

Santa Paula Branch Line Trail Master Plan Update

Ventura County Transportation Commission

Item 12: SPBL Trail Master Plan Project Update

January 9, 2026





Presentation Overview

- About the SPBL Trail Master Plan Update & EIR
- Trail Compatibility
- Alternatives Development
- Environmental Impact Report
- Community Engagement and Ways to Get Involved



About the SPBL Trail Master Plan Update & EIR



Acquisition, Trail Master Plan & EIR

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF PROPOSED TRANSPORTATION ENHANCEMENT ACTIVITIES (not to exceed 60 words)

This project is the acquisition of the 32-mile-long Santa Paula Branch railroad right-of-way for use as a multimodal corridor serving five communities within Ventura and Los Angeles Counties. The corridor will be used for a bicycle and hiking trail; for freight port access, recreation, and possibly commuter rail service; for pipelines and utilities; for public parks, greenbelts and gateways to communities; for access to the Coastal Bicycle Trail and the De Anza National Historic Trail; and for access to the State High Speed Rail Corridor. The acquisition includes 388 acres of land, 29 miles of operating track, bridges, buildings and related improvements.

SANTA PAULA BRANCH LINE MASTER PLAN

December, 1996

Ventura County Transportation Commission



Santa Paula Branch Line
Recreational Trail

Master Plan

Ventura

Sanicoy

Santa
Paula

Fillmore

Piru



Ventura County Transportation Commission

SANTA PAULA BRANCH LINE RECREATIONAL TRAIL MASTER PLAN

Final Environmental Impact Report

State Clearinghouse No. 99031035

January 2000



Existing Trail Segments

Built Trail Sections in Santa Paula, Fillmore, and Piru

**Santa Paula –
2.2 miles opened 2012**



**Fillmore – 1.3 miles
opened 2007**



**Piru – 0.3 miles opened
2005 & 2007**



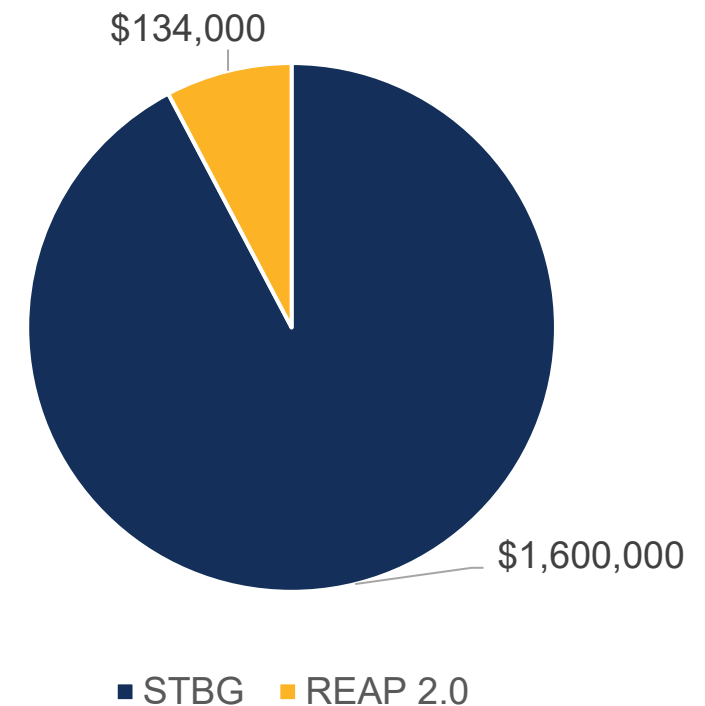
SPBL Timeline (1995 – Now)



How is the Project funded?

- \$134,000 from Regional Early Action Planning (REAP) 2.0 County Transportation Commission Partnership Program Grant Funds
 - Established as part of the 2021 California Comeback Plan under Assembly Bill 140
 - CA State Funds distributed via competitive grant programs to MPOs (SCAG) and suballocation to CTC (VCTC)
- \$1,600,000 STBG: Surface Transportation Block Grant funded from FHWA Highway Trust Fund- federal fuel and transportation-related excise taxes
 - Federal transportation funding source for projects that preserve and improve the conditions and performance of highways, bridges, and public roads; pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure; and transit capital projects.
- Competitive Grant Transportation Funds allocated to this SPBL Master Plan project **cannot** be used for local streets and roads or other miscellaneous projects (including other SPBL projects)

Funding Source



SBPL Trail Master Plan Update and EIR

- SPBL Trail Master Plan Update and Environmental Impact Report (EIR)
- Rails WITH Trails
- Updates Master Plan from 2000
 - No construction planned at this time
- Develops new environmental document



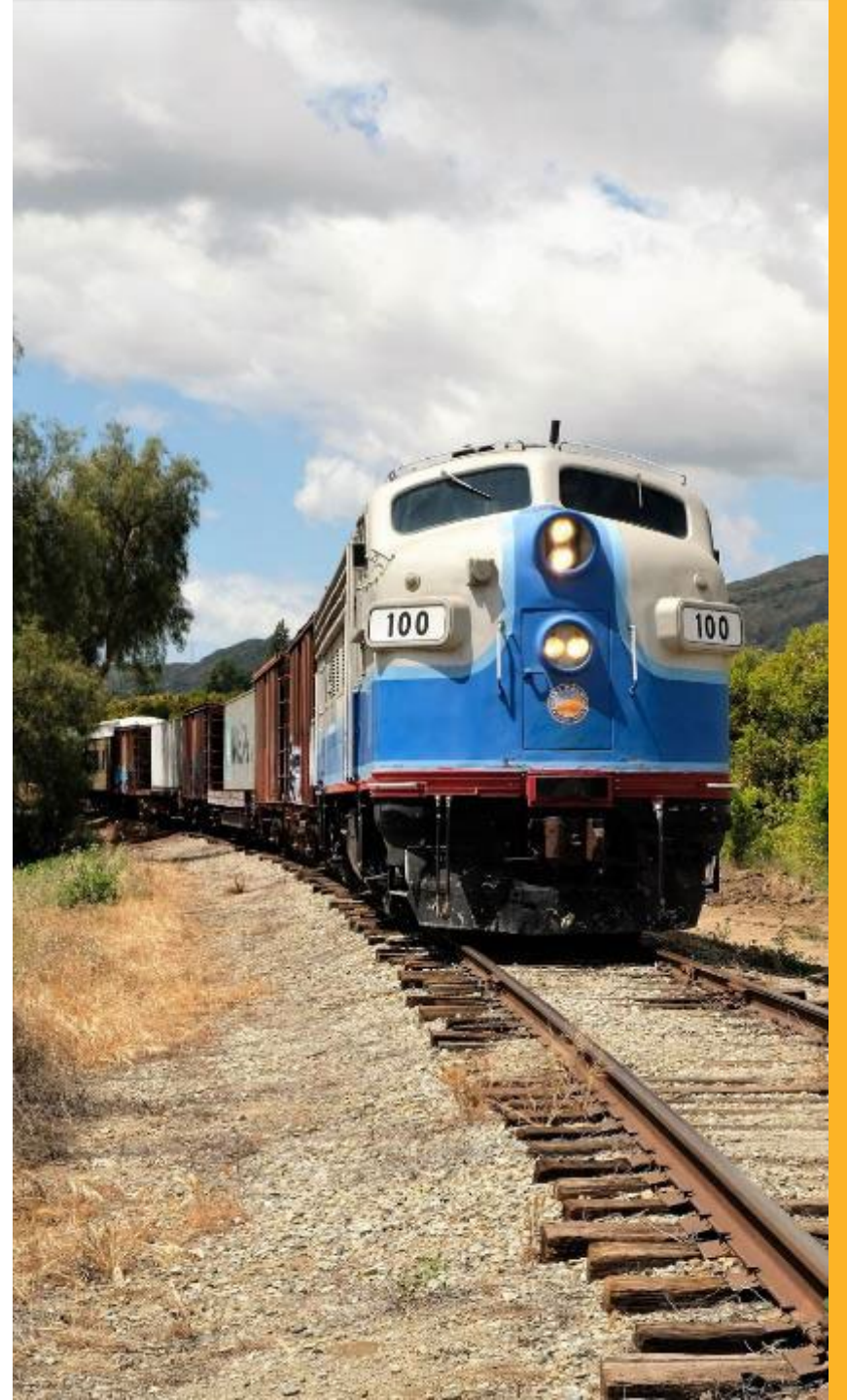
Source: VCTC, 2025



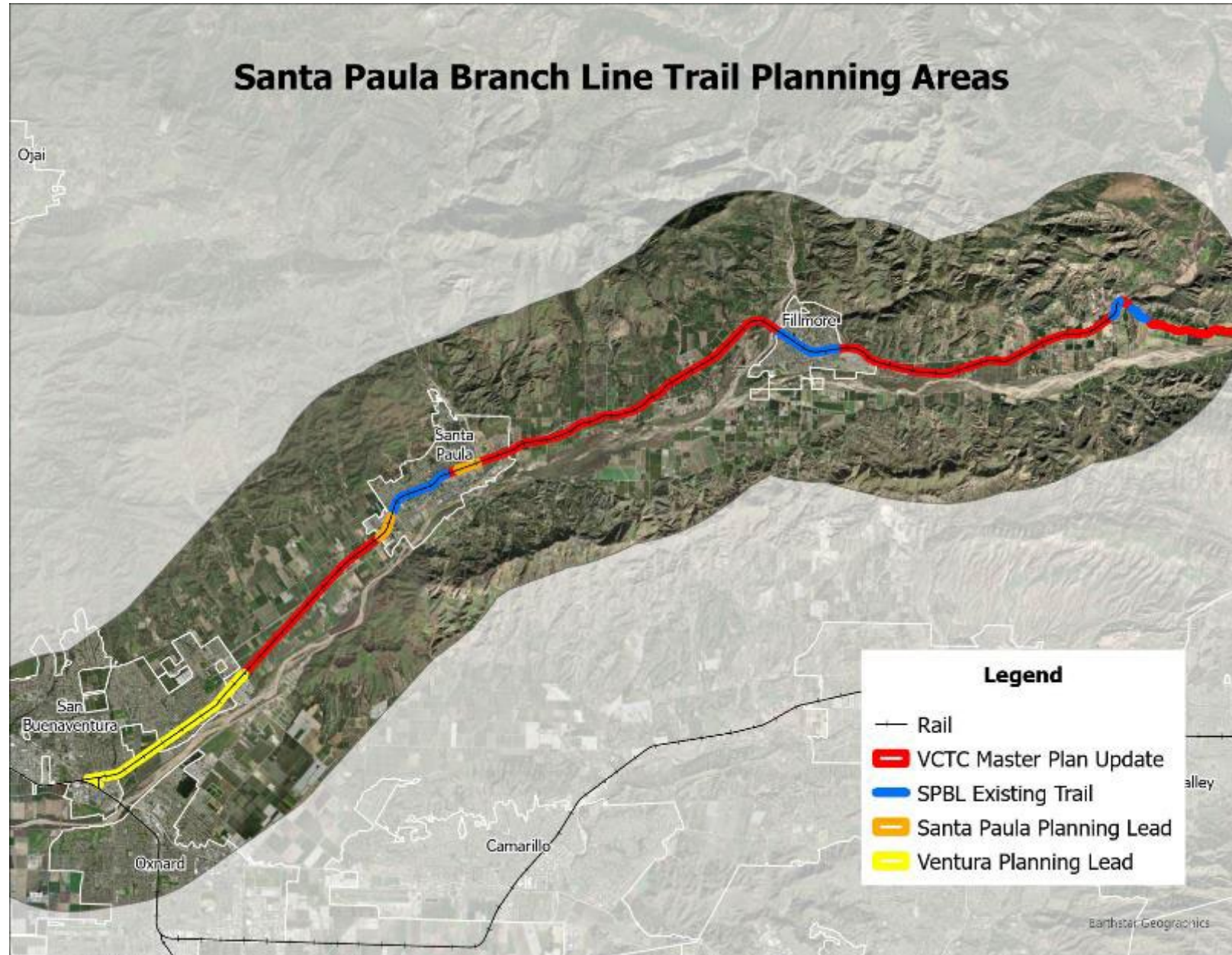
Key Project Objectives

- Meet commuter and recreational needs
- Connect to existing and planned trails
- Maximize user safety
- Minimize disruption to adjacent agricultural activities
- Continued & expanded tourism
- Integrate cultural, historical, and educational elements
- High-quality linear park experience

Source: *Master Plan EIR 2000*



Trail Planning Areas



Challenges & Opportunities

Challenges:

- Right-of-way constraints
- Constrained bridges
- At-grade crossings
- Minimize disruptions to adjacent agricultural activities

Opportunities:

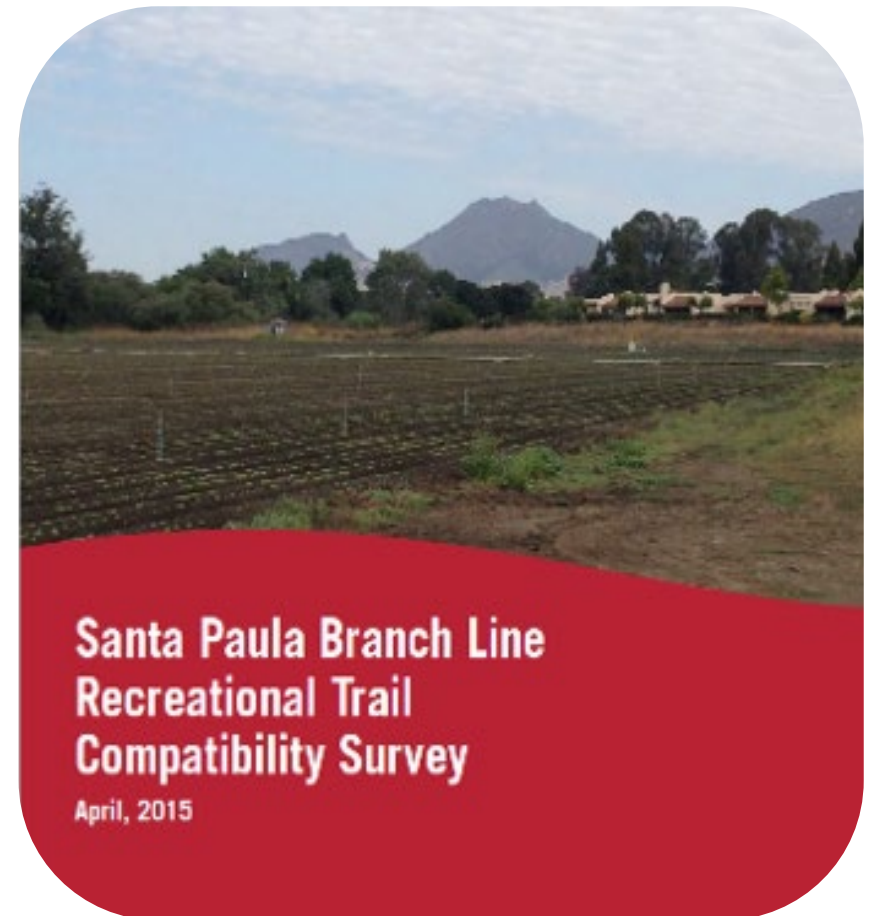
- Build on previous studies
- Connect to existing and planned trails
- Incorporated historic and educational elements



Trail Compatibility



Trail Compatibility



Trail Compatibility

- Trail alignments
- Operational and economic viability
- Pesticide use, food safety, and liability
- Fencing, trespass, and safety
- Emergency access and maintenance
- Trail amenities and education
- Communication and trust



Feedback is being incorporated into the Master Plan and Environmental Impact Report

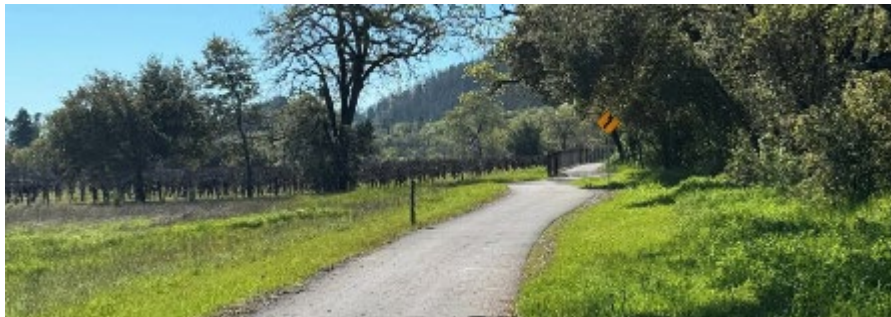


Napa Valley Vine Trail AG RESPECT Program



NAPA VALLEY VINE TRAIL

- Non-profit project champions actively participating in planning, fundraising, construction, and long-term trail stewardship
- Coalition of growers, Vinters, Farm Bureau, Ag Commissioner, Transportation Authority, bicyclists, Parks and Rec, and more
- Handles trail maintenance



- Created AG RESPECT program to address trespassing, pets, and property concerns
 - Affirmative and educational messaging on maps, signs, website, etc.
 - Promotes respect for private property
 - Signs at property edges that growers can change to indicate trail closures, caution, safety, and more
- Licensed for use around California

Alternatives Development



Alignment Options to be Analyzed

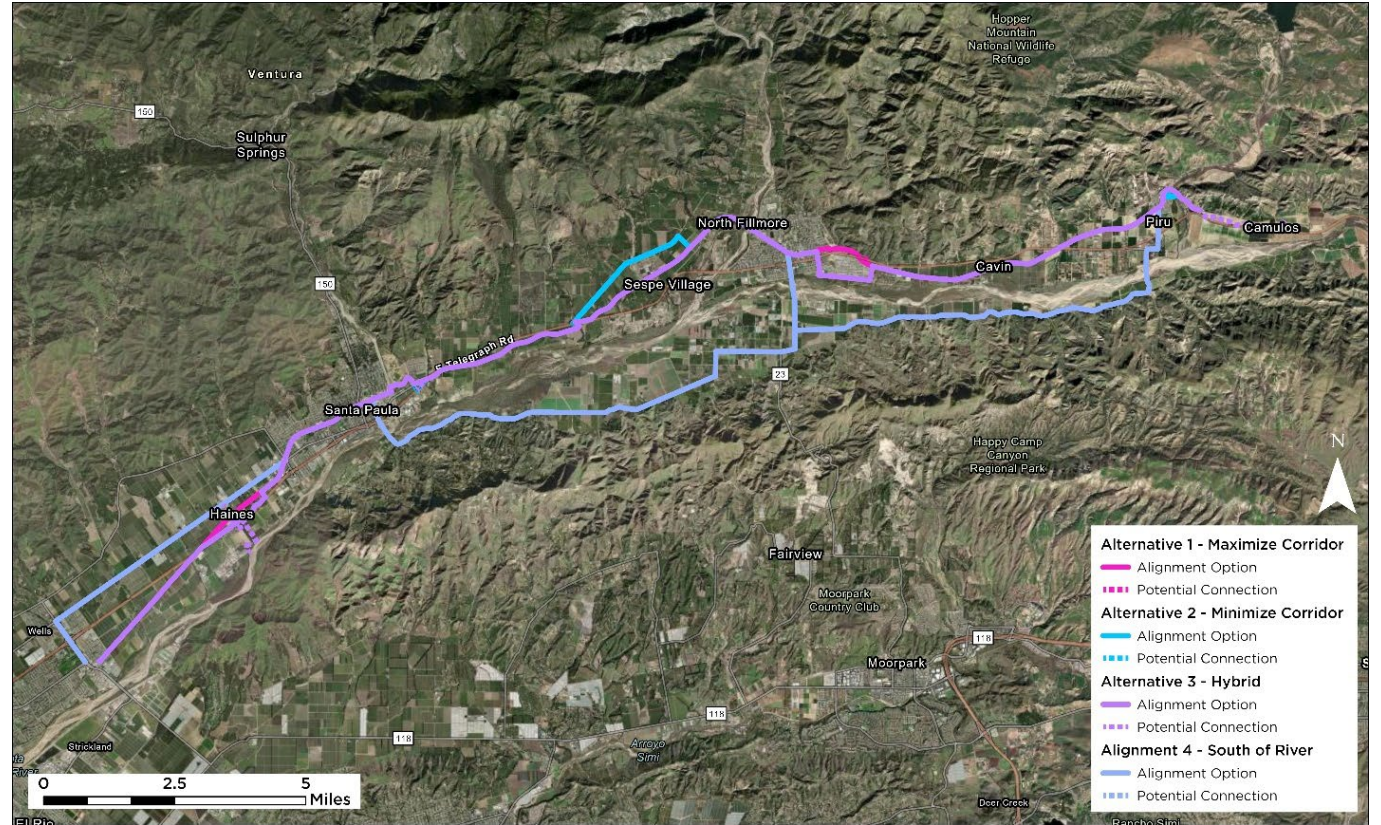


- Alignments developed through an iterative process with routes initially proposed by the technical team and refined through stakeholder feedback
 - Community workshops, advisory committee meetings, one-on-one discussions, and online feedback
- Primary project corridor is Santa Paula Branch Line right-of-way
- Alignment variations being considered based on community suggestions and where constraints make utilizing the Santa Paula Branch Line right-of-way difficult



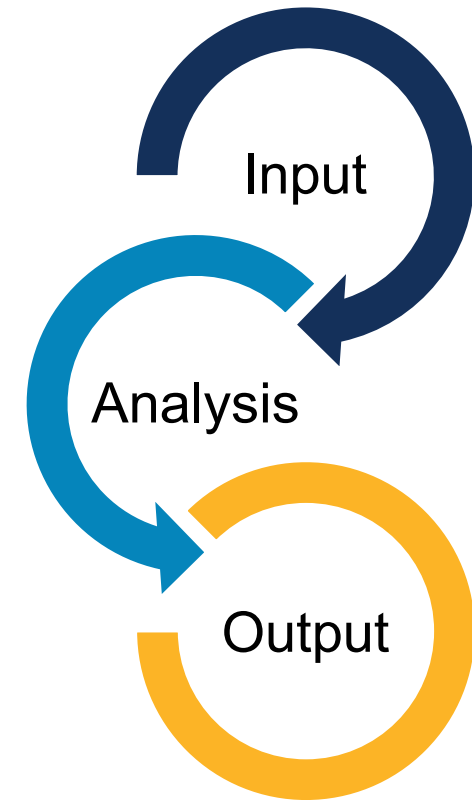
Alternatives Under Consideration

- Evaluating four end-to-end alternatives
 - Alternatives 1 through 3 follow SPBL ROW with some variations
 - Alternative 4 follows local roadways with connections to towns
 - All being considered for some level of trail amenities



Alternatives Development Next Steps

- Finalize evaluation criteria and analysis methodology
- Prepare cost estimates for each alternative
- Evaluate alternatives based on project objectives and evaluation criteria
- Select ***the*** “preferred alignment” and range of alternatives for analysis in the EIR based on the evaluation
- Identify funding strategies
- Outline implementation plan and schedule



Trail Amenities Alternatives

- Trail amenities:
 - Rest areas ~ 3 miles
 - Wayfinding signage
 - Seating
 - Shade structures or shade trees
 - Water fountains
 - Restrooms
 - Potentially parking (most likely at parks and the ends of the trail)
 - Possible pedestrian amenities at ~1-mile intervals, such as benches and trash cans



Example of Rest Area
Source: Napa Valley Vine Trail in Napa, CA



Environmental Impact Report



Program Environmental Impact Report (EIR) for SPBL Trail

Detailed report that analyzes the potential environmental effects of a proposed project or plan

Informs the lead agency and public about the potential environmental impacts of the entire plan, including mitigations and any alternatives that may reduce impacts



What are the advantages of a Program EIR?

- Streamlines approval of future projects
- Reduces reconsideration of recurring policy issues
- Provides a thorough consideration of direct and cumulative impacts
- Analyzes a reasonable range of project alternatives





DRAFT CONCEPT



Environmental Analysis



Project Description



Public Scoping



Technical Studies



Draft EIR

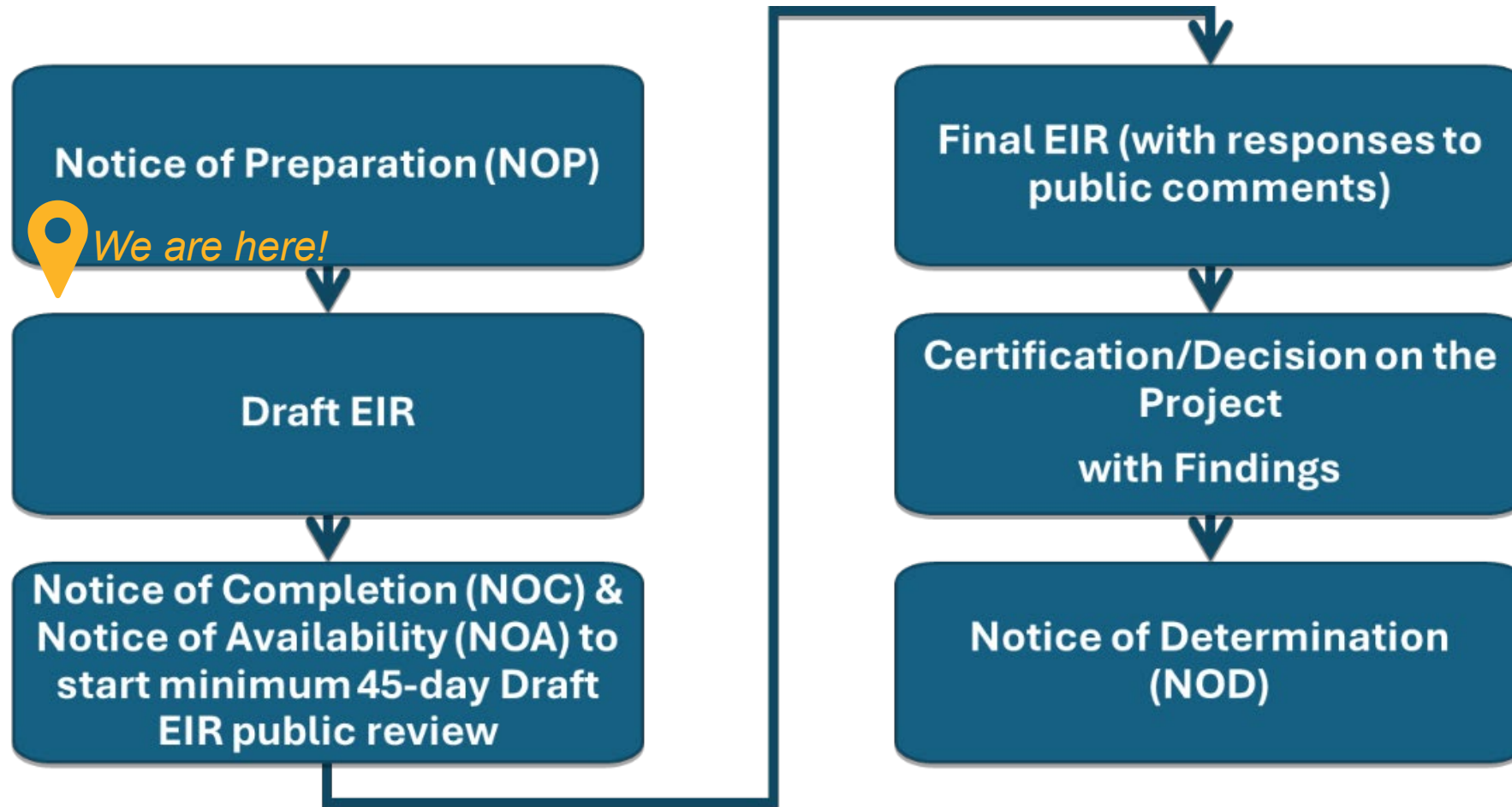


Public Review & Meetings



Final EIR

EIR Process





Contents of an EIR

- Table of contents
- Summary
- Project description
- Environmental setting
- Analysis of impacts
- Significance thresholds
- Significant effects
- Mitigation measures
- Alternatives
- Cumulative impacts
- Significant irreversible changes
- Growth inducing impacts
- Effects found not to be significant
- Organizations and persons consulted



Environmental Factors Analyzed in EIR

- Aesthetics
- Agriculture and Forestry Resources
- Air Quality
- Biological Resources
- Cultural Resources
- Energy
- Geology and Soils
- Greenhouse Gas Emissions
- Hazards and Hazardous Materials
- Hydrology and Water Quality
- Land Use and Planning
- Mineral Resources
- Noise
- Population and Housing
- Public Services
- Recreation
- Transportation
- Tribal Cultural Resources
- Utilities and Service Systems
- Wildfire



Initial Feedback on Environmental Factors

Feedback gathered from Project Development Team (PDT), Technical Advisory Committee (TAC), and Community Advisory Committee (CAC) meetings (leading into Community Workshop #3):



Agriculture

intersection between agriculture and other topics, pesticide use, liability, theft, trail maintenance, leases and crossings, food safety, fencing



Aesthetics

solar lighting, light pollution in rural areas



Air Quality

impacts on trail segments along Hwy 126



Biological Resources

wildlife corridors, endangered species, invasive plants



Hydrology & Water Quality

flooding, drainage, culvert maintenance



Population & Housing, Land Use

gentrification, connections to new housing developments, medical centers, and business parks



Recreation and Transportation

accessibility, walkability, trail connections and crossings, e-bike safety and speed



Wildfire

Emergency access along the trail



Notice of Preparation



Issued Nov. 17, 2025

Posted to Project website, submitted to CEQA Clearinghouse, and sent certified mail to agencies and tribal governments



Hosted Scoping Workshop Dec. 11

Concurrent with Community Workshop #3



Comments due Dec. 21, 2025

Submitted via email to spbl.trail@goventura.org



Analysis underway by consultant team

Will be incorporated into the EIR analysis



How Public Feedback Shapes the EIR Process

- Helps to identify technical areas of focus and potential impacts, *in a local context*
- Informs the consideration of project alternatives
- Suggests more effective mitigation measures



Community Engagement



Community Engagement To Date

- Technical Advisory Committee
- Community Advisory Committee
- Community Workshops in June, October, and December*
- Community Pop-ups in Saticoy, Fillmore, Santa Paula, and Piru*
- Ongoing one-on-one and small group listening sessions
- Online Pin Map engagement*
- Canvassing*
- Website, social media, newspaper, and radio*



**information and/or interpretation provided in Spanish and other languages*



Meetings

- 18 One-on-One meetings held so far, including:
 - Tour of the railroad corridor with Sierra Northern Railway
 - Caltrans, Assemblymember Bennett, Agriculture Commissioner, Farm Bureau, Ventura County, CoLAB, Newhall Ranch, Vine Trail, Cycling Stakeholders, Limoneira, Prancers Farm, Underwood Family Farms, Brokaw Nursery, VCTC Transit Department
- Wide range of topics covered, including project history, approval process, stakeholder priorities, agriculture best practices, trail best practices, approaches to project delivery, and local connections
- Presentations to organizations, including Ventura County Agricultural Policy Advisory Committee, One Step a la Vez, East Ventura Community Council, and Fillmore Planning Commission



Engagement in 2026

- TAC and CAC meetings
- Ongoing one-on-one and small group engagement
- Additional pop-up events
- **Summer 2026: Draft EIR comment period**
- Final EIR and Master Plan public hearing: Fall 2026





Stay Engaged

- Explore alternatives and share comments on our online Pin Map
- Submit comments via email to spbl.trail@goventura.org
- Sign up to be notified about future engagement opportunities



<https://linktr.ee/spbltrail>

<https://www.goventura.org/spbl-trail-master-plan/>



Project Timeline

- ➡ ① **Existing Conditions:** May – August 2025
- ➡ ② **Conceptual Planning:** July – November 2025
- ➡ ③ **Master Plan:** September – December 2025
- ➡ ④ **Project Definition:** September – December 2025
- ⑤ **Technical Studies:** December 2025 – February 2026
- ➡ ⑥ **Draft EIR:** February – May 2026
- ⑦ **Final EIR:** June – November 2026



➡ = **Opportunity for Engagement**

Thank You

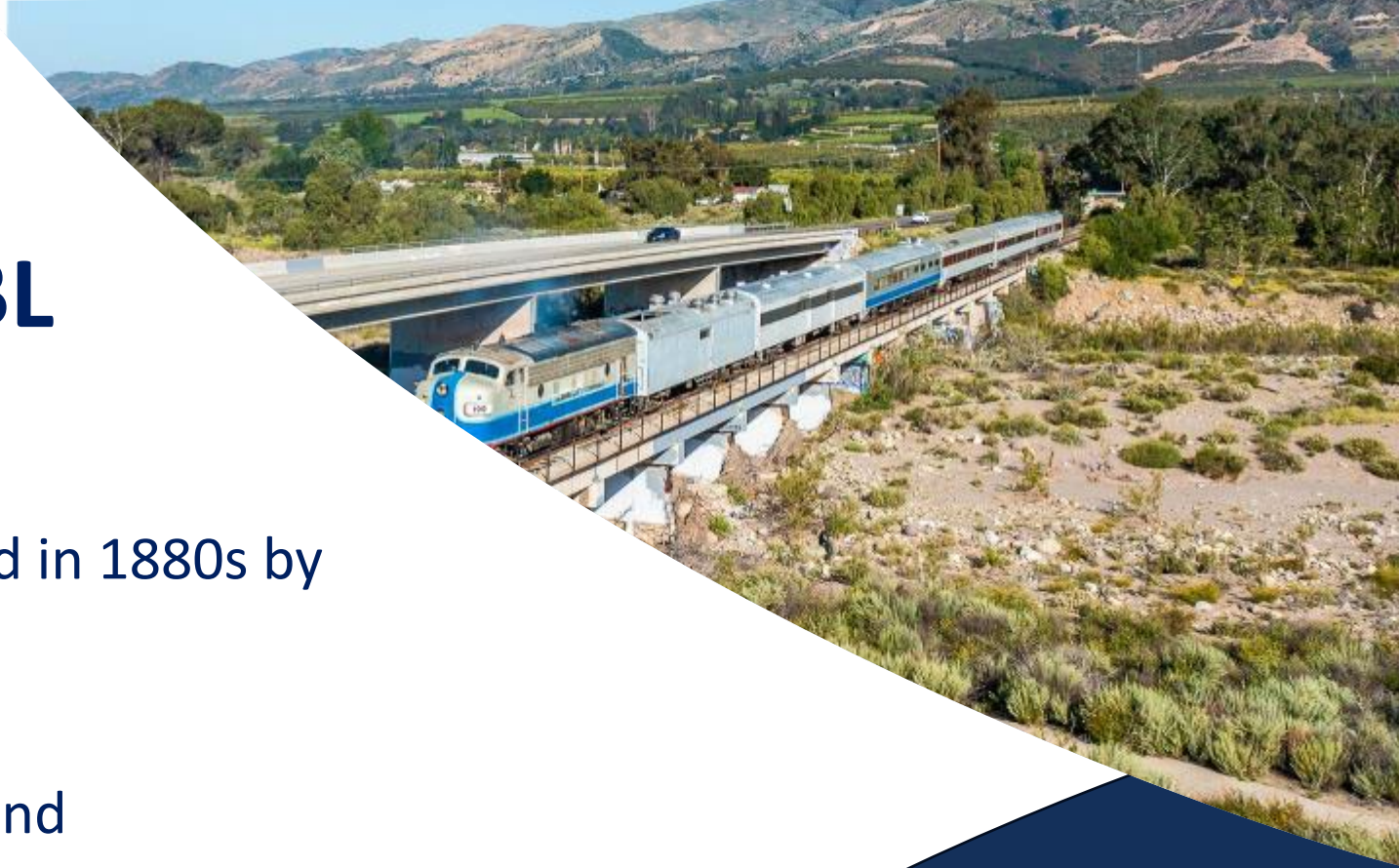


BACKUP - History of the Santa Paula Branch Line



History of the SPBL Railroad

- SPBL right-of-way assembled in 1880s by Southern Pacific Railway
- Opened in 1887
- Shared history of railroads and agriculture



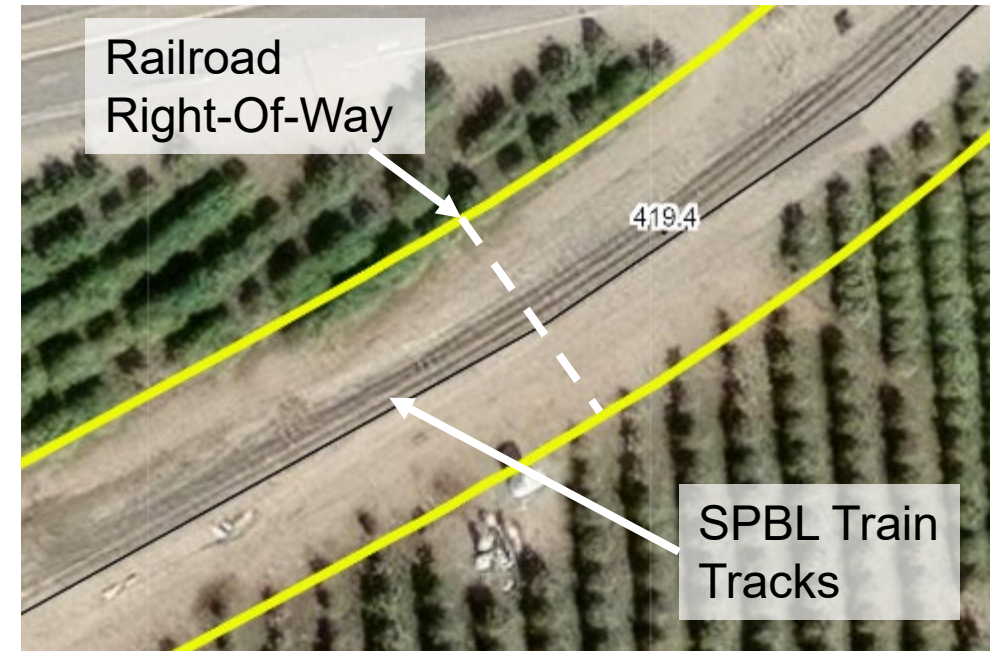
Services and Activities on the SPBL

- Railroad Lease & Operations Agreement with Sierra Northern Railway defines use for “Railroad Purposes”
 - Freight and transload services
 - Installing spur lines
 - Storing/switching rail cars
 - Services related to movie, film, television, commercial, media, and entertainment
 - Tourism and seasonal passenger services



What is Right-of-Way?

- Right-of-way refers to a linear corridor used for transportation infrastructure like roads, railroads, and trails
- VCTC-owned SPBL right-of-way consists of 99 parcels typically 100' wide extending 32 miles from East Ventura/Montalvo Metrolink Station through unincorporated Piru community



Source: <https://www.goventura.org/getting-around/spbl/>



Local Plan Compatibility



Santa Paula 2040 General Plan



Source: City of Santa Paula General Plan Update, Mobility Element Technical Report, December 2019
Figure 3-10 – Preferred Plan, Bicycle Facilities

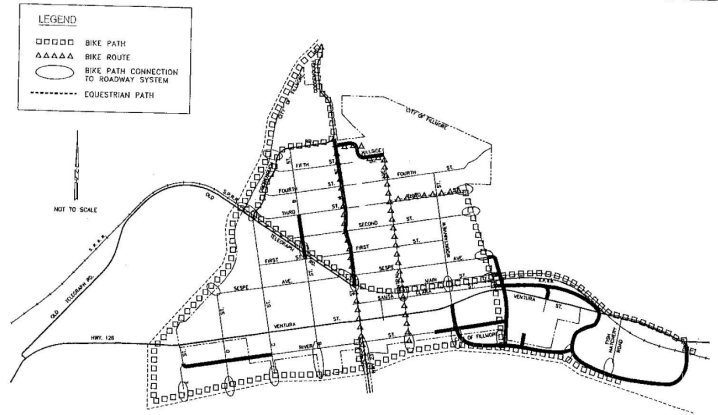
March 4, 2020

Circulation and Mobility – 3-35



County of Ventura
2040 General Plan

City of Fillmore
Circulation Element



Source: Whelan Associates, 2000
Proposed City-Wide Bicycle Circulation System

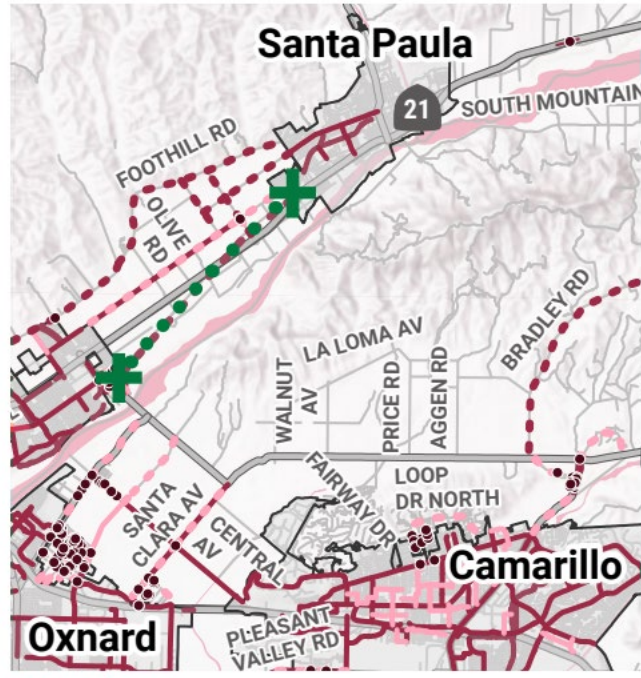
C-7

City of Fillmore

City of Fillmore
General Plan (2003)



VCTC Bicycle Wayfinding Plan (2017)



Location within county



Ventura County Active Transportation Plan (2024)



Saticoy Active Transportation Plan
September 2020

Saticoy Active Transportation Plan (2020)



Master Plan/EIR PDT

| PDT MEMBERS | ORGANIZATION / AFFILIATION |
|-------------------|----------------------------|
| Ryan Johnson | Caltrans District 7 |
| Benjamin Medina | Caltrans District 7 |
| Robert Wong | Caltrans District 7 |
| Joe Bellomo | City of Fillmore |
| Erika Herrera | City of Fillmore |
| Brian McCarthy | City of Fillmore |
| Kevin McSweeney | City of Fillmore |
| Manuel Minjares | City of Fillmore |
| Jonathan Royas | City of Santa Paula |
| Bob Woodward | City of Santa Paula |
| Jeff Hereford | City of Ventura |
| Derek Towers | City of Ventura |
| Alex Puga | City of Ventura |
| Christopher Solis | County of Ventura |
| Shelley Sussman | County of Ventura |
| Matt Blackburn | Sierra Northern Railway |
| Cole Pennington | Sierra Northern Railway |



Master Plan/EIR TAC

| TAC MEMBERS | ORGANIZATION / AFFILIATION |
|-------------------------|---|
| Ryan Johnson | Caltrans District 7 |
| Kevin McSweeney | City of Fillmore |
| Bob Woodward | City of Santa Paula |
| Derek Towers | City of Ventura |
| Jeri Cooper | County of Ventura – General Services Agency (GSA) Parks |
| Brian Miller | County of Ventura – District 3 |
| Christopher Solis | County of Ventura – Public Works Agency |
| Lourdes Solorzano | County of Ventura – District 1 |
| Victor Briones | County of Ventura – Sustainability Division |
| Bruce Stenslie | Economic Development Collaborative |
| Israel Vasquez-Nicholas | Ventura County Farmworker Resource Program |
| Don Aguilar | Santa Paula Police Department |
| Dr. Daniel Sandoval | Santa Paula Unified School District |
| Cole Pennington | Sierra Northern Railway |
| Korinne Bell | Ventura County Agricultural Commissioner |
| Lisa Tate Soury | Ventura County Agricultural Policy Advisory Committee |
| Dr. Cynthia Herrera | Ventura County Community College District |
| Ryan Kraai | Ventura County Fire Protection District |

Alternates

Alternates are not official committee members but may attend to represent their organization in support or instead of the official member.

| TAC ALTERNATES | ORGANIZATION / AFFILIATION |
|-----------------|---|
| Benjamin Medina | Caltrans District 7 |
| Susan Arroyo | County of Ventura – Public Works Agency |
| Colter Chisum | County of Ventura – GSA Parks |
| Michael Durazo | County of Ventura – District 3 |
| Bill Bartels | Economic Development Collaborative |



Master Plan/EIR CAC

| CAC MEMBERS | ORGANIZATION / AFFILIATION |
|----------------------|--|
| Matt Blackburn | Sierra Northern Railway |
| Pedro Chavez | One Step a la Vez |
| James Danza | Friends of the Santa Clara River |
| Sierra Doehr | Saticoy Food Hub |
| Kate Faulkner | Channel Islands Bicycle Club |
| Joey Juhasz-Lukomski | Shared-Use Mobility Center |
| Shawn Kelly | Santa Clara River Conservancy |
| Louise Lampara | Ventura County CoLAB |
| Xavier Maignon | Collector Car Vault |
| John Marquez | Santa Paula Chamber of Commerce |
| Maureen McGuire | Ventura County Farm Bureau |
| Veronica Nava | Spirit of Santa Paula |
| Atticus Reyes | Office of Assemblymember Steve Bennett |
| Andy Sobel | Bicycle Advocate |
| Brian Tucker | Ventura County Coast / Lodging Association |
| Gabrielle Vignone | House Farm Workers |
| Ken Wiseman | Piru Neighborhood Council |

| CAC ALTERNATES | ORGANIZATION / AFFILIATION |
|------------------|--|
| Jasmine Gollner | Collector Car Vault |
| Krista Silva | Ventura County Coast / Lodging Association |
| Brianne Whitcomb | Ventura County CoLAB |

Invited Organizations

Individuals from the following organizations were also invited to participate in the CAC:

- Bike Ventura County
- Boys and Girls Club of Santa Clara River Valley
- CAUSE
- County of Ventura – Office of Disability Access
- Kalpulli Huitzilin Ihaun|Xochitl (Aztec Dance Group)
- Limoneira Company
- Saticoy Municipal Advisory Council
- Santa Paula Latino Town Hall
- Ventura County Community Foundation - Isabella Project

