

Mayor and San Jose Councilmembers
200 East Santa Clara
San Jose, CA, 95113
(sent via email 3/24/13)

re: historic trestle on the Three Creeks Trail

Dear Mayor Reed and San Jose Councilmembers,

Writing as an individual who has spent decades (literally!) working in support of the Los Gatos Creek Trail, Willow Glen, and historic preservation, along with a decade on the Three Creeks Trail, I endorse and applaud your efforts to apply for grants to provide a crossing of the Three Creeks Trail over the Los Gatos Creek (Council Agenda 3/26/13, item 5.1). However, I do not endorse Staff's recommendation that the existing historic train trestle be demolished and replaced with a new steel bridge.

The City commissioned and has received from CH2M-Hill a thorough engineering analysis of the existing trestle. The report finds that the trestle is structurally strong but does need some maintenance and repairs, and then it documents in detail which few piers need to be replaced and which beams need to be removed or patched. It goes on to recommend the "pre-cast concrete deck" option for the trail surface, saying that it would help protect the timbers and give a 35 - 50 year expected lifetime. The report says that a new steel bridge would be more expensive but should last somewhat longer. However, the reported 'big savings' is that the wood trestle would have to be inspected once every other year by two inspectors on a ladder whereas it would only take one inspector to look at the steel bridge. Regarding the 'difficult' creek clean-ups: we in the community have done this in the past using just garbage bags and a long rope. Smoke detectors or other remote sensors can protect against future fire damage. The engineering report gave no consideration to aesthetics or historic value.

A steel bridge could be beautiful, soaring across the riparian habitat just like the one upstream by Blackford Elementary. However, the train trestle is beautiful in its own way and in addition is so invocative of the long-gone "old wild west": the trestle is roughly 90 years old and has been there in Willow Glen since before it became a town. There are very few similar trestles in the area, and it is very unlikely that the City would ever build one just for a bike path.

The Staff report states that "[t]he historical character of the trestle structure is difficult to appreciate when on the structure". It doesn't mention that, going north, the planned trail is to make a sharp right turn and follow the bank, affording a great view of the bridge. And, just south of the bridge, the right-of-way is quite wide with space for the trail to weave to the side to afford a view and/or for a trail-side viewing area -- perhaps with a bench or picnic table.

The Staff report also states that the City was awarded "\$450,000 in grant funding from the Santa Clara Valley Water District (District) for improving the trestle that spans Los Gatos Creek": could the City even use this funding to instead demolish the trestle and replace it with a steel bridge?

Another question: has there been outreach to the historic preservation community, and to the community as a whole? For years, we have been featuring the trestle as the icon of the entire Three Creeks Trail.

The train trestle is truly a "hidden gem", seen by few in person: one can be within a block of it and not even know that there's this impressive 25-foot high trestle spanning a 210-foot

wide chasm. It, like the steel bridge alternative, would provide trail continuity and afford a wonderful view of the healthy streamside habitat; but, unlike the steel alternative, the trestle would also invoke the history of the region when trains served all the canneries in the Valley of the Heart's Delight.

I support San Jose in seeking grants to improve the Three Creeks Trail, but I oppose Staff's recommendation to demolish the historic train trestle over the Los Gatos Creek.

Dr. Lawrence Ames

member, Los Gatos Creek Streamside Park Committee (1984-2000)

member, San Jose's Willow Glen Spur Trail Task Force (2009)

Larry@L-Ames.com; March 24, 2013

cc:

San Jose – Yves Zsutty, Julie Edmonds-Mares, Jennifer A. Maguire, Joe Horwedel, Matt Cano

Historic Preservation – Jim Zetterquist, Joan Bohnett, Jean Dresden, Marvin Bamburg

Santa Clara Valley Water District – Barbara Keegan, Teresa Alvarado

Trails – Michael LaRocca, Helen Chapman, Tai McMahan, Bill Rankin

Neighbors and Media – D6NLG, Barbara Marshman, Carol Rosen, Janice Rombeck