Ultimate Trail Gains National Recognition

For those who may not have noticed, we'd like to ask readers to review how both Santa Cruz County voters and our Regional Transportation Commission (RTC) staff have helped land a remarkable set of grants to help develop and construct what's now known as our Ultimate Trail Project — and how much congratulations we deserve.

Unified around our County's multimodal transportation plans, we have earned not only significant funding for this coastal rail trail project featuring a trail in the same corridor as an active rail line under study for public transit, but wide respect, as well.

Check out what's occurred since 74% of voters rejected Greenway's Measure D at the polls last year and instead raised our hands in favor of building a trail in the same corridor as a rail line for future public transit:

In December, the California Transportation Commission approved $115.8 million for Active Transportation Projects in our county, $105 of that for the multimodal Coastal Rail Trail. The $67.6 million for Segments 10-11 in Capitola and Aptos is the largest ATP grant ever awarded!

Then, in January of this year, The RTC in partnership with Caltrans and Metro was awarded $30 million in Mega Grant funding from the U.S. Department of Transportation for the RTC's Watsonville-Santa Cruz Multimodal Corridor Program: Highway 1 Bus on Shoulders and Auxiliary Lanes from Freedom Boulevard to State Park Drive and Segment 12 of the Coastal Rail Trail Project.

One of only nine Mega Grants approved nationwide in this cycle, ours was the only one for a project in the state of California — for our all-of-the-above transportation project with highway, transit, and trail projects all wrapped into one effort that keeps our rail line intact and available. And on April 24, the State Secretary of Transportation, Toks Omishakin, traveled to Santa Cruz to hand over three checks that will help us deliver modern transportation projects.

$3.45 million will go toward RTC's Zero Emission Passenger Rail and Trail Project, and an additional $2.274 million to the Transportation Agency of Monterey County, TAMC, to advance the environmental phase of its Pajaro/Watsonville Multimodal Station Project, an important connection to the State Rail network.

We see three takeaways from this amazing news.
First: when voters show they strongly favor transportation projects, chances of gaining funding significantly increase. And 74% of voters favoring integrated rail and trail planning demonstrates very solid support.

Second, combined-transport modes such as rail and trail, or highway with transit, clearly stand high chances of scoring in the competitive world of grant funding.

And third, intelligent above-and-beyond design very simply pays off.

Consider: the Ultimate Trail will be the widest trail in the entire county, accommodating more folks at a time than any other. And in a community where our children now ride their bikes next to speeding cars, the fully separated trail offers a far safer alternative.

The trail will also provide environmental improvements. Nearly all the trees to be removed to allow a wide trail are non-native; many are invasive, fire-prone, tumble-happy, and somewhat poisonous and dangerous eucalyptus. These will be replaced with more appropriate species at a four-to-one ratio, which over time will increase the neighborhood forests.
So let's give credit to our amazing RTC grant writers, and also to generations of planners and commissioners who saw the possibilities long ago of a trail with the rail line, and set out, with the help of voters, to plan an Ultimate Trail.

It's a vision we're seeing become a reality.
So let's continue to push through any momentary complications, and also reject interim, partial, and temporary distractions. The Ultimate Trail is succeeding, and much more quickly than more limited piecemeal options. All we need to do now is stick with it.

Submitted by Barry Scott, Paul Wagner, Gina Cole, Jim MacKenzie, Janie Soito, Temujin W Kuechle, Mary Offermann, and Jim Weller.

(626 words including title)