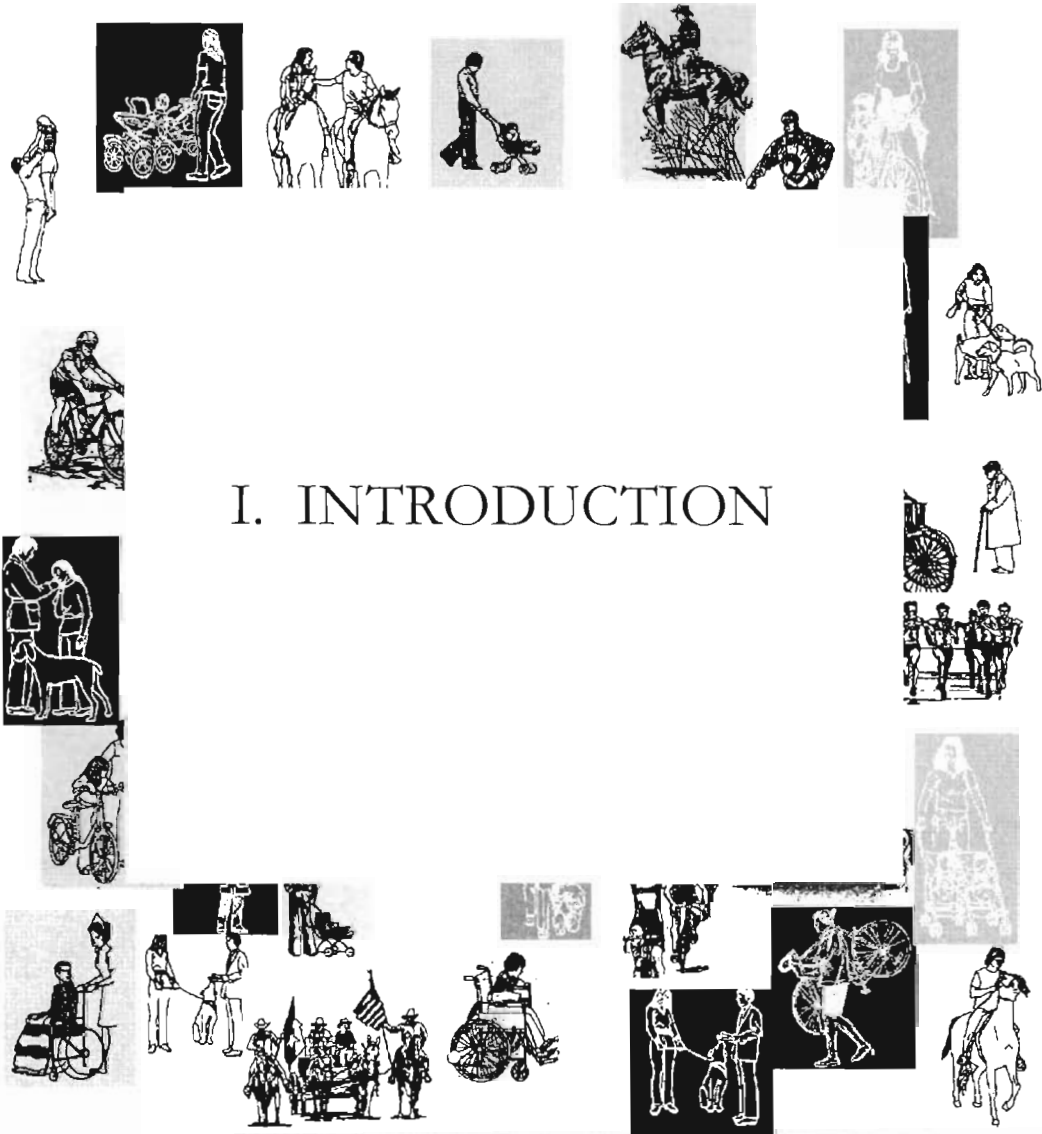




Santa Clara County COUNTYWIDE TRAILS MASTER PLAN Update



I. INTRODUCTION

Final Report
Santa Clara County Trails Plan Advisory Committee

Adopted November 14, 1995
Santa Clara County Board of Supervisors

I. INTRODUCTION

HISTORY

Planning trails throughout the county is a visionary endeavor. Many of the trails in Santa Clara County that are now available to the general public are there only because of a legacy of support and planning by the County's agencies and dedicated citizens interested in trails. As the county has become more urbanized, the trails planning effort has necessarily become more sophisticated.

Planning for trails has been an integral part of land use planning in Santa Clara County for at least the past 30 years. In the late 1950s and early 1960s, plans were developed to provide hiking and bicycling trails as part of park chains proposed along most of the major streams that flow through the Santa Clara Valley, including Coyote Creek, the Guadalupe River, and Stevens Creek. Some of these proposed trails and parkways are only now becoming realities. Trails have been a part of the Santa Clara County General Plan since 1980.

- **1980 General Plan:** In 1980, the Board of Supervisors combined and adopted, with minor revisions, a 1972 "Plan of Regional Parks for Santa Clara County" that was already an element of the General Plan with a 1978 trails plan known as the "Trails and Pathways Master Plan for Santa Clara County" prepared by the Santa Clara County Planning Policy Committee's (PPC) Trails and Pathways Subcommittee. This new combined General Plan Element became the "Regional Parks, Trails, and Scenic Highways Element" of the County's General Plan.

The 1980 General Plan map for trails envisioned an interconnected, countywide network of hiking, bicycling, and equestrian trails and pathways that linked parks and public open space lands with one another and provided access from the urbanized valley floor to hillside, water conservation reservoirs, and mountain parks and public open space lands.

- **1990 Board of Supervisors General Plan and Policy Review Decisions:** In 1990, the Board of Supervisors initiated a review of the County General Plan and established a General Plan Review Committee. In parallel but unrelated actions, the Board also directed County staff to review two items relating to trails. The first was to formally document the County's Trail Easement Dedication Policies and Practices. The second was to develop and implement a public process to define ambiguous trail routes on the 1980 General Plan Trails and Pathways Map. These

1990 actions focused public attention on both the County's Trail Easement Dedication Policies and Practices and the trail portion of the General Plan.

- **1992 Board of Supervisors Decisions:** On January 28, 1992 The Board of Supervisors adopted the "Trail Easement Dedication Policies and Practices" that provide County staff, Commissions and the Board with directives regarding how trail easements are requested in conjunction with land subdivision and development. At the same time, because of the public interest and concern about trails and the easement policies, the Board of Supervisors approved a recommendation by the Santa Clara County Parks and Recreation Commission to review and update the trails portions of the General Plan separately from the update of the other General Plan elements being reviewed by the General Plan Committee.
- **The Trails Plan Advisory Committee, Its Mandate, and Legal Authority:** By Board of Supervisors action on January 28, 1992, a balanced Trails Plan Advisory Committee was established, composed of sixteen members including:
 - One member of the Board of Supervisors
 - Two members from the County Parks and Recreation Commission
 - Two members from the County Planning Commission
 - One member of the Intergovernmental Council (IGC) Trails and Pathways Subcommittee
 - Two appointments from each County Supervisor to reflect a balance of property owners and trail advocates.

Their charge was to conduct a comprehensive study of the trails policies and the trails map contained in the County General Plan and to present their recommendations to the Board of Supervisors as an amendment to the General Plan. A listing of the Trails Plan Advisory Committee members is found in Appendix A.. The Board of Supervisors resolution is found in Appendix B.

- **1995 General Plan Update and the Countywide Trails Master Plan:** On December 20, 1994, the Board of Supervisors approved an updated General Plan (hereinafter referred to as the 1995 General Plan) that was based on the work of the General Plan Review Committee established in 1990. All required and discretionary elements of the General Plan were involved in the update, including

trails. With regard to trails, the 1980 Trails and Pathways Master Plan map was carried forward and place-holding policies were incorporated into the 1995 General Plan. This was done recognizing the forthcoming work of the Trails Plan Advisory Committee. The recommendations of the Trails Plan Advisory Committee contained in this Countywide Trails Master Plan served as the basis for amending the 1995 General Plan.

THE COMMITTEE AND ITS PLANNING PROCESS

The term "advisory" is somewhat of a misnomer for the strength, keen interest, and involvement of the Trails Plan Advisory Committee (the Committee). Their group discussions and viewpoints, reviews and evaluations, suggestions and critiques, and approvals did more than advise staff. This plan was prepared under the direct instruction of the Committee.

The Committee met monthly in an open public forum for approximately two and one-half years. They prepared the request-for-proposals and selected the consulting team that would assist them in authoring this County Trails Master Plan Update. They took field trips throughout the County to walk, experience, and discuss the usefulness of varying trails and complexity of trail-related issues. They conducted workshop sessions with special interest trail groups, special interest land use and property-rights groups, and with private property owners in the County on whose land proposed trail routes enter or cross. The Committee members personally conducted field surveys of existing trail use and questioned trail users about their perceptions of trails. They conducted and attended fifteen public workshops focusing on trail evaluation criteria, trail goals and policies, and the preliminary plans. They reviewed, commented and approved every public-information document prior to its dissemination. Through a well-considered, paced, step-by-step process, the Committee logically crafted this trails plan update from the ground up. A chronology of the Committee's major activities is presented in Appendix B.

Three major themes of keen interest to the Committee underpin the policies and map that make up this plan. These are:

- **Vision:** A quality trails plan demonstrates intelligent foresight and presents a mental image of trail route patterns consistent with the future growth and development in Santa Clara County. The overall County General Plan horizon is the year 2010. The true benefactors of this trails plan, however, are the County's

children who will grow up, use, enjoy, and learn from the County's public trail system well into the twenty-first century.

- **Respect and Fairness:** A Countywide trails plan that identifies routes across or adjacent to private lands must address the land-use, privacy, liability, and due-process concerns of said landowners. This is true whether the lands in question are to remain in private ownership or are to eventually be obtained by a public agency. Respect for individuals' use of their own property and fairness in accommodating the public good without placing an undue burden on the property owner are basic tenets that must not be forgotten by the County, its administrators, or its staff.
- **Need and Convenience:** The success of a trail system depends on its ability to be useful and used. Creating these attributes means identifying realistic trail routes and focusing attention, by establishing priorities, on: those trails that will facilitate the maximum use in terms of accessibility; and those trail routes that provide the most desirable attributes in terms of a quality experience.

THE GENERAL PLAN AND OTHER AGENCY TRAIL PLANS

A General Plan provides the basis for rational decision-making regarding the County's long-term development. The General Plan acts as a "constitution" for development by expressing community development goals and embodying public policy relative to the distribution of future land uses, both public and private. The content of the General Plan's policies and implementation measures is a reflection of the community. State law does not mandate that trails be included in a General Plan. The fact that Santa Clara County includes trails in its General Plan is exactly the type of expression about "local conditions and circumstances" that General Plan guidelines reference. It is up to the decision makers, in this case the Committee, the County Parks and Recreation Commission, the County Planning Commission, and the Board of Supervisors, to decide what are desirable and reasonable goals to establish for the County relative to the provision of the public good, including trails.

As part of the Santa Clara County General Plan, the policies of the Countywide Trails Master Plan and the Countywide Trails Master Plan Map are intended to serve as a guide for the County. The policies and Trails Master Plan Map are also intended to provide a coordinated vision for linking the existing trail plans and implementation efforts of individual jurisdictions and agencies within the County rather than pre-empt them.

Figure 1 illustrates the fifteen incorporated cities within Santa Clara County and generalized urban areas within the County. In addition to the Cities, the following agencies and special districts also plan, develop, operate, and manage public trails within Santa Clara County:

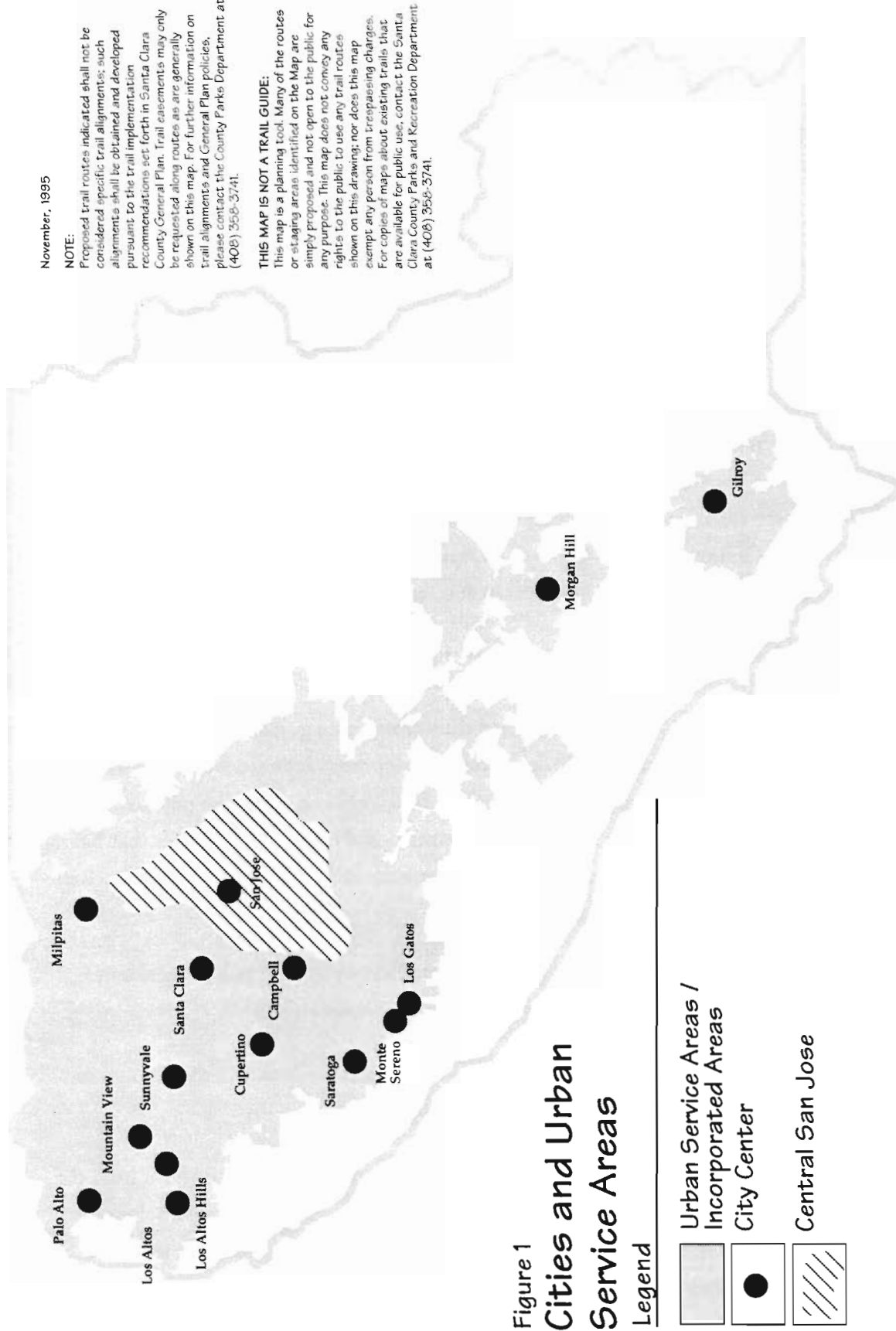
- Santa Clara County Transportation Agency
- Santa Clara County Open Space Authority
- Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District
- California Department of Parks and Recreation, Coe State Park, Castle Rock State Park
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, San Francisco Bay National Wildlife Refuge

In addition, there are other public agencies, such as the Transportation Agency, the County Roads and Airport Department, the Santa Clara Valley Water District and the California Department of Transportation who are key participants in implementing trails in the County. There are many other regulatory agencies such as the Bay Conservation and Development Commission, the California Department of Fish and Game and the California Department of Forestry whose stewardship and regulatory roles affect trail opportunities.

This Trail Master Plan Update accommodates several important County objectives. These are:

- Taking a regional perspective and thus providing a guide which each of the jurisdictions can use to make its trail development activities become part of a "system" in the real sense of the word than would be otherwise possible. In addition, Federal, State, adjacent Counties, and other local agencies that have a direct or regulatory interest in trails planning within the County would benefit from a coordinated trail master plan.
- Focusing attention on cooperation and efficiency among public agencies as implementation and funding opportunities become available.
- Identifying a common set of the most important trails within the County to aid in securing trail development funding.
- Providing the opportunity to shift from motorized transportation for both the recreation and transportation needs of the County as one part of a solution to improve or maintain environmental quality while facing increases in future populations.

Santa Clara County Trails Master Plan Update



November, 1995

NOTE:



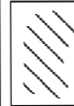
Proposed trail routes indicated shall not be considered specific trail alignments; such alignments shall be obtained and developed pursuant to the trail implementation recommendations set forth in Santa Clara County General Plan. Trail easements may only be requested along routes as are generally shown on this map. For further information on trail alignments and General Plan policies, please contact the County Parks Department at (408) 358-3741.

THIS MAP IS NOT A TRAIL GUIDE:

This map is a planning tool. Many of the routes or staging areas identified on the Map are simply proposed and not open to the public for any purpose. This map does not convey any rights to the public to use any trail routes shown on this drawing; nor does this map exempt any person from trespassing charges. For copies of maps about existing trails that are available for public use, contact the Santa Clara County Parks and Recreation Department at (408) 358-3741.

Figure 1
Cities and Urban Service Areas

Legend

-  Urban Service Areas / Incorporated Areas
-  City Center
-  Central San Jose

Note: See text for explanation

THE NEED FOR COUNTYWIDE TRAILS

The Committee allocated a considerable number of its monthly meetings and agenda time to discussing and evaluating the factors that define the need for trails. The phrase "need for trails" is interpreted by many people in many ways. A background report titled Overview of Trail Needs: Santa Clara County (on file at the County Parks and Recreation Department) was prepared for the Committee. That report summarizes a number of trail and trail-related surveys, including surveys specific to Santa Clara County, population statistics, and trends that were considered in preparing the trails plan. The conclusions of the Committee's deliberations about the need for trails are presented below.

- **Trail Roles and Functions:** The need for a countywide trail system in Santa Clara County is based on the following:
 - **Outdoor Recreation:** The activity of walking is consistently ranked the highest in terms of participation. Bicycling, and in particular mountain bicycling, continues to increase in popularity. Horseback riding has been, and continues to be, a strongly supported heritage of Santa Clara County. This is particularly true for the rural residents of the unincorporated areas of the County. This plan focuses only on non-motorized trail uses.
 - **Transportation:** Trails provide an alternative form of travel to get to work or school, to go shopping, or to get to any number of other destination points including local and regional parks and open space preserves. For all county residents, trails, as an alternative to the private automobile, are energy-efficient, reduce reliance on fossil-fuels and benefit air quality.
 - **Education:** To many individuals trails are also a means to an end. This is especially true for outdoor science teachers representing all levels of our educational system. Trails provide access to and through nature's outdoor laboratories.
 - **Public Health and Physical Well-being:** Trail use supports exercise of any desired degree. Activities involving exercise are both healthy for the individual and reduce health care costs.
 - **Social and Economic Well-being:** The positive benefits of well-managed trails on local economies and increased property values near trails in urban areas is well documented.

- **Alternative Emergency Access and Egress:** The subdivision of properties and intensification of land uses within wildland areas of the County increases the need for providing and maintaining emergency access/egress routes. Trails can serve as access routes in and out of an area blocked by fire, landslide, flood, or traffic.
- **Supply and Demand:** The "need" for trails is also to be considered as a quantitative evaluation involving available supply, existing and projected populations, and population characteristics weighed against a measurable support for trails. This view of need provides an overall direction for County policies in identifying a reasonable number of trails, patterns of trails, length of trails, and types of trails that should be planned.

There are currently about 650 miles of existing off-highway, non-motorized trails in all of Santa Clara County that are managed for public use by Federal, State, County, and Regional Open Space agencies. This mileage estimate includes all types of trails in all public lands within the County, regardless of location, size, accessibility, and usefulness. Approximately 575 miles of proposed trail routes were delineated on the 1980 General Plan/ Santa Clara County Trails and Pathways Plan. Of these, approximately 105 miles have been implemented. This mileage does not include approximately 30 miles of trail routes that were indicated by unconnected "arrows" on the Plan.

The broad conclusions of the Committee about the supply and demand for trails in Santa Clara County are:

- One local trend affecting trail need has not changed substantially over the past twenty years -- as the County's population grows, the need for trails will increase. The urbanization of Santa Clara County has increased the need for trails while the urbanization process has generally diminished the opportunity for potential trails and access to them.
- There exists an expressed demand for additional trails in Santa Clara County and a willingness to pay for them on the part of the majority of County residents.
- Hiking and off-street bicycle trails are in demand in all areas of the County, particularly those trails that are easily accessible from urban areas.
- On-street bicycle routes to accommodate the recreation-oriented bicyclist are needed along roadways that lead into the mountain areas of the County and in the rural areas of the southern part of the County.

- Additional equestrian trails are needed in Santa Clara County. This is particularly true in selected areas where a concentration of horse owners exists and safety issues are mounting as those areas develop and traffic conditions intensify making it less safe to travel along rural roadways.
- For many county residents, trails provide a safe, healthy means of transportation that is non-polluting. The separation between recreation and transportation use of trails that once may have existed is becoming blurred as more people "enjoy" traveling to work by bicycling or walking.
- Trails are broadly viewed within the County as serving a wide variety of purposes and providing a wide variety of benefits to residents and visitors versus being perceived as a single-use, recreation function.
- Traveling habits are changing with more outdoor recreation outings taking place closer to home and/or work. Trails are useful where they may be accessed either directly from the home or from a convenient location within a relatively short travel time of about fifteen minutes from home/or work.
- The most common trail trip for recreational purposes is about three miles in length.
- The concept of regional trails, such as the Bay Area Ridge Trail and the Bay Trail, is supported by the majority of voters (55% to 65%) of Santa Clara County. (source: Bregman, 1993).
- The concepts of close-to-home trails along the County's major streams is supported by more than two-thirds (65% to 75%) of County voters (source: Bregman, 1993).
- On a per capita basis, deficiencies in the availability of existing, easily accessible trails within an approximate 15 minute driving time from city centers are most evident, in order of ranking, for the residents of Gilroy, San Jose, Sunnyvale, Santa Clara, Mountain View, Campbell, and Milpitas.
- On a per capita basis, the residents of Los Altos Hills, Monte Sereno, and Saratoga enjoy the greatest degree of access to existing trails of countywide significance.

This is true because of the developed and managed public trails within County Parks and on lands of the Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District.

- The mileage of proposed trails and connections as shown in the current Trails Master Plan element of the General Plan is reasonable given the projected population of the County as measured against other national and local trail standards.