separated from automobile traffic. Parts of the trail already exist in Monterey and Santa Cruz Counties, yet vital links exist.

PACIFIC COAST BIKE ROUTE

In 1976, in honor of the nation’s bicentennial, the American Revolution Bicentennial Commission of California and the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) developed the Pacific Coast Bicentennial Bike Route. The designated route began on Highway 101 at the California/Oregon state line and ended adjacent to Interstate 5 at the Mexican border. In the early 1990s, the California State Legislature designated this route as the Pacific Coast Bike Route. In Santa Cruz County, Highway 1 is recognized as the Pacific Coast Bike Route. The route generally follows Highway 1 north of the city of Santa Cruz, surface streets in the cities and county urbanized areas, and along rural surface streets south of Aptos. Due to its spectacular scenery, the route draws many recreational bicycle riders, mountain bikers, charity ride participants, group riders, bike delivery operations, triathlons, and bicycle races. The Pacific Coast Bike Route has been incorporated into this Master Plan as shown on the alignment maps in Section 4.

3.1.3 EXISTING RAIL LINE

The Santa Cruz Branch Rail Line corridor, first established in 1876, parallels Highway 1 extending almost 32 miles from the town of Pajaro in Monterey County to Davenport in Santa Cruz County. The right-of-way is generally 70 feet wide with 37 bridges, including major crossings of the Pajaro River, Highway 1, Soquel Creek, the Santa Cruz Yacht Harbor, and the San Lorenzo River. The corridor links major tourism and activity centers as it traverses downtown Watsonville, Aptos Village, Capitola Village, and the Santa Cruz Beach area near downtown Santa Cruz.

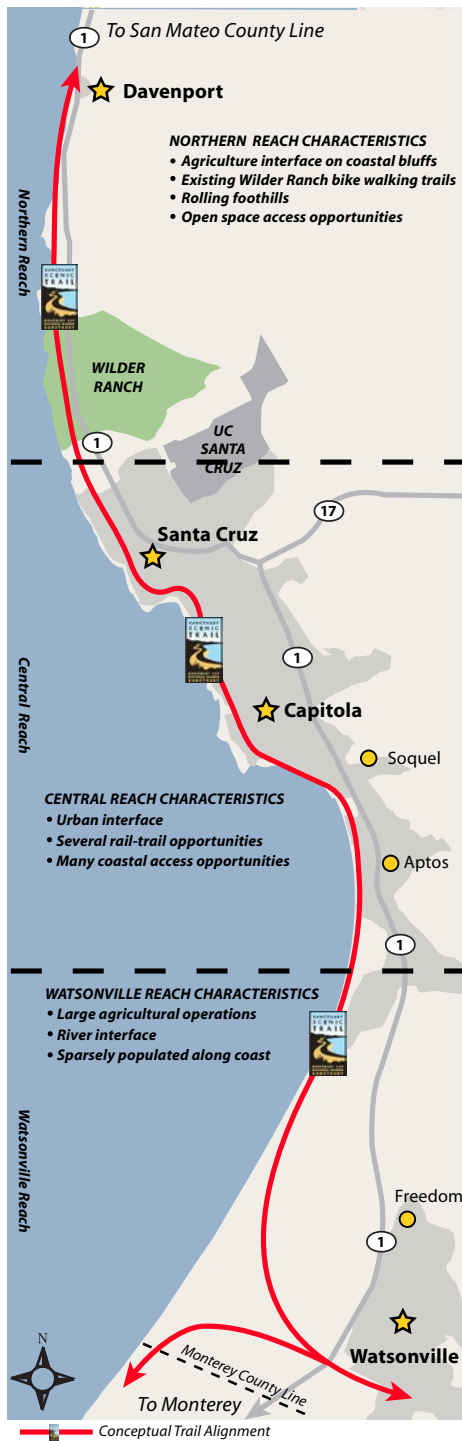
The Santa Cruz Branch Rail Line has historically transported lumber, quarried material, and agricultural products out of the Santa Cruz area. Incoming freight included coal and gypsum for delivery to the cement factory located in Davenport. Following the closure of the cement plant in 2010, freight business on the rail line was reduced by 90 percent. Currently, there is no daily freight service on the rail line outside of the city of Watsonville. A seasonal passenger rail service operates between the city of Santa Cruz and the northern reach, south of Davenport. This seasonal service operates two to four passenger trains per day, with a higher number of trips on weekends. Seasonal service is also planned from Watsonville to south of Manresa State Beach. Within the Watsonville/Pajaro area, there are freight trips as needed. These trips are localized and do not extend outside of the Watsonville/Pajaro area. The rail line in Watsonville is used to transport perishables (including raspberries, strawberries, and other agricultural products), lumber, and biofuels. There is currently no rail operation between Watsonville and Santa Cruz, except when needs arise for a special movement of equipment.

Iowa Pacific Holdings, operating as Santa Cruz and Monterey Bay Railway, owns a 20-foot-wide easement for train service and maintenance along the entire rail line. Iowa Pacific Holdings and Monterey Bay Railway will operate freight, and will implement freight, passenger, and recreational rail service. Iowa Pacific Holdings intends to run trains twice per week to serve existing freight customers. While passenger service is initially planned from Santa Cruz to Davenport, Iowa Pacific Holdings and the RTC are exploring the possibility of service throughout the entire county and possibly beyond. Constructing a trail along the Santa Cruz Branch Rail Line corridor can double the value the local community derives from the rail corridor by providing citizens with a greater number of transportation options. Additionally, the rail corridors maximum gradient of 2.5% make it an appealing option for bicycle commuters, pedestrians, wheelchair users, and runners.



Breathtaking vista looking at the Northern Reach of the trail alignment





3.2

OPPORTUNITY AND CONSTRAINT METHODOLOGY

The Master Plan area presents a range of opportunities and constraints for the proposed multi-use trail. Opportunities are defined as unique conditions that will facilitate implementation and/or enhance the operations and user experience of the trail. Constraints are defined as conditions that may negatively impact the feasibility, enjoyment, and/or operation of the trail. The project team gathered data for development of opportunities and constraints maps using the methodologies described below.

FIELD RESEARCH

The project team conducted an extensive study of the Master Plan area that included development of field notes per trail segment, digital photography, ground truthing of aerial photography, and identification of potential alignment opportunities.

STAKEHOLDER AND PUBLIC INPUT

The RTC and project team collected input from agency and implementing entities staff and community stakeholders, including railroad staff, community groups, and business leaders. In addition, three countywide community workshops were conducted and over 200 members of the public attended. These workshops provided the opportunity for members of the public to comment on the draft opportunity and constraints analysis and maps.

DOCUMENT RESEARCH

Over two dozen documents were reviewed by the project team in order to incorporate opportunities and constraints information prepared by others. This information was used in development of the proposed alignment.

3.2.1

REACH VS. SEGMENT

The Master Plan organizes the proposed trail alignment into two categories: reaches and segments. A reach is defined as a geographic area identified by regional similarities, such as the urbanized areas of Santa Cruz, Capitola, and Aptos. The Master Plan area is divided into Northern, Central, and Watsonville Reaches, which are further explained in Sections 3.3 through 3.5.

Segments are defined as potential trail projects with logical beginning and end points. The Master Plan trail alignment is divided into 20 segments with the intent that each segment will be funded, designed, and constructed as a whole. However, funding or other constraints may result in portions of segments being constructed independently. Each segment is described and mapped in Section 4.

3.3 NORTHERN REACH DESCRIPTION

The defined Northern Reach of the MBSST Network begins where Highway 1 crosses the San Mateo/Santa Cruz County line, just north of the Waddell Bluffs, and continues south to the northern Santa Cruz city limit near Schaffer Road. The Northern Reach consists primarily of narrow, steep coastal bluffs from Waddell Creek to Yellow Bank Beach at Coast Dairies, and transitions to rural agricultural land and natural coastal mesas south to Schaffer Road. There are numerous small coves and beach strands with mostly informal footpaths down to the beach shore. Large sections of the coastal edge are owned by California State Parks, with several scenic rest stops along Highway 1 that include passive recreation access to beaches, coastal bluffs, and inland parkland trails. Much of the land between Highway 1 and the coastal bluffs is managed under agricultural leases with intermittent public coastal access adjacent to the agricultural land. These intermittent access points vary from paved parking lots with restrooms, potable water, and scenic overlooks to unpaved informal roadway pullouts with difficult access to steep coastal bluff tops and beaches.

An existing multi-use paved path runs parallel between the railroad corridor and Highway 1, heading north just over one mile from Schaffer Road to Wilder Ranch trailhead parking off Highway 1. Many of the other public access points along the Northern Reach have limited signage and provide limited trail access along the coast. The railroad corridor parallels the coastal side of Highway 1 from Schaffer Road to Davenport, where the tracks cross Highway 1 to the inland side before ending one mile north of Davenport. Except for the crossing in Davenport, the railroad's offset from Highway 1 varies from 100 feet to 1/4 mile from Schaffer Road to Scaroni Road, then parallels Highway 1 at a distance of 50 to 100 feet as the coastal bluffs steepen and narrow toward Davenport. The rail tracks cross several small drainages with both wood trestles and box culverts in the Northern Reach. Much of the land south of Coast Dairies is flat, with intermittent rolling hills giving way to steep coastal cliffs further north. Sensitive biological areas exist along perennial creeks and drainages, and near coastal bluffs and sand dunes. The Northern Reach is comprised of Segments 1-5.



Coastal bluffs in the Northern Reach



Picnic facilities near Greyhound Rock



Rail tracks adjacent to Highway 1 looking south





Figure 3-2 Northern Reach location map

3.4 CENTRAL REACH DESCRIPTION

Beginning at Santa Cruz's northern city limit near Schaffer Road and extending southeast to Seascape Park just south of Aptos, this reach of the rail corridor traverses through densely populated coastal urban areas. The combination of intense urban development and the steep coastal edge in the Central Reach creates many physical challenges. However, the central reach has the highest potential to improve bicycle and pedestrian access to key destinations and reduce the number of vehicle miles traveled and associated greenhouse gas emissions.

Within the Santa Cruz city limits, the rail corridor parallels many existing segments of the core route of the Monterey Bay Sanctuary Scenic Trail (MBSST) alignment. Much of the original alignment in the Central Reach is made up of on-road facilities, sidewalks, bike lanes or coastal edge pedestrian boardwalks with beach access and interpretive signs. Some sections are strictly in the street as Class III bike routes with no sidewalks. The rail corridor parallels the entire length of the existing MBSST alignment and could serve as an alternate off-street, multi-use route connecting communities north and south to the regional network.

Other challenges along the Central Reach are the many existing large rail bridge and trestle structure crossings. These structures are old, narrow in width, and span steep drainages and roadways. In one scenario the structure spans across a historic district in Capitola. The southern portion of the Central Reach parallels the coast meandering atop the steep coastal bluffs and multiple residential and resort areas. The Central Reach connects over six state beaches, numerous coastal access points, parks, schools, and provides future connection opportunities for countless communities along the corridor. The Central Reach is comprised of Segments 6-14.



Santa Cruz Harbor



New Brighton State Beach



View of Capitola from the historic train trestle



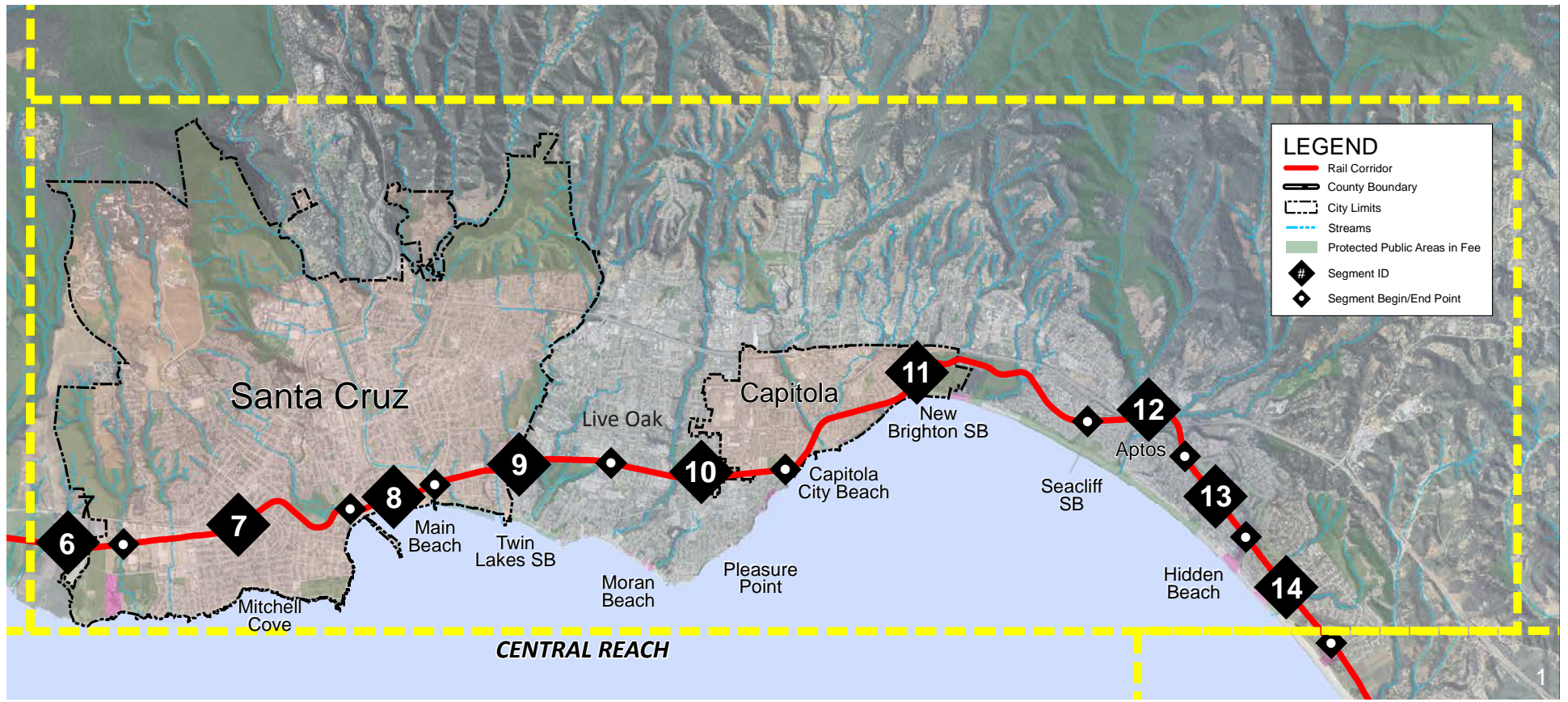


Figure 3-3 Central Reach location map



3.5 WATSONVILLE REACH DESCRIPTION

The Watsonville Reach of the Monterey Bay Sanctuary Scenic Trail begins at railroad mile marker 10 near Seascap Park, and ends over the Santa Cruz and Monterey County border at the Pajaro River and at Railroad Avenue in Monterey County. This reach only parallels the coastal edge for about one mile before it begins following the San Andreas Road alignment inland as it heads south and east. The landscape is primarily open space, with some residential areas near Manresa and tapers off to rural farm and agricultural lands further to the south. The rail alignment eventually drifts away from San Andreas Road just south of railroad mile maker 7 and follows the inland side of a steep sloping mesa.

The Watsonville Reach stretch of the corridor travels through native woodlands, flanked on the west by agricultural land on top of the mesa and to the east, rural land sloping away to the Gallighan Slough below. The Harkins Slough is an impressive wetland crossing with wide open fields flooded throughout the year. The rail crossing at the Harkins Slough is on a stretch of raised earthen dike. The rail line then crosses Watsonville Slough and passes through the center of the agricultural fields, just west of the city of Watsonville, eventually connecting to city park land and the downtown street network at Walker Street. The rail line crosses the Pajaro River to the south and ends at Railroad Avenue in the town of Pajaro. The Watsonville Reach is comprised of Segments 15-20.



View of Manresa State Beach parking lot from railroad tracks



Railroad tracks in Watsonville



Train trestle spanning the Pajaro River in Watsonville



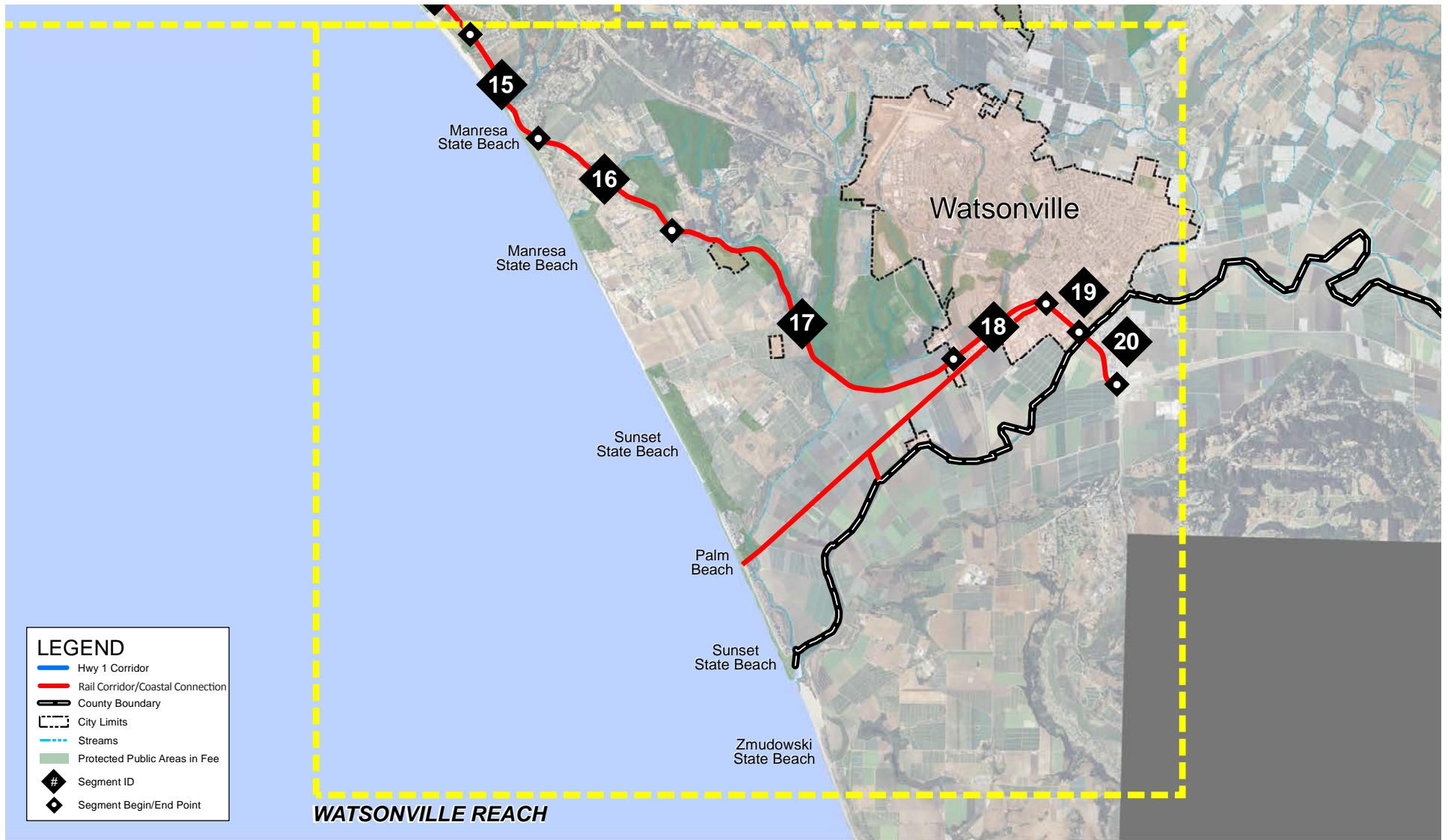


Figure 3-4 Watsonville Reach location map

3.6 EXISTING ACTIVITY CENTERS

Significant public investment will be required to implement and maintain the proposed trail alignments. Therefore, the trail should link as many users as possible to achieve the maximum public benefit. The identification of activity centers is important to ensure that the planned trail routes connect people to the planned trail alignment. An activity center is defined as any place that can attract trail users, including recreational, civic, and educational centers that are located within 1/4 mile (for pedestrians) to 1 mile (for bicyclists) of the proposed trail alignment. Existing activity centers and their relationships to the trail planning area are listed below and identified on Table 3-1.

BEACHES AND STATE BEACHES

- Waddell Beach
- Greyhound Rock Beach
- Scott Creek Beach
- Davenport Landing Beach
- Davenport Beach
- Bonny Doon Beach
- Yellowbank Beach
- Three Mile Beach
- Four Mile Beach
- Natural Bridges State Beach
- Lighthouse Field State Beach
- Main Beach
- Seabright State Beach
- Twin Lakes State Beach
- Pleasure Point
- Capitola State Beach
- New Brighton Beach
- Seacliff State Beach
- La Selva Beach
- Manresa State Beach

PUBLIC PARKS AND STATE PARKS (PARTIAL LIST - 88 TOTAL)

- Big Basin Redwoods State Park
- Forest of Nisene Marks State Park
- Wilder Ranch State Park
- Wetlands of Watsonville City Trail Network
- Ellicott Slough
- Seascape Park
- Aptos Village Park
- Seaview Park
- River Park
- Twin Lakes Park
- Depot Park
- Neary Lagoon Park
- Coast Dairies
- Sand Hills Bluffs
- Ramsay Park



Natural Bridges State Beach



Rio del Mar Beach with updated signage



View of Harkins Slough from railroad tracks



SCHOOLS

- 42 schools are located within one mile of the proposed trail alignment

CIVIC FACILITIES

- Simpkins Swim Center
- Santa Cruz Visitor Center

MAJOR EMPLOYMENT CENTERS

- City of Watsonville
- Granite Construction
- Santa Cruz Beach Boardwalk
- Santa Cruz City/County Government Center
- University of California, Santa Cruz
- Cabrillo College
- Downtown Santa Cruz
- Westside Santa Cruz

MAJOR COMMERCIAL SHOPPING AREAS

- Capitola Mall
- Downtown Santa Cruz
- Capitola Village
- Aptos Village
- Downtown Watsonville
- Rancho Del Mar

CAMPING

- Sunset State Beach Campground
- Santa Cruz/Monterey Bay KOA Campground
- New Brighton State Beach Camping
- Seacliff State Beach
- Mansera Uplands

MAJOR TOURIST DESTINATIONS

- Santa Cruz Beach Boardwalk
- Pleasure Point
- Roaring Camp & Santa Cruz Railroads
- Steamer Lane Surfing
- Capitola Wharf
- Seacliff State Park Cement Ship
- Seascape Resort
- Santa Cruz Harbor
- Santa Cruz Wharf
- Lighthouse Point
- Davenport Overlook
- Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary Exploration Center
- Watsonville Sloughs Nature Center



Santa Cruz Harbor



Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary Exploration Center Photo Credit: NOAA



Pleasure Point surfing

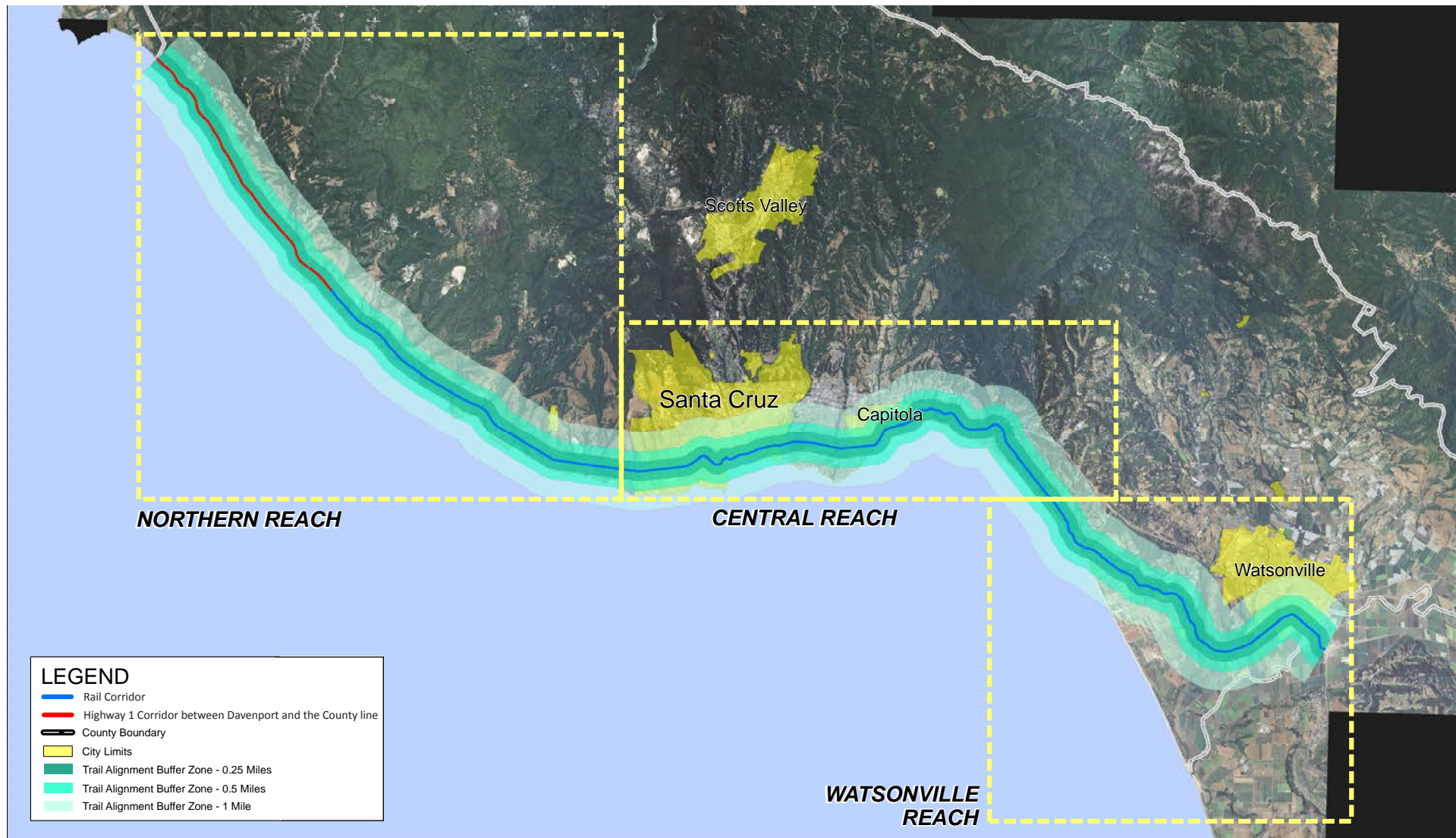


Figure 3-5 Activity center map illustrating 1/4-, 1/2-, and 1-mile distances from the Coastal Rail Trail



Table 3.1 identifies the activities found within each trail network segment. Activity centers have been separated into 1/4-mile, 1/2-mile, and 1-mile distances from the proposed trail alignment. The numbers within each column represent the number of instances the activity center occurs. This table corresponds with Figure 3-5.

- Activity Center Type Per Segment



Two-way cycle track adjacent to the sidewalk near the Santa Cruz Beach Boardwalk

