



Midpeninsula Regional  
Open Space District

R-23-138  
Meeting 23-32  
November 8, 2023

**AGENDA ITEM ~~5~~ 6**

## **AGENDA ITEM**

Carpool Pilot Program at Rancho San Antonio Open Space Preserve

### **GENERAL MANAGER'S RECOMMENDATIONS** *den*

1. Conclude the carpool pilot program as the pilot program has reached its project objectives.
2. Direct the General Manager to add a new project to the upcoming fiscal year to evaluate possible long-term carpool program implementation options based on lessons learned from the pilot program.

### **SUMMARY**

The Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District (District) initiated a year-long carpool pilot program at Rancho San Antonio Open Space Preserve & County Park (Rancho San Antonio, Preserve) in September 2022. The carpool pilot program supports the goals of the Rancho San Antonio Multimodal Access Study, which was completed in 2021 to identify green modes of transportation for addressing congestion and parking issues and improve the visitor experience. This report summarizes the findings from the pilot program and presents the General Manager's recommendations for next steps.

### **BACKGROUND**

Over the past 20 years, Rancho San Antonio has experienced increased visitation, where the 2022 total estimated visitation has exceeded one million visitors. The Preserve is popular due to its proximity to many bayside communities and ease of access. As such, parking demand has exceeded supply, creating parking and congestion impacts both onsite and for adjacent communities. In response to the ongoing parking and congestion issues, some adjacent neighborhoods have eliminated parking altogether or restricted parking during Preserve peak hours. These parking policy changes have further exacerbated the parking challenges at this popular preserve. To address parking and congestion issues, the District initiated the Rancho San Antonio Multimodal Access Study (Study) in 2020.

The Study explores and evaluates non-motorized mobility, transit options, and parking alternatives for the Preserve. The Study identifies strategies for encouraging visitors to use greener modes of transportation and reduce parking demand and traffic, while maintaining equitable access for both local and regional visitors. The Study prioritizes 15 transportation demand management (TDM) strategies and organizes them into three sets of recommendations. The Board of Directors (Board), at its April 28, 2021 meeting, approved moving forward with the first set of recommendations, including the following six strategies (*italics added to highlight the strategy that is the subject of this report*):

- Bike facilities
- New and improved bike access
- Subsidized ride hail
- Free or low-cost shuttle service
- *Carpool restricted lot*
- Dynamic or variable signage

The District has been actively implementing priority one strategies since Board authorization in April 2021. To date, new bike facilities and a dynamic sign have been installed, a one-year carpool restricted pilot program was initiated in September 2022, the City of Los Altos has made bike infrastructure modifications along St. Joseph Avenue, and a funding agreement with the City of Cupertino to improve bike access along Cristo Rey Drive has been executed with implementation anticipated later this year/early next year. Additionally, we are in the process of completing the evaluation of the shuttle program and ride hail program.

## DISCUSSION

### Carpool Pilot Program Implementation

#### *Initial Program Design*

The goal of a carpool restricted lot is to incentivize visitors to shift from single-occupancy vehicles to high-occupancy vehicles. The 2021 Study outlines key considerations for the carpool restricted lot strategy, including:

- An attendant would be necessary for compliance.
- The carpool lot should be sized for about a quarter of the overall parking to accommodate all carpool vehicles at any given time.
- Consider a pilot program for ease of implementation
- Consider a peak-time or weekend-only carpool lot to minimize staffing/operation cost

Using these guidelines and considering the fact that the District has never implemented such a program, staff determined that a pilot carpool program on weekends and holidays was the most appropriate next step to test this strategy. The pilot program would allow the District to evaluate the effectiveness of this strategy and collect data for potential long-term implementation.

To initiate the pilot program, staff first reviewed the parking setting at the Preserve main entrance. The main entrance parking area is comprised of six parking lots (Lots 1 through 6), with a total of 328 parking spaces, including 309 standard spaces, 14 ADA spaces, 5 motorcycle spaces and an equestrian trailer parking and staging area (Attachment 1). The breakdown of parking spaces for each lot is shown below:

Parking Lot	Vehicle Parking Spaces	ADA Parking Spaces	Other Parking Spaces
1	80	4	Equestrian Area
2	48	1	None
3	22	2	None
4	46	2	None
5	30	0	None
6	83	5	5 (Motorcycle)
<b>Total</b>	<b>309</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>5</b>

Lots 2 to 6 are located adjacent to and along the Rancho San Antonio Service Road, a 25-foot-wide two-lane road. Lot 1 feeds to and from the Rancho San Antonio Service Road just beyond the main parking area entrance point. After careful review of the parking area setting and consultation with patrol staff, while recognizing it may not be the most ideal location given its long distance to the main trailhead, Lot 1 was selected as the carpool restricted lot for the pilot program based on the following reasons:

- Single entrance/exit point for ease of operation
- Only lot that could be monitored without major physical modifications to the parking area
- Contains 80 parking spaces, which is about 25% of total parking spaces available

In addition to reviewing the parking setting, staff also reviewed and evaluated data collected from a year-long traffic counting project conducted in 2017. Based on the 2017 data, nearly 40% of vehicles visiting on weekends already have two visitors. As the goal of the pilot program is to incentivize visitors to shift to high-occupancy vehicles and based on the total number of carpool space available, it was determined that the carpool limit should be set at three or more occupancies for the program to be effective.

#### *Dynamic Sign*

Understanding that implementing such a program is a significant change to many visitors, staff timed the implementation of the pilot program after the installation of a dynamic sign to lessen the potential impacts and provide a better visitor experience. The dynamic sign system provides real-time parking availability for both the carpool lot and the non-carpool lots at the main parking area entrance, as well as on District website, allowing visitors the opportunity to check parking conditions before they leave home. The dynamic sign is a welcomed amenity, and the parking availability webpage is one of the most visited District webpages.

#### *Public Education and Notification*

Ahead of implementation of the carpool pilot program, the District launched a robust public education and notification process to get the message out to the community about this upcoming pilot program. The process included pop-up tabling events at the Preserve, articles in District newsletters (print & digital), email notifications, social media announcements, press release, and temporary signs with “carpool pilot coming soon” messages throughout the parking areas with QR codes and web links for more information. A dedicated webpage was developed and has been periodically updated throughout the carpool implementation period.

#### *Program Implementation Logistics*

The Visitor Service Department (VS) is responsible for the day-to-day implementation of the carpool pilot program. Additional seasonal staff have been hired to operate the carpool program. For Fiscal Year 2022-23 (FY23), \$56,491 was budgeted, and for FY24, \$66,733 is budgeted towards temporary staff for the implementation of the program. Staff are staged at the entrance to manage carpool lot entry, count the number of vehicles and occupants in each vehicle, and observe which lots those who qualify for the carpool lot chose to utilize. Seasonal staff also monitor the dynamic signage counts on the website to verify the amount of open parking spaces.

No permanent facilities/structures were introduced for the pilot program. VS staff set up the temporary monitoring station at the entrance in the morning and remove it at the end of the shift. These temporary structures did not hold up nor provide adequate shelter during inclement weather.

### *Public Feedback*

To date, the District has received 29 written comments related to the carpool pilot program. More than 80% of the comments were received during the first 6 weeks of implementation. The comments can be grouped into the following categories:

- General concerns about restricted parking enforcement (12)
- Location of the carpool lot (5)
- Speedhumps, which were installed to slow down traffic to improve accuracy of traffic sensors for the dynamic sign (12)
- Other (1 each: neighborhood parking & parking counter on website)

In most cases, staff provided responses explaining the purpose of the carpool pilot program. Two of the comments about speedbumps raised potential concerns about bicycle safety. In response, staff reconfigured the speedbumps to allow bicycles to pass through the bumps and improved bike path directional signage to encourage bicyclists to use existing bike paths that run parallel to the service road.

### **What We Learned from the Pilot Program**

#### *Field Observations*

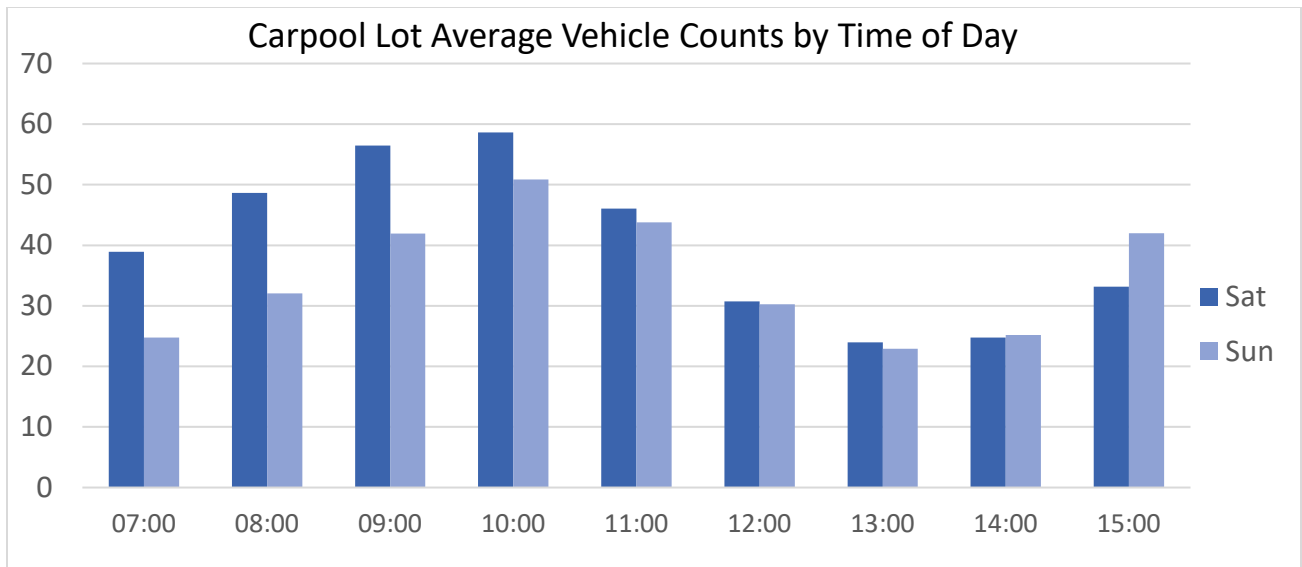
Key field observations are summarized below:

- Lot 1 typically has available parking after the rest of the parking lots are full, meeting the program objective to incentivize visitors to carpool.
- When vehicles with three or more occupants come to the main entrance, many decline the offer to park in the carpool lot if parking spaces closer to the main preserve entrance are still available. Lots 5 or 6 continue to be the most popular parking lots at the main entrance because of their proximity to preferred areas and amenities.
- On many weekends, all parking lots were full prior to operating the carpool lot. Carpool hours would need to begin when entrance gates open.

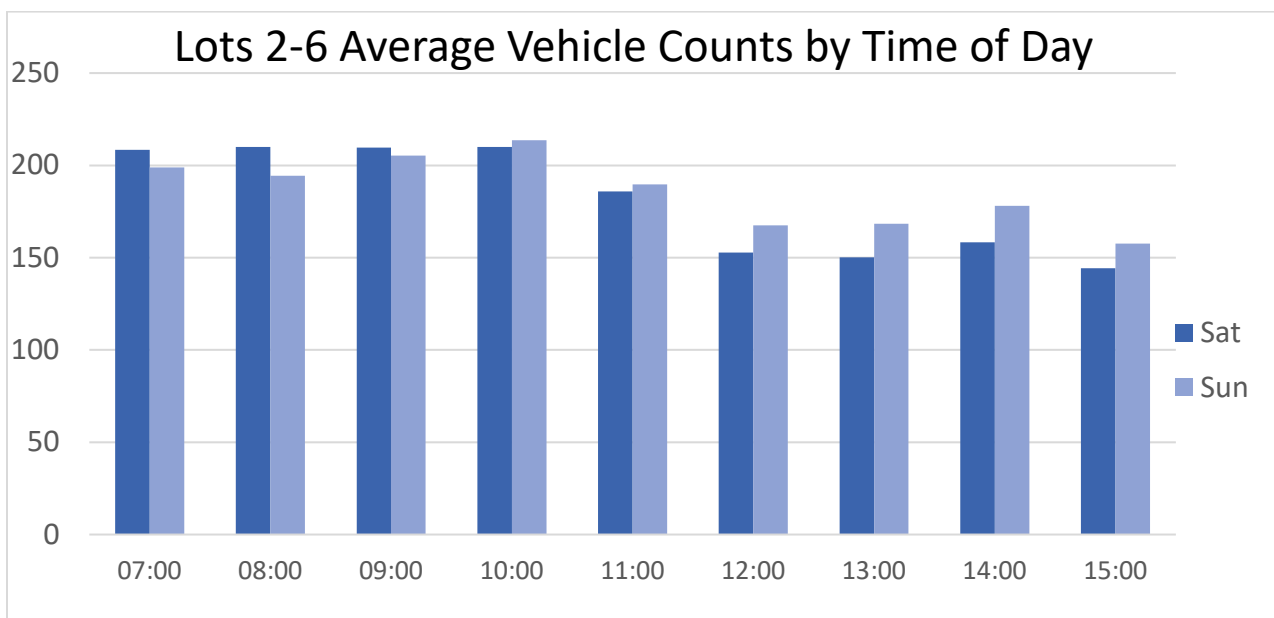
#### *Data Analysis*

The dynamic sign system automatically collects vehicle ingress/egress and parking availability information. Ranger staff collected vehicle occupancy information. These helpful data provided some insights on the parking situation at the Preserve. Below are two key findings from the data.

This graph below shows average vehicle counts for the Carpool lot on Saturdays and Sundays, from September 2022 through September 2023, during the hours when carpool restrictions were enforced (7:00 am to 3:00 pm). It shows clear peaks in visitation in late morning. On average, Lot 1 reaches almost 80% occupancy at peak times on Saturdays and almost 70% occupancy on Sundays. This average includes all days, including those with inclement weather when the Preserve has fewer visitors. Over the 109 days that carpool restrictions were enforced, the Carpool Lot reached capacity on 26 days and exceeded 90% of capacity on 63 days.

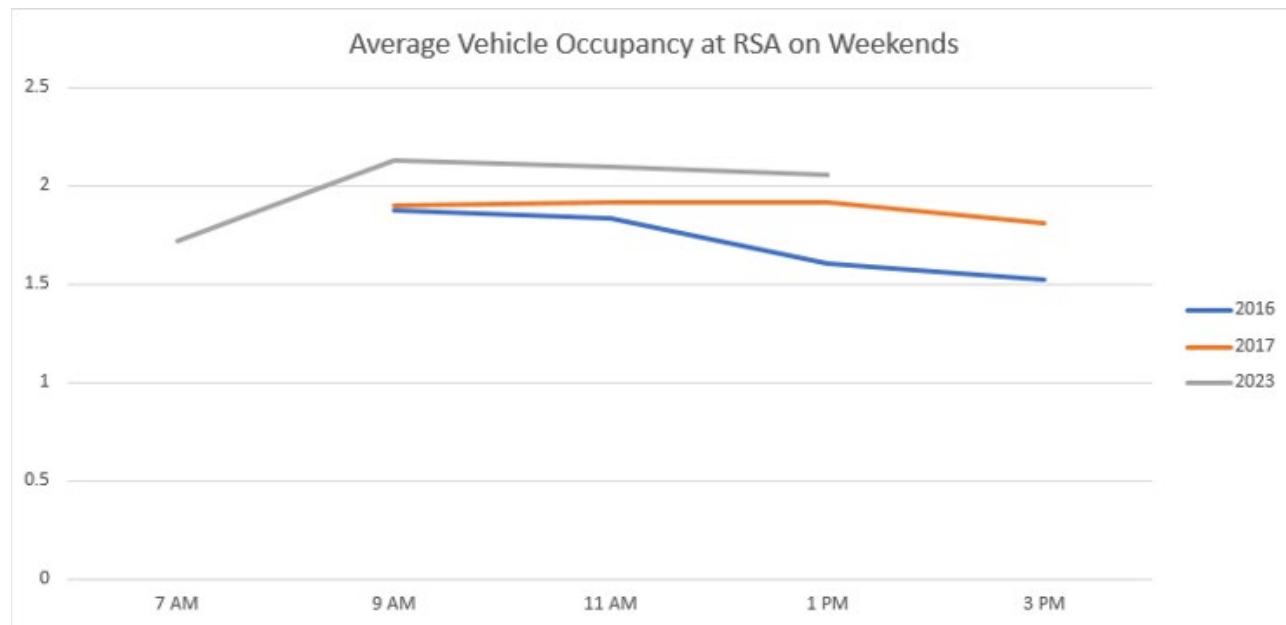


For comparison, the next graph shows the average vehicle counts for Lots 2-6 on Saturdays and Sundays, from September 2022 through September 2023. It shows that lots tend to fill early in the morning and gradually empty starting in the late morning. On average, Lots 2-6 reach almost 90% occupancy at peak times on Saturdays and almost 100% occupancy on Sundays. This average includes all days, including those with inclement weather when the Preserve has fewer visitors. Over the 109 days that carpool restrictions were enforced, Lots 2-6 reached capacity on 74 days and exceeded 90% of capacity on 96 days. The vehicle counts for the carpool lot and other lots confirm the field observations that the carpool lot is being used and it usually has some capacity after the rest of the lots are full, meeting the program objective to incentivize visitors to carpool.



The graph below compares the vehicle occupancy observations gathered by Visitor Services staff in 2023 based on data gathered in a visitation use estimation study performed from October 2016 through December 2017. An observer stationed at the entrance gate recorded the number of vehicles and occupants in each vehicle as they entered the parking area. The study data was collected at various times of day and days of the week, in one-hour time periods over more than

a year. As part of the Carpool Pilot program, Visitor Services started counting vehicles and vehicle occupancy entering Rancho San Antonio in February 2023. Data was collected while the Carpool Lot was monitored, capturing parking and visitation data for typical peak periods on weekends and holidays in two-hour periods. Data was normalized in order to compare the two data sets. Data from the earlier study was aggregated into 2-hour windows for comparison and data for weekdays was removed from the dataset. Vehicle occupancy was subsequently recalculated for each time period.



The graph shows a slight increase in average vehicle occupancy comparing the 2023 data and the 2016 and 2017 data. While it is exciting to see the increase, it should be noted that it might be difficult to draw definitive conclusions from this graph that the increase is a direct result of the carpool lot because many factors influence visitation and vehicle occupancy rates. The graph compares data collected across various times of the year and under various weather conditions, both of which can affect visitation and the average number of occupants in each vehicle. Additionally, visitation to Rancho San Antonio has changed before and after Covid, with many new visitors discovering the Preserve and making regular visits to open spaces a part of their “new normal”.

### *Lessons Learned*

Based on field observations and data analysis, lessons learned from the carpool pilot program can be summarized as follows:

- Although there are differing opinions about the effectiveness of the carpool lot, most visitors appreciate District efforts to explore ways to address parking and congestion issues at Rancho San Antonio.
- The dynamic sign is crucial to the success of the carpool program as it provides real-time parking availability information on-site and online, which is helpful to VS staff and many preserve visitors.
- Daily setup/takedown of the monitoring station is time consuming and the accommodations in the temporary station are not adequate. A permanent station is needed if a long-term permanent carpool program is considered.
- Constantly training seasonal staff is not sustainable. The program needs dedicated staff if a long-term permanent carpool program is considered.

- Need to relocate the carpool lot to be closer to the main trailhead if a long-term permanent program is considered. Such a relocation will require parking modifications/reconfiguration and other new infrastructure.

### Next Steps

The District has reached the end of the one-year pilot carpool program. This year-long program has offered an invaluable opportunity to experiment carpool restrictions, which has never been tried before at District preserves. As summarized above, the District has gained helpful data and learned many lessons that can be applied for permanent implementation at Rancho San Antonio and other preserves. Based on the lessons learned from the pilot program, the General Manager recommends the following:

- Conclude the pilot program as the District has collected sufficient data to evaluate next steps.
- Direct the General Manager to add a new project to the upcoming fiscal year to evaluate long-term carpool program implementation options, which may include, but not be limited to a preferred carpool lot location, number of parking spaces designated for carpools, permanent monitoring station, potential parking circulation modifications and/or parking lot reconfiguration to accommodate a permanent carpool program, and potential parking lot expansion to allow more carpool spaces (or to replace spaces that are assigned for carpools).

Santa Clara County (County) owns Rancho San Antonio County Park, which is located just east of the Preserve and includes the main parking area. The District operates the property under a management agreement with the County. Any proposed modifications to the parking area will need to be reviewed and approved by the County in order to proceed with implementation.

### FISCAL IMPACT

The Rancho San Antonio Multimodal Access – Implementation project falls under two projects: MAA11-003 (Measure AA (MAA) funded) and VP11-001 (non-MAA Funded). MAA11-003 supports capital expenditures and improvements, while VP11-001 supports operating activities and expenditures (which has included the carpool pilot program). If the Board directs the General Manager to proceed with evaluating options for a permanent carpool program at Rancho San Antonio Open Space Preserve, costs would be refined and presented at a future date for Board consideration.

### PRIOR BOARD AND COMMITTEE REVIEW

**April 28, 2021:** The Board reviewed and approved the Rancho San Antonio Multimodal Access Strategies Report and directed the General Manager to begin implementing the first set of prioritized transportation demand management strategies and recommendations, including the exploration of a free or low-cost shuttle program and subsidized ride hail.

- [Board report](#)
- [Minutes](#)

**February 23, 2022:** The Board received a memo for the Rancho San Antonio Multimodal Access Implementation Update

- [Memo](#)

**July 11, 2023 and July 18, 2023:** The Planning and Natural Resources Committee received a presentation on the proposed shuttle and ride hail service design concepts and performance measures and contingent TDM measures.

- [PNR Report](#)
- [July 11, 2023 Minutes](#) & [July 18, 2023 Minutes](#)

**August 9, 2023:** The Board received a memo on estimated visitation for 2022.

- [Memo](#)

**September 12, 2023:** The Board received a presentation on the proposed shuttle and ride hail service design concepts and performance measures and contingent TDM measures.

- [Board Report](#)
- [Minutes](#)

## **PUBLIC NOTICE**

Public notice was provided as required by the Brown Act. Additional notice was provided to County Parks, the Cities of Cupertino, Mountain View, Los Altos and Los Altos Hills, Santa Clara Valley Water District, Santa Clara Valley Transportation Authority, and Rancho San Antonio Open Space Preserve interested parties.

## **CEQA COMPLIANCE**

The conclusion of the one-year carpool pilot program is not considered a project under CEQA. Feedback received from Board at this meeting will inform future actions that may be subject to CEQA, and subsequent environmental review would be conducted at that time.

## **NEXT STEPS**

Pending Board direction, the General Manager will direct staff to evaluate long-term carpool program implementation options in FY25.

Attachment(s)

1. Parking Lot Map

Responsible Department Head:

Ana Ruiz, General Manager

Prepared by:

Susanna Chan, Assistant General Manager, General Manager's Office

Brad Pennington, Foothills Area Superintendent, Visitor Services Department

Contact person:

Susanna Chan, Assistant General Manager

Graphics prepared by:

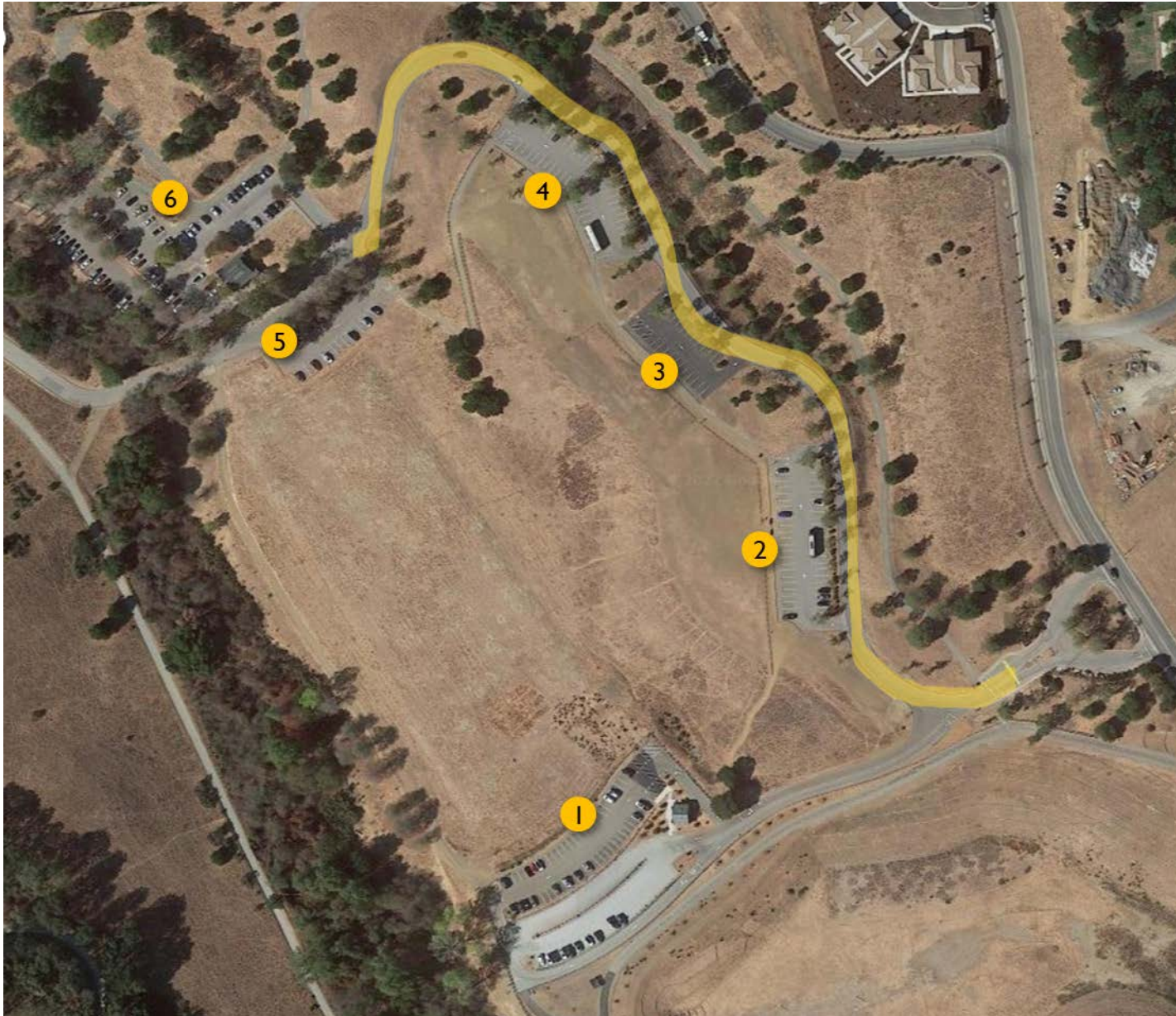
Marion Shaw, Management Analyst II





# CARPOOL PILOT PROGRAM AT RANCHO SAN ANTONIO OPEN SPACE PRESERVE

Service Road through parking areas is highlighted



## Lots

- (1) Equestrian Lot/ Hammond Snyder Trailhead, reserved for carpools on weekends & holidays
- (2) North overflow/remote-controlled airfield lot
- (3) Central overflow/remote-controlled airfield lot
- (4) South overflow/remote-controlled airfield lot
- (5) Main Lot overflow
- (6) Main Lot