

MidPeninsula Regional Open Space Dist.
via email: Hwy17@OpenSpace.org
sent July 10, 2019

re: Comments on the Highway 17 Regional Trail Connection

Dear Hwy 17 Team,

At the MidPen / Hwy 17 public meeting last night in Los Gatos, I submitted a couple written comments. I write this letter now because it may be challenging to read my handwriting, and also because I want to point out details on a map (see below) and give additional comments. As I'm an avid road-bicyclist, my comments may complement rather than duplicate those given by others.

First off: connecting of wildlife corridors is important. As I'm not a biologist, I am unable to weigh in on the optimal placement of the wildlife crossings: I can't say whether Alternative 1 or Alternative 2 from yesterday's chart is preferable. I would imagine that wildlife would rather not share crossings with human trail users, since people (and the pets that often accompany them) can leave behind scents and odors that may disturb wildlife and discourage them from using a shared crossing.

Secondly: for hikers, mountain bikers, and other users of the Bay Area Ridge Trail, a new crossing is desirable since the overall trail length is important, and trail users would not appreciate the addition mile needed to walk along Fwy. 17, cross at the Bear Creek Road interchange, and then walk back down the other side. However, in deciding between Alternatives 3, 4, and 5 from yesterday's chart, there are considerations in addition to those discussed yesterday:

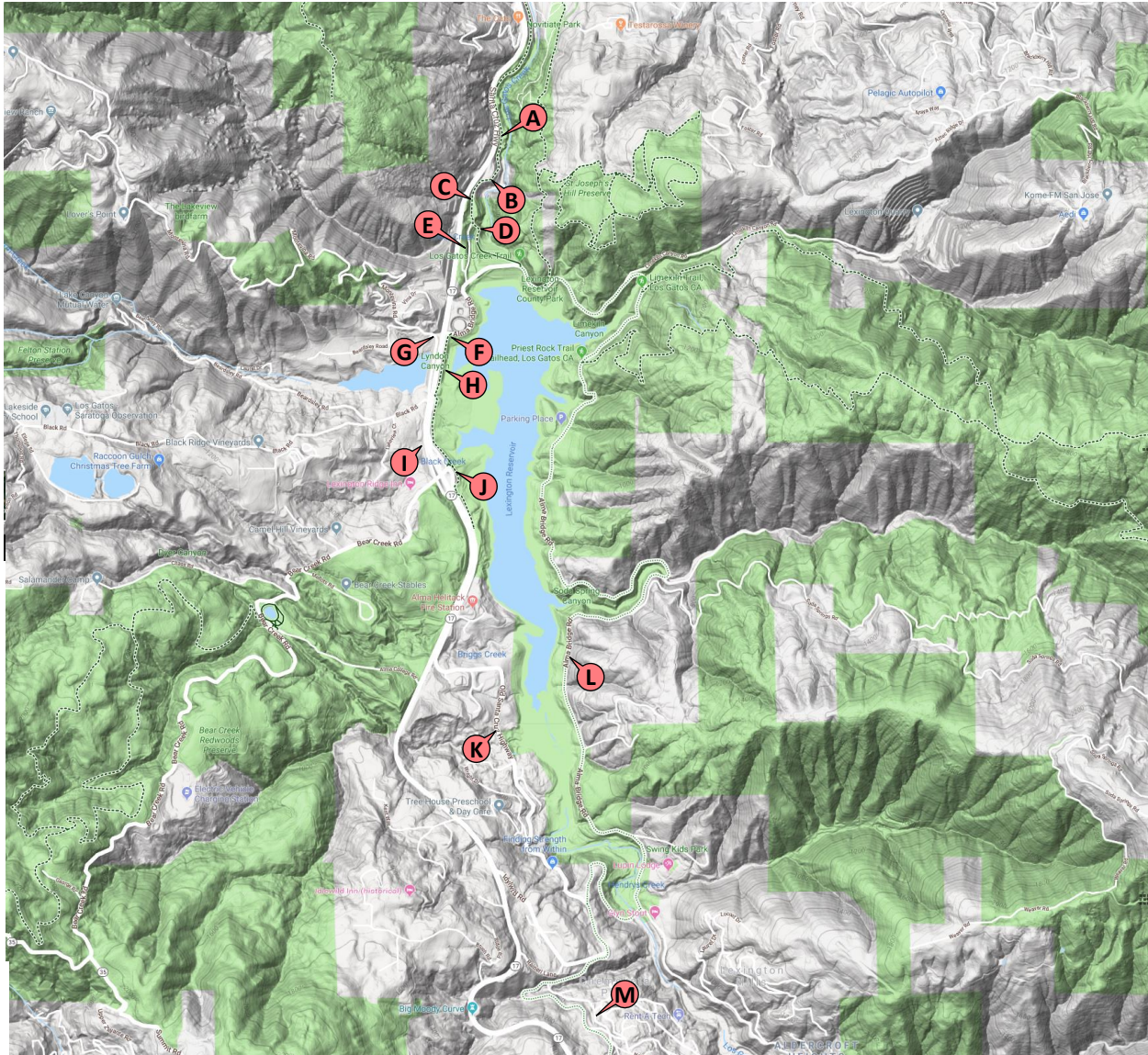
- What is the total elevation gain in connecting across the freeway? While the trail users are out for the exercise, they may still dislike having to needlessly climb down into a canyon and back up the other side, especially if another alternative would involve less climbing.
- Some of the alternatives presented involve a series of switchbacks. If the trail is to be used by bicycles, I recommend at least a 6' radius-of-curvature at the inside of the hairpin turns.
- Consider the proximity to parking: not every trail user is going to walk the entire south bay portion at once. Alternative 3 seems most convenient to the trailhead parking on Alma Bridge Road; Alternative 4 also looks viable; but Alternative 5 seems quite distant, and might discourage out-and-back day-use of the far-side portion of the trail.

And, now to my main point of interest: road-biking.

The Los Gatos Creek Trail and then on past Lexington and southward to Old Santa Cruz Highway is the best bike route from the San José area to Santa Cruz and points south. There are not many alternatives:

- Highway 9 adds an extra 1,000 foot climb (and has traffic);
- Highway 84 adds an extra 40 miles;
- Highway 152 is a narrow and busy road over Hecker Pass;
- and while it is legal for bicyclist to be on portions of Freeway 101, the highway bridge over the Pajaro River at the county line has no shoulder, putting cyclists in the traffic lane with the trucks and buses.

Thus, maintaining, and hopefully improving, the north-south connection here is very important.



Specific points:

- The trail on the east side of 17 ("H" on the diagram) provides a direct connection from the Los Gatos Creek Trail to Old Santa Cruz Highway ("K" and "M"), shaving roughly 25 minutes and ~100' of climbing relative to the Alma Bridge Road route on the east side of the reservoir ("L").
- The trail "H", Old Santa Cruz Highway ("K") and Alma Bridge Road ("M") make a scenic loop around the reservoir. This loop trail can be accessed from town either by the Los Gatos Creek Trail, or by driving up Hwy. 17 and then parking by the dam. And if the trail "H" could be given an all-weather surface, this would create a year-round amenity.
- If possible, it would be nice to improve the Los Gatos Creek Trail itself. Currently, south from town it follows a gentle grade on a levee "A" along the creek, then takes a very steep climb up hill "B" to reach a nearly level segment "C" along an old Hwy. 17 alignment. Is there any way to improve (regrade?) segment "B" to make it less steep?

- The trail currently dips sharply at “D”, crosses a bridge, and then climbs the face of the dam. If the old spillway path “E” could be reopened, it would be a more direct connection.
- Presently, the trail connection from Alma Bridge Road “F” at Hwy. 17 is poorly marked, and visitors and others not familiar with the alignment might have difficulty finding the through route. Alma Bridge Road itself could also be improved there for bicycle safety.
- The proposed Alternative 4 crossing would connect Alma Bridge Road at “F” to Montevina Rd at “G”, which would be nice, but is not necessary: the west-side road “I” is fairly level, wide, and quiet, so the one-mile detour from “F” to “G” via “H”, the Bear Creek crossing at “J”, and back down on “I” is not too onerous for bicyclists.
- If there is a crossing from “F” to “G”, please keep (and improve) the trail “H” anyway: it gives a nice overview of the reservoir that would be lost if one instead had to go to the other side via “F”, “G”, “I”, and “J”. Also, the two extra freeway crossings could be annoying.

I think I’ve now used every lettered point in the diagram, and hopefully these comments will help clarify the rather cryptic comments I submitted at yesterday’s meeting.

Contact me if I can answer any questions.

Thanks!

~Larry Ames, longtime trail advocate and avid bicyclist.