

Humboldt Bay Trail - Maintenance and Public Safety

SUMMARY

Residents and visitors are eagerly anticipating the completion of the Humboldt Bay Trail linking Eureka and Arcata. The Arcata segment is complete and in use daily; the Eureka section is nearly finished and also in use. The center portion connecting these two segments is being planned and designed by the Humboldt County Public Works Department. The county has secured grants for planning and design of the center segment. It is preparing grant requests for the construction, estimated to begin in 2021.

The Humboldt County Civil Grand Jury (HCCGJ) investigated security, safety and maintenance issues surrounding trail development. We began by interviewing several government officials responsible for the trail, trail users, and trail volunteers. In addition to interviews, we reviewed numerous articles and documents about the trail. The HCCGJ was impressed with the work done by Arcata and Eureka on their segments of the trail. The HCCGJ still has concerns regarding safety, security and maintenance.

BACKGROUND

In its February 2018 issue, Sunset magazine selected Eureka to be one of the “Most Game-Changing Places to Live in the West,” due to its architecture, artists per capita, redwoods, and trails. While Humboldt County residents appreciate all these elements, they are especially proud of the developing trail system. The 14.6-mile Humboldt Bay Trail, a Class 1 ADA accessible multi-use trail, consists of three segments in different jurisdictions. It is composed of the Waterfront Trail in Eureka, the Arcata City Trail, and the yet unnamed county segment which connects the two.

Once completed, the trail will offer many benefits to residents and visitors alike. It will provide a place to bike, walk, run, and commute. In addition to providing appreciated recreation facilities for residents, it is envisioned to be a tourist attraction. Visitors will have a new way to experience the beauty of the county and its bay. The Humboldt County Civil Grand Jury (HCCGJ) investigated how Humboldt County and the cities of Eureka and Arcata are ensuring trail security, safety and maintenance.

For the trail to be a success, it must be safe, secure and well maintained. The HCCGJ considered multiple aspects of safety, security and maintenance. While the design and construction costs of the trail were provided by grants, the security, safety and maintenance costs were presumed to be covered by the general funds of the county and the two cities.

METHODOLOGY

The investigation consisted of:

- Interviews with city and county officials responsible for various aspects of the trails
- Interviews with law enforcement officers familiar with the trails
- Interviews with community volunteers who help maintain the trails
- Review of publications, county and city websites, and broadcast media
- Walking the completed segments of the trail

DISCUSSION

A non-motorized trail along the shores of Humboldt Bay has been long imagined and in the planning and construction phases for nearly two decades. Today, 10 miles of the 14.6-mile trail are complete.

Trail Segments

The southern, or Eureka, segment of the trail, called the Waterfront Trail, begins in the south at Elk River. It continues north along Waterfront Drive, past the Wharfinger Building and the Eureka Public Marina, to the promenade boardwalk. The planned trail joins the sidewalk along 1st Street to H Street, follows the abandoned railroad tracks to I Street, then parallels Waterfront Drive to the Aquatic Center. It proceeds under the Samoa Bridge, winds behind the Blue Ox Millworks and ends at the Eureka Slough. It provides a non-motorized 6.3-mile alternative route to Highway 101 through Eureka. Eureka's Waterfront Trail is complete except for a gap between the boardwalk and the Aquatic Center. The gap is not currently ADA compliant. The most recent estimate is this gap will be completed by 2021, depending on funding.

The northern, or Arcata, segment of the trail starts in the south near the Bracut Industrial Center, goes north along the railroad tracks, traverses along the Arcata Marsh and Wildlife Sanctuary, and crosses Samoa Boulevard. It continues northward along L Street, around Arcata High School and ends at Arcata Skate Park. This provides a 4.5-mile Class 1 ADA accessible, non-motorized multi-use trail. It is complete and in use.

The center, or county, segment of the trail will connect the Eureka and Arcata segments.

The planned trail will begin behind Target in Eureka and will pass over the unused railroad bridge that spans the Eureka Slough. It will then continue alongside the railroad tracks until it reaches the vacant California Redwood Company (CRC) saw mill. The trail will pass to the west along the bay on the CRC property. At the north end of the CRC property, the trail will parallel the railroad tracks passing the Bracut Industrial Center, to connect with the Arcata segment.

The county has allocated funds to complete preliminary engineering studies, environmental studies, permitting, and engineering plans. Future funding will be needed for construction and environmental mitigation costs. The goal of the county is to have engineering plans, funding and permits in place to start construction by 2021. Until construction is complete, the county plans to open a temporary segment of the trail connecting Eureka and Arcata. This segment begins in the south behind the Target store in Eureka and continues across the southbound Highway 101 bridge over the Eureka Slough. It will then follow the rust-colored shoulder (class III bikeway) along the southbound lane of Highway 101, joining the Arcata segment just north of the Bracut

Industrial Center. Both bicyclists and pedestrians currently travel along this section of Highway 101.

Current and prospective trail users anxiously await completion of the final segment to alleviate potentially dangerous conditions resulting from its proximity to Highway 101.

Map of Humboldt Bay Trail



Security Concerns

The southern segment of the Humboldt Bay Trail presents a few security concerns. Some homeless encampments have been found there, which may intimidate trail users. The Problem Oriented Policing (POP) squad patrols the area, and regularly removes large amounts of trash, including hypodermic needles. For both residents and tourists to enjoy this trail, homeless encampments and trash must be minimized. Several people interviewed told us that transients prefer their encampments to be out of public sight. They believe as more people use the trail, any encampments will move to more isolated areas. Eureka has funded a new full-time position to patrol the parks and trails around the city. In addition, Bayshore Mall security reportedly has agreed to patrol the segment of the trail behind the mall.

The Humboldt County Sheriff’s Office’s (HCSO) considerable experience in policing the Hammond Trail in McKinleyville can be applied to the security of the county segment of the Humboldt Bay Trail. A sheriff’s deputy patrols the Hammond Trail on an ATV, reminding trail users that drinking alcohol, using drugs and camping are illegal. Because there is a perception that transients are camping in the brush along the trail, the HCSO regularly sends the Sheriff’s Work Alternative Program (SWAP) team to clear the brush in order to prevent illegal encampments.

The Arcata, or northern, segment of the trail has been open since November 2017. Since the

opening of the trail, the number of homeless encampments has decreased. Reports of crime have also been reduced. The city has a park ranger who regularly patrols various trails in Arcata, including the northern segment of the Humboldt Bay Trail. Installation of lighting from 17th St. to the skate park has added an additional level of security for that section.

Law enforcement agencies have developed strategies for patrolling trail segments. Additional security concerns have been identified by the HCCGJ. Among these concerns are lighting and the need for more frequent patrols.

Safety Concerns

All segments of the trail share common safety concerns. There is a potential for injuries from a variety of causes. Conflicts may arise among the various trail users, such as bicyclists, skateboarders, dog walkers, children, and people with disabilities. After dark, trail users may experience diminished visibility, especially along the highway.

Another safety concern is related to usage by people with disabilities. Requirements vary depending on the nature of the disability. The vision impaired will require braille signage or auditory devices. For the hearing impaired, visual warning signals may be needed. The design and location of benches are important to those with mobility issues.

Some safety issues exist with the gap in Eureka between the boardwalk and the Aquatic Center. Trail users must navigate between a dirt path and parked cars along 1st Street. Until permanent safety barriers are installed, there exists the possibility of vehicular traffic utilizing the section along the railroad tracks, presenting a significant risk to trail users. In addition, the gap is currently unsafe for people with disabilities, who must access the trail via the street.

The major safety concerns of the Humboldt Bay Trail system arise along the county segment. Until construction is completed, the interim segment will be utilized for at least several years. This temporary segment is the rust colored, 10-foot-wide shoulder of Highway 101. The posted speed limit for this area is 50 MPH, however, traffic often moves more rapidly. A Caltrans survey indicates many people share significant concern for the safety of users of this temporary segment. Those with limited mobility, sight, hearing, or other disabilities would be in significant danger.

The Humboldt County Public Works Department is working with a disability support organization to design and determine the location of signage along the county segment of the trail to aid users with various disabilities. The HCCGJ found no similar arrangements for the Eureka and Arcata segments of the Bay Trail.

The HCCGJ found a number of safety issues still remain, particularly with the portions yet to be completed.

Maintenance

The Volunteer Trail Stewards program is aiding with trail maintenance. These volunteers are currently involved with trash pickup, graffiti abatement, minor landscaping, and invasive species removal along the northern and southern segments. They plan to expand these services to the central segment of the Humboldt Bay Trail when it opens. Since their activities will be increasing, they are actively recruiting more members. They are confident they can successfully recruit sufficient volunteers to support the entire Humboldt Bay Trail.

The Humboldt Bay Trail Fund, managed by the Humboldt Area Foundation, has so far raised

at least \$240,000 to support trail maintenance. Their goal is to reach \$1,000,000 in order to create a tax deductible endowment for continual support of the trail. They have established this fund to support the local cities and county governments which may have difficulty allocating funds to adequately maintain the trail.

The city of Arcata has bi-monthly work days when volunteers clean-up and remove invasive species from city trails and parks. This work is supported by various service organizations, Humboldt State University (HSU) student groups, and the Volunteer Trail Stewards. Typically between 20 and 80 volunteers participate during these scheduled workdays.

Significant effort to financially support maintenance of the Humboldt Bay Trail has been expended by local community members. Recruitment of adequate numbers of volunteers remains a concern. Fundraising needs to be ongoing.

FINDINGS

- F1. The City of Arcata and its Parks and Recreation Department are to be commended for completing their segment of the Humboldt Bay Trail in a timely manner.
- F2. The City of Eureka and its Parks and Recreation Department are to be complimented for overcoming the many barriers encountered to construct the Waterfront Trail.
- F3. Members of the Humboldt County community are to be commended for their participation in the development of a creative endowment through the Humboldt Area Foundation to fund trail maintenance.
- F4. Local law enforcement agencies have considerable experience policing trails.
- F5. To address security concerns, adding additional law enforcement may be warranted along each segment of the trail.
- F6. Efforts of the Volunteer Trail Stewards to keep the trails clean, remove trash and clear excess plant growth are impacted by an insufficient number of regular volunteers.
- F7. Completion of the remaining four-mile segment along the Highway 101 Safety Corridor is contingent upon committed cooperation among various agencies and private property owners.
- F8. Many trail users do not feel safe walking or riding bicycles on the interim trail along the shoulder of Highway 101.
- F9. While groups may feel safe on the trail, individuals may not feel safe.
- F10. Trail safety for those with disabilities needs to be further assessed and addressed.
- F11. Additional safety concerns may arise as more people use the trails.
- F12. The gap between the boardwalk and the Aquatic Center on the Waterfront Trail is confusing to follow and dangerous to use.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- R1. The Humboldt County Civil Grand Jury recommends the Humboldt County Sheriff, the City of Eureka, and the City of Arcata each provide regular daily security patrols along their respective segments of the Humboldt Bay Trail. Such patrols may include trained volunteers such as Senior Citizens on Patrol (SCOP). These patrols should be in place by October 1, 2018. (F4, F5, F8, F9)
- R2. The Humboldt County Civil Grand Jury recommends the City of Arcata install signage at the southern end of its segment of the Humboldt Bay Trail to alert the public that continuing on the shoulder of Highway 101 may not be safe. This signage should be in place by September 1, 2018. (F8)
- R3. The Humboldt County Civil Grand Jury recommends the City of Eureka install signage at the northern end of its segment of the Humboldt Bay Trail to alert the public that continuing on the shoulder of Highway 101 may not be safe. This signage should be in place by September 1, 2018. (F8)
- R4. The Humboldt County Civil Grand Jury recommends Humboldt County, the City of Eureka, and the City of Arcata form a working group with the sole purpose of studying the requirements for providing individuals with disabilities full access to the Humboldt Bay Trail. This working group should include a minimum of one person each from groups with visual, hearing, and mobility impairments. This group should be formed by September 1, 2018. (F10, F11)
- R5. The Humboldt County Civil Grand Jury recommends Humboldt County, the City of Eureka, and the City of Arcata form a second working group, including community members-at-large, with the sole purpose of developing rules for use of the Humboldt Bay Trail consistent across all trail segments. These rules should address issues such as animals, bicycles, skates/skateboards, and motorized specialty vehicles, etc. These rules should be developed by January 1, 2019, be clearly posted and be included in a brochure at all major access points. (F8, F9, F11)
- R6. The Humboldt County Civil Grand Jury recommends Humboldt County, the City of Eureka, and the City of Arcata place signage at all major access points within their jurisdictions including mileposts, distances to other points along the trail, and rules for use. These signs should be installed by May 15, 2019. (F9, F10, F11)
- R7. The Humboldt County Civil Grand Jury recommends Humboldt County, the City of Eureka, and the City of Arcata install safety lighting along the Humboldt Bay Trail where appropriate. Lighting should be installed by May 15, 2019. (F9, F10, F11)
- R8. The Humboldt County Civil Grand Jury recommends Humboldt County, the City of Eureka, and the City of Arcata install specialized receptacles for syringes, recyclables, and pet waste, to be placed at regular intervals along all segments of the trail. These receptacles should be in place by January 1, 2019. (F9, F10, F11)
- R9. The Humboldt County Civil Grand Jury recommends the Board of Supervisors consult with

Caltrans regarding an appropriate temporary safety barrier, to be placed along the interim segment of the trail adjacent to Highway 101. This consultation should take place by September 1, 2018. (F7, F8)

R10. The Humboldt County Civil Grand Jury recommends Humboldt County, the City of Eureka, and the City of Arcata parks and recreation departments cooperate to develop a shared list of potential volunteer organizations for community trail work occasions. This list should be available to each entity by September 1, 2018. (F6)

R11. The Humboldt County Civil Grand Jury recommends the City of Eureka install signage directing users how to navigate the gap between the boardwalk and the Aquatic Center. These signs should be installed by July 1, 2018. (F12)

R12. The Humboldt County Civil Grand Jury recommends the City of Eureka eliminate parking and add K-rail on the west side of 1st Street between the boardwalk and the railroad tracks to enhance safety of this section until complete. (F12)

REQUIRED RESPONSES

Pursuant to Penal Code section 933.05, the Grand Jury requires responses from the following governing bodies as follows:

- Humboldt County Board of Supervisors (**R4, R5, R6, R7, R8, R9, R10**)
- City of Arcata (**R1, R2, R4, R5, R6, R7, R8, R10**)
- City of Eureka (**R1, R3, R4, R5, R6, R7, R8, R10, R11, R12**)
- Humboldt County Sheriff's Office (**R1**)

Reports issued by the Grand Jury do not identify individuals interviewed. Penal Code section 929 requires that reports of the Grand Jury not contain the name of any person or facts leading to the identity of any person who provides information to the Grand Jury.

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