



Midpeninsula Regional
Open Space District

Memorandum

DATE: July 13, 2016

TO: MROSD Board of Directors

THROUGH: Stephen E. Abbors, General Manager

FROM: Julie Andersen, Resource Management Specialist III, Natural Resources Department

SUBJECT: Highway 17 Wildlife Passage and Bay Area Ridge Trail Crossing Project Update

The Highway 17 Wildlife Passage and Bay Area Ridge Trail Crossing project was identified as a high priority project during the Vision Plan and funding for the project was provided through passage of Measure AA. When completed, safe passage will be provided for both wildlife and both the Bay Area Ridge Trail and Juan Bautista de Anza Trail (a National Park Service administered trail that overlays the Ridge Trail and follows the route of the early Spanish Explorer).

In February of 2016, the Board of Directors authorized staff to enter into a contract with a consultant team to identify preliminary alternatives and conceptual designs for both the wildlife and trail crossing options within the study area. A project fact sheet (attached), website- www.openspace.org/Hwy17, and email- Hwy17@openspace.org have been launched.

A brief overview of the project and preliminary alternatives, including cost estimates, will be provided at the July 27, 2016 Board Meeting. Following this meeting, a Planning and Natural Resources Committee meeting has been scheduled for August 2, 2016. This meeting will be structured as an open house and informational presentation to provide an opportunity for the public to see the project options for the first time and for the committee to hear from public during the very early stages of the project.

Attachment:

Highway 17 Wildlife Passage and Bay Area Ridge Trail Crossing Fact Sheet

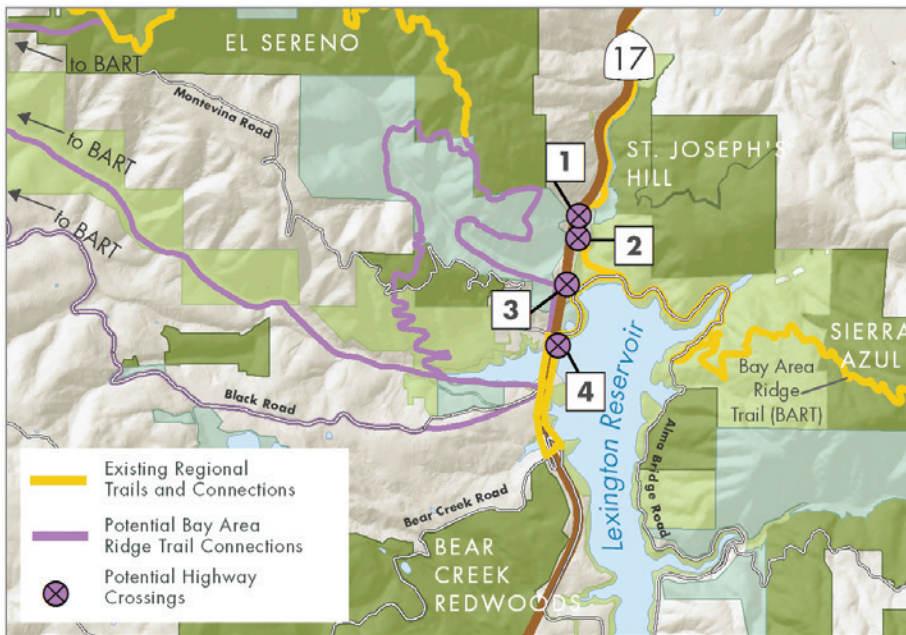


HIGHWAY 17 WILDLIFE PASSAGE AND BAY AREA RIDGE TRAIL CROSSING

Lexington Study Area

Safe Passage for Wildlife and Humans on Highway 17

Highways can be dangerous places for both people and wildlife. State Highway 17—from the southern border of the Town of Los Gatos to the Bear Creek Road overcrossing has been identified as a “road kill hot spot”, a place that is dangerous to both wildlife and people who try to navigate an increasingly busy stretch of narrow highway. This section of Hwy 17 lacks wildlife accessible culverts and bridges that can often provide safe crossing for wildlife. As a result, over the last nine years, 82 animals have been killed in this section of Hwy 17, including 51 deer, 5 mountain lions and numerous small and medium mammals. These collisions (and near collisions) are also extremely dangerous for motorists and their passengers.



Wildlife Connectivity— between Los Gatos and Bear Creek Road overcrossing Lexington Hills

The Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District (Midpen) is leading this locally, regionally and nationally important project and will collaborate with many partners to complete this work. Currently, Midpen is at the initial phase of developing a wildlife passage across Hwy 17, between Los Gatos and Bear Creek Road. This passage was identified as a high-priority project by the public and is part of Midpen’s adopted Vision Plan which is partially funded by Measure AA, a bond measure approved by voters in 2014.

Hwy 17 has fragmented thousands of acres of open space in the Santa Cruz Mountains limiting the ability of wildlife to find food, mates and habitat. Well-placed and appropriately designed crossings will help alleviate wildlife/vehicular

collisions and will enable wide-ranging species like mountain lions to live healthier lives in an increasingly urbanized landscape. To accommodate large animals, a large crossing structure is needed.

Regional Trails— Crossings for People

As part of this project, Midpen will partner with the Bay Area Ridge Trail Council and others to connect county and Midpen open space lands and trails.

Today, the gap in the Ridge Trail between Sanborn County Park to the west of Hwy 17 and Sierra Azul Open Space Preserve to the east, is one of the most challenging and significant in the San Francisco Bay Area. Hwy 17 is also a barrier between the popular Los Gatos Creek Trail and Bear Creek Redwoods, El Sereno, and St. Joseph’s Hill Open Space Preserves, as well as parts of Lexington County Park, neighborhoods in the Lexington Basin, the Santa Cruz Mountains and beyond.

This route is also anticipated to be designated as part of the Juan Bautista de Anza National Historic Trail, a National Park Service-administered trail which will ultimately extend from Mexico to San Francisco, following the route of the Spanish explorer.

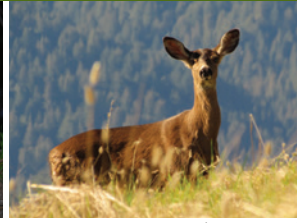
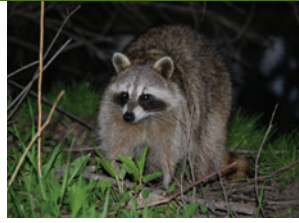
Healthy wildlife need:

- Access to food and water
- Habitat connectivity
- The ability to find mates to maintain genetically healthy populations
- Areas where juveniles can establish their own territory
- The ability to get away from human populations and other dangers

MIDPENINSULA REGIONAL OPEN SPACE DISTRICT



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New Wildlife Crossing Alternatives

1) Undercrossing at Ravine Culvert

A new undercrossing near the existing Ravine culvert would feature an opening on the west within the confines of a steep walled canyon and an opening on the east near an existing retaining wall along the Los Gatos Creek Trail. Access to the west is extremely steep, rocky and wooded, and would entail a significant descent and climb. For these reasons, this location is not considered feasible for a recreational trail crossing, but could provide a functional wildlife crossing.

2) Undercrossing at Trout Creek

A new undercrossing near the existing Trout Creek culvert would feature an opening on the west above the creek and an opening on the east near the top of a steep embankment above the Los Gatos Creek Trail. Trout Creek is a major tributary to Los Gatos creek where mountain lion, deer and other wildlife are known to attempt to cross the roadway, often unsuccessfully. Due to the proximity of environmental resources and extremely steep terrain, this alternative is considered a potential wildlife crossing only.

New Regional Recreational Trail Crossing Alternatives

3) New Overcrossing

The location for a new overcrossing would be south of the existing Trout Creek culvert where the topography is favorable for recreational use. The terrain immediately to the west is a steep slope, but there is a level “bench” area on the slope that could provide a tie in point for a new overcrossing. On the east side, there is a small hill with a wide landing area that could be connected to the existing Los Gatos Creek trail. Although an overcrossing may be used by wildlife it would primarily be a recreational trail crossing.

4) Undercrossing at Montevina and Alma Bridge Roads

A recreational trail undercrossing at this location could be built to connect Montevina Road on the west to the existing recreational trail on the east adjacent to Lexington Reservoir. This location is well south of the area where wildlife attempts to cross the highway and is farther from continuous habitat. Limitations for wildlife at this location and the proximity to existing trails make this primarily a recreational trail crossing.

Project Timeline

2016 ★	2017-2018	2019-2020	2020 (or later)
Identify Project Alternatives (Feasibility Study)	Select Preferred Alternative(s) and Environmental Review and Permitting	Plans and Specifications (Design)	Construction (dependent on funding)

Key Stakeholders and Regional Partnerships

This project requires a high level of coordination and collaboration. Key stakeholders in this project will include Bay Area Ridge Trail, Caltrans District 4, Juan Bautista de Anza Trail (National Park Service), the UC Santa Cruz Puma Project, Santa Clara Valley Transportation Authority, and Santa Clara County Parks.

Current partners on this project include Peninsula Open Space Trust and the Pathways for Wildlife. Midpen is continually working to develop additional partnerships and expects this list to grow as the project develops.

Project Updates

For project updates visit www.openspace.org/Hwy17 or contact Julie Andersen, project manager at: Hwy17@openspace.org.



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