

COMMUNITY ADVISORY GROUP | MEETING #2 NOTES

FRESNO COUNTY REGIONAL TRAILS PLAN

Fresno Council of Governments and County of Fresno

October 8, 2020 | 10:00-11:30AM | Virtual meeting via Zoom

1. Welcome and Introductions

Kristen Lohse, Consultant Project Manager, welcomed attendees and thanked them for attending the 2nd Community Advisory Group meeting for the Fresno County Regional Trails Plan (Plan). Kristen Lohse then provided a brief overview of the meeting agenda and asked that the Project Team and Community Advisory Group members introduce themselves. A complete listing of meeting attendees can be found below.

Name	Agency/Organization
Peggy Arnest	Fresno Council of Governments
Brian Spaunhurst	County of Fresno
Gloria Hensley	County of Fresno
Vernon Crowder	Kings River Conservancy
Mona Cummings	Tree Fresno
Tony Gonzalez	CalViva Health
Laura Gromis	U.S. Green Building Council - Central California
Kermit Johansson	San Joaquin River Trail Council
Mark Keppler	Coalition for Community Trails
Laurence Kimura	Fresno Irrigation District
Tony Molina	Fresno County Bicycle Coalition
Sarah Parkes	San Joaquin River Parkway and Conservation Trust, Inc.
John Shelton	San Joaquin River Conservancy
Kristen Lohse	Toole Design
Megan Wooley-Ousdahl	Toole Design
Hector Guerra	VRPA Technologies, Inc.

2. Regional Trails Plan Refresher

Kristen Lohse explained that the intent of the Plan is to address the gaps in the Fresno County Regional Active Transportation Plan (ATP). This is being achieved through collaboration with partners across Fresno County to identify opportunities for new trail connections.

The focus of the Plan is on recreation trails, which include paved shared-use paths (Class I), and unpaved trails on County-owned land and County “islands.” These trails are mainly used for hiking, walking, off-road biking, and horseback riding. The Plan will emphasize making connections to recreational facilities, and providing opportunities for people to be active outside.

To guide the development of the Plan, goals were developed and supported by attendees at the first Community Advisory Group meeting. These goals include:

- **Livability:** Enhance livability by integrating trail systems into community activity.
- **Connectivity:** Develop trail connections to important destinations in urban, rural, and open spaces.
- **Mobility:** Create active transportation options for recreational and utilitarian trips.
- **Collaboration:** Collaborate with local jurisdictions, organizations, and community to plan, coordinate, implement, maintain a countywide trail system.
- **Economic Development:** Leverage economic development opportunities for local businesses and tourism by increasing the use of trails.

3. What We've Been Working On

Kristen Lohse explained that the Project Team conducted a field inventory by visiting over 20 trails in Fresno County to assess trail characteristics. This led to the development of a trail classification system, which includes the following classifications:

- Sidepath
- Shared-Use Path
- Off-Road/Multi-Use
- Off-Road/Single-Use

The Project Team has developed a set of recommendations for trails throughout the County, which includes approximately 375 miles of new proposed trails. The proposed trails include both new trails and the closure of gaps between existing trail segments. The Project Team has also identified a general location for a potential mountain bike park, based on input received from the community.

When developing the proposed trails, the Project Team attempted to strike a balance between both practical and visionary recommendations. Therefore, some of the proposed projects may be implemented in the near-term, while other projects are more visionary and will take longer to implement due to the funding that is needed.

All of the proposed trails connections have been placed in an online map, which will allow users to view the recommended trails in Fresno County. The Project Team is requesting that the public and Community Advisory Group members identify the top 5 recommended trails in Fresno County that they think should be developed in the next 5 years.

4. Discussion

Megan Wooley-Ousdahl led a group discussion with Community Advisory Group members, asking several questions designed to solicit input on the Fresno County Regional Trails Plan development process. Responses to the initial set of discussion questions were provided via Mentimeter, an online polling platform, and included the following questions and answers:

What makes a trail important to the countywide trail system?

- Separation from traffic
- Connectivity
- Connectivity, safe and well maintained.
- Close to home
- Beautiful area

- Close to home
- Connectivity
- Scenic views, adventure experiences or destination of distinction.
- One major feature to combine interests of many collaborators are the thread of the rivers. The rivers provide interests of many users of trails, a strong connectivity and varied recreation uses along the way.
- Trails with lots of info, easy to find.
- Connectivity
- Connecting to important destination centers (making trails utilitarian as well as recreational). Should also be aesthetically pleasing.
- Amenities of the destination. Attractiveness of scenery on route.
- Connections, length, and well maintained.

Do you see opportunities for your organization or agency to partner on implementation or funding a recommended trail?

- Yes, very much so. We have grant funding.
- Fresno COG, through Measure C (existing and renewal).
- Perhaps Senate Bill (SB) 743 may present some opportunities as increased development mitigation.
- The SJRT is a 501 (c) (3) non-profit which can make grant applications. We also can solicit for sponsors for activities and construction.
- Which trails are most expensive? Which trails have the most resistance from the community? That will inform the way forward.

Megan Wooley-Ousdahl then asked Community Advisory Group members to provide any thoughts that they made have on topics covered during the meeting, or on the Fresno County Regional Trails Plan development process as a whole. Responses from meeting participants are noted below.

- **Vernon Crowder**
 - Do we know which trails we expect to get the most resistance, either from the community or for political reasons?
 - Which proposed trails will be the most expensive?
 - I worry about safety and if there is going to be enough separation between a trail and vehicles.
 - Think we need a North/South trail in Fresno.
- **Tony Molina**
 - Share Vernon's concern of the absence of a North/South Class I facility to link up with the Sugar Pine and Midtown Trail loop.
- **Kermit Johansson**
 - Some of the trails drawn on the map go up to the Fresno County border and are no longer shown once they cross the border. This gives the appearance of a segmented trail.
- **John Shelton**
 - With regards to expense of a trail versus political difficulty, there are some trails that will be expensive but relatively easy to do with the political constituencies and getting funding. We should make sure that whatever is noted for expenses doesn't rule out the ability that it may still be one of the best trails to go after.

- To the earlier conversation on connections to other Counties, the San Joaquin River Conservancy, along with other partners, are looking at bridges. One of the bridges that keeps being referred to quite a bit is off of Plan and Nees, to access the Sycamore Island area. This bridge would be for bicyclist, pedestrians, and equestrians.
- **Laura Gromis**
 - It is important to not let political considerations, or difficulty of implementing a project, stand in the way of really creating active transportation access for people.
- **John Shelton**
 - Funding for maintenance is always one of our biggest issues. Getting grant funds from construction or even purchasing right-of-way can be relatively easy to do. However, the maintenance is always tough. If funds can be used from Measure C towards maintenance, that would put everything in a very good position. Is this available as an option?
- **Mark Keppler**
 - A five-for-one deal was negotiated and agreed upon several years ago. An example of the five-for-one deal is that if \$500,000 was received in grant money to build a trail, \$100,000 would be available to maintain that trail using Measure C funds. This was the compromise that was agreed to by the City of Fresno, City of Clovis, and the County of Fresno. I would like to see something similar in the next Measure C iteration, so that parties would be encouraged to go out and get grants to build trails, with the idea that they can tap Measure C money to maintain these trails.
- **Tony Gonzalez**
 - As we look at the development of trails, I think there may be some possibilities for a health organization/local initiative to be able to sponsor some of the funding for trail maintenance.
 - Would also like to focus on promoting health, as far as stress reduction, heart health, and obesity prevention among other topics.
- **Sara Parkes**
 - Believe that investigating different partnerships for the issue of maintenance is critical. Unfortunately, the County/Cities don't have enough resources for maintenance, and we definitely don't want to "dole out" new trails if they are going to fall apart and not be safe for the community.
- **Laurence Kimura**
 - Believe that there are opportunities out there, but there are challenges along the way as well.
- **Tony Molina**
 - Wanted to know if there have been any considerations for Rails to Trails opportunities. Specifically along the abandoned right-of-way of the Sugar Pine Trail corridor (north of Willow, along Friant Road) and connecting to the Millerton recreational area.
- **Mark Keppler**
 - Following up on the Rails to Trails conversation, is there a way to put on the map, rail corridors or abandoned/inactive rail corridors? We can also look at sending a note to the various City Manager's and asking if they are aware of any abandon rail corridors that can be potential candidates for a Rails to Trails project.

- **Laura Gromis**
 - It would be great to have more of an institutionalized process of bringing together all of those working on active transportation. It would assist in making sure that plans are aligning and that everyone is working together on implementation.

The final questions asked of Community Advisory Group members was, “If you could include one thing in the Plan, what would it be and why?” Responses to this discussion question are noted below.

- **Tony Gonzalez**
 - Would like to see resident engagement built into the plan, and explore different funding opportunities for maintenance.
- **Laura Gromis**
 - The importance of having an eye on implementation, and the challenges that have to be addressed.
 - Community engagement, equity, and diversity are also key.
 - It is also important to bring a lot of the other cities and unincorporated communities to the table to talk about this Plan.
- **Kermit Johansson**
 - Synergistic effect of having the Plan recognize other trails for writing a grant application. If I wrote a grant application for the San Joaquin River Trail and the County doesn’t even show the trail on its map, I can’t use that map as a tool to say this is of value to others.
- **Mark Keppler**
 - Fresno County is uniquely position with trail. If we can build a network here we can offer an amenity to folks that makes the County a very attractive place to live.
- **Laurence Kimura**
 - That the Plan would be comprehensive, incorporate connectivity issues, and provide a forum for the collaboration.
- **Tony Molina**
 - Look at Rails to Trails opportunities.
 - Address barriers to collaboration, which can be a challenge when working on a project involving multiple entities.
- **Sarah Parkes**
 - Don’t constrict this Plan to solely the resources that the County has. There may be some unorthodox partnerships available. Exploring those opportunities will be very interesting and can lead to some exciting projects.
- **John Shelton**
 - Continued collaboration and having in place a group that can coordinate between organizations and local government.
 - Keeping a couple of “big vision” projects in the Plan. The projects may not be very practical, but may be the type of projects that can draw the biggest support.

5. Next Steps

- Community Advisory Group members are encouraged to visit the online map (fresnocog.org/project/active-transportation/), provide input, and share the map link with at least three friends, colleagues, or neighbors
- The online map will be open through December

- The third Community Advisory Group meeting will take place in Spring 2021

