Joint Cities Coordinated Stevens Creek Trail Feasibility Study

JOINT CITIES WORKING TEAM RECOMMENDATION TO THE COUNCILS

Project Background

The vision for a Stevens Creek Trail was first identified by the Santa Clara County Planning Department in 1961. The County's plan for a "Stevens Creek Park Chain" created a framework for preserving land along Stevens Creek for an interconnected system of parks and trails. Today, the Stevens Creek Trail extends approximately five miles from San Francisco Bay to the Dale/Heatherstone bike-pedestrian overcrossing of State Route 85 in Mountain View. An additional one mile trail segment is in place from Stevens Creek Boulevard to McClellan Road through Blackberry Farm Park and McClellan Ranch Preserve in Cupertino. A gap exists between these trail segments of approximately three miles through the cities of Cupertino, Los Altos, Mountain View and Sunnyvale.

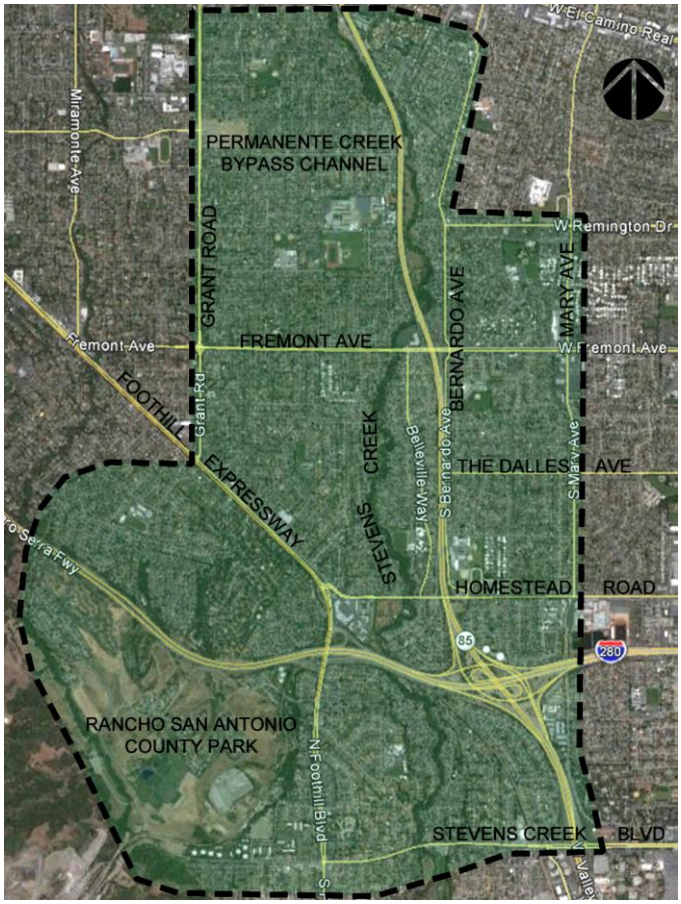


Figure 1 - Study Area

The purpose of this feasibility study was to evaluate potential routes to bridge the gap in trail segments that currently exist. The scope of the feasibility study also included an evaluation of routes to connect Stevens Creek Trail to Rancho San Antonio County Park which features an extended trail network into the Santa Cruz Mountains. Study area boundaries, as shown in Figure 1, were established from Heatherstone Way in the north, Mary Avenue to the east, Grant Road to the west, and Stevens Creek Boulevard to the south. The study area is approximately 3.25 miles north to south and 1.50 miles east to west.

A coordinated trail planning effort between the four cities was started in 2009 with the appointment of a Stevens Creek Trail Coordination Committee consisting of one elected official and one staff member from each of the four jurisdictions. This group worked to develop the scope of the current feasibility study, prepare the funding plan, and selected a consultant to prepare the feasibility study. In 2011, the four cities entered a funding agreement and created the Joint Cities Working Team (JCWT) to oversee preparation of the feasibility study. In the fall of 2012, a Citizens Working Group (CWG) was also created to assist with public outreach and act in an advisory role to the JCWT.

Feasibility Study Outreach Process

Between November of 2012 and May of 2014, a series of public meetings of the JCWT and CWG were held to review current conditions and discuss possible trail alignments. Five community meetings were held to gather input on potential trail alignments. A full summary of these meetings can be found in Appendix B of the Joint Cities Coordinated Stevens Creek Trail Feasibility Study (http://www.stevenscreektrail.insunnyvale.com). After this series of meetings a draft feasibility study report was prepared and then published for public comment in March 2015.

It is important to note that the final feasibility study report does not include recommendations for which trail alignments are considered to be the best. The feasibility study was developed to assess the technical feasibility of a wide array of possible alignments and to document the characteristics of routes that are considered feasible. Filling the gap in the Stevens Creek Trail presents many challenges including the possibility of constructing bridges or tunnels to traverse the Creek itself and to cross major roadways such as Interstate 280, State Route 85, Fremont Avenue, and Homestead Road. The feasibility study developed potential solutions to these challenges with conceptual level engineering analysis and ruled out some potential routes as infeasible. This analysis focused on physical constraints including elevation changes, existing infrastructure such as the location of bridges and sound walls, and the availability of existing public land. Although the feasibility study provides a solid basis from which the JCWT formulated a set of recommendations, these recommendations may require further planning, studies, or environmental review to determine further feasibility.

Once the draft feasibility study was published in March 2015, an additional seven public meetings of the CWG and JCWT were held before this final recommendation from the JCWT was completed on August 21, 2015. During this time, comments on the draft feasibility study report were accepted via e-mail and mailings. Ultimately, 945 written comments were received and are include as Appendix C of the Final Joint Cities Coordinated Stevens Creek Trail Feasibility Study report. All comments were provided to members of the CWG and the JCWT before recommendations were made. Three additional public outreach meetings were held by the JCWT in May and June of 2015 to obtain public input on the project. These meetings were well attended with approximately 100-200 residents attending each of the three meetings. A brief summary of the outreach meetings is included as Attachment A (High-Level Themes – SCT Public Input Meetings).

Recommendation Development

The recommendations outlined in this summary represent the majority support of the JCWT and includes alignment preferences as well as policy recommendations. During their discussions, the policymakers took into consideration the draft feasibility study, public comments, the CWG recommendations (Attachment B), and individual insight to conclude on regional recommendations for the Stevens Creek Trail. The JCWT made its recommendations as a regional body and considered the alignments through all of the cities. These recommendations were discussed during a series of four meetings on July 20th, July 24th, August 5th, and August 21st. Meeting minutes for these four meetings can be found here.

(http://sunnyvale.ca.gov/Departments/PublicWorks/StevensCreekTrailJointCitiesFeasibilityStudy/StevensCreekTrailMeetingNotes.aspx).

Alignment Recommendations

Study Segment 1 – Dale Avenue/Heatherstone Way to Fremont Avenue

The preferred Stevens Creek Trail (SCT) route in this segment is an off-street trail through existing open space areas along Stevens Creek as shown in Figure 2.

Steps to preserve and enhance the riparian habitat along the Creek in this segment should be included as part of master planning for the trail project. Special attention should be paid to narrow areas where new bridges or structures are needed to traverse the Creek.

Connections to the trail in this study segment should include:

- A connection to West Remington Drive in Sunnyvale via a new bicycle/pedestrian bridge over Stevens Creek. This connection is prioritized by the JCWT to provide neighborhood access.
- A connection to Mountain View High School via new bicycle/pedestrian bridge over Highway 85 near Bryant Ave. in Mountain View.
- Connections to Fremont Avenue east and west of Highway 85 if feasible.

Figure 2 – Study Segment 1 Recommended off-street pedestrian/bike trail

Figure 3 – Potential Configuration on Bernardo Avenue, between Astoria Drive and The Dalles Avenues

Study Segment 2 – Fremont Avenue to Homestead Road

The preferred alignment is an off-street bike/pedestrian pathway on Bernardo Avenue including a bike/pedestrian overpass of Fremont Avenue at Bernardo. This alignment requires either the removal of on-street parking or the conversion of Bernardo to a one-way street. A detailed parking and traffic study should be conducted prior to further trail master planning work in this segment so the City of Sunnyvale can determine if this alignment is feasible. Every effort should be made to minimize impacts to nearby residents by preserving parking where feasible. In addition to the off-street improvements

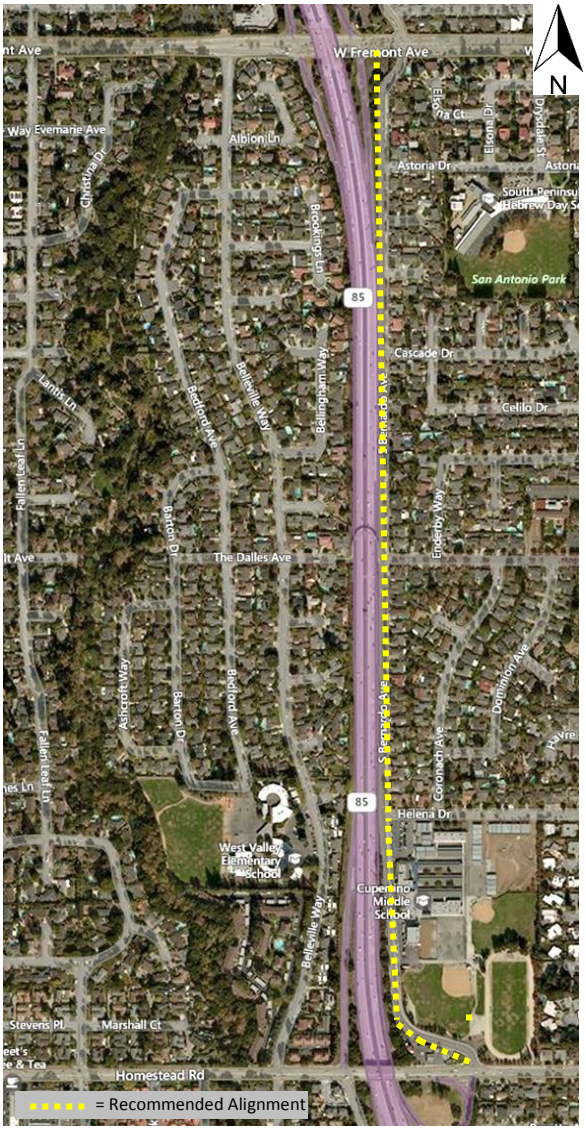


Figure 4- Study Segment 2 Recommended off-street pedestrian/bike trail

on Bernardo, modest on-street bike/pedestrian improvements should be considered on Belleville Way and Fallen Leaf Lane consistent with each city's adopted bike/pedestrian master plans. Special attention should be paid to making safety enhancements for bikes and pedestrians near Cupertino Middle School and managing traffic during school pick up and drop off times. A potential configuration of Bernardo Avenue, between Astoria Drive and The Dalles Avenue is shown in Figure 3 and Figure 4 outlines the location of the JCWT recommendation in this segment.

If an off-street bike/pedestrian pathway on Bernardo Avenue is not considered feasible by the City of Sunnyvale, no routes should be designated as the Stevens Creek Trail in this segment. In this case, other modest bike and pedestrian safety improvements should be evaluated on Bernardo Avenue as well as other routes in the area that could connect to the Stevens Creek Trail, such as Belleville Way, Fallen Leaf Lane, Bernardo Avenue, and Bedford Avenue.

The extent of these modest improvements and their implementation should be determined by each city for the streets within its jurisdiction.

<u>Study Segment 3 – Homestead Road to Stevens Creek Boulevard</u>

In this study segment no route for an off-street facility was found to be feasible. Although several feasible alternatives were identified in the feasibility study, the JCWT did not select one of these routes as a preferred alternative. Feasible routes identified in the study had major drawbacks which included: 1) the route required on-street bike lanes on heavily traveled and high-speed streets such as Stevens Creek Boulevard, Foothill Boulevard, or Mary Avenue which

Figure 5 – Existing Homestead Road Bike/Pedestrian Path in Los Altos

was considered incompatible with the goal of a system that was suitable for bike riders of all skill levels; or 2) the route required a new crossing of Interstate 280 in an area that could be changed by the planned reconfiguration of the I-280/SR 85 interchange.

Figure 6 - Study Segment 3 Area

While the JCWT did not specify for an alignment in segment 3, they recognize there is a need for a long term vision for the trail. The JCWT agreed that should circumstances change regarding the availability of land in the area, further studies should be undertaken to identify a feasible route. For example, if the Union Pacific Railroad right-of-way became available in the future, new off-street trail routes may be possible and should be explored and pursued as a "rails-to-trails" concept. In addition, if the I-280/State Route 85 Interchange were rebuilt, new routes may become available through this area. Since the rebuilding of this interchange is included in current long-range transportation plans, the JCWT recommends that cities reach out proactively to Caltrans and VTA to express that bike and pedestrian accesses through the interchange is a community priority and discourage any modifications that may limit future improvements. Furthermore, the JCWT supports improvements on Foothill Expressway/Boulevard. While this segment would not be part of the Stevens Creek Trail, bicycle and pedestrian improvements should be considered if there are Caltrans improvements to the I-280/Foothill interchange or as part of other city or county projects in the vicinity.

Figure 7 – Eastbound Homestead Road Approaching Bernardo Avenue/NB SR 85

Within this segment improvements to Homestead Road were evaluated. The Homestead Road crossing of State Route 85 is particularly challenging for bicycles. The JCWT supported either widening the existing bridge or building a separate parallel bicycle/pedestrian bridge to provide a connection to the existing off-street bike/pedestrian pathway along the north side Homestead Road in Los Altos. This improvement would have independent utility as a safety improvement for better bike access to Cupertino Middle School and Homestead High School for students in Cupertino, Los Altos and Sunnyvale.

Study Segment 4 – Trail Connections to Ranch San Antonio County Park via Stevens Creek Boulevard

The preferred route from Blackberry Farm to Rancho San Antonio County Park is using the existing Stevens Creek Boulevard on-street bike lanes and then continuing west via an off-street trail along the north side of Stevens Creek Boulevard starting near Stonebridge. This route would include a new bike/pedestrian bridge over the Union Pacific Railroad tracks and connect to the Hammond-Snyder Loop Trail in Rancho San Antonio County Park. This route is considered an important recreational amenity for the community but is not considered part of the Stevens Creek Trail.

A staging area is recommended with parking, restrooms, and signage on County Roads and UPRR land south of the new railroad crossing bridge.

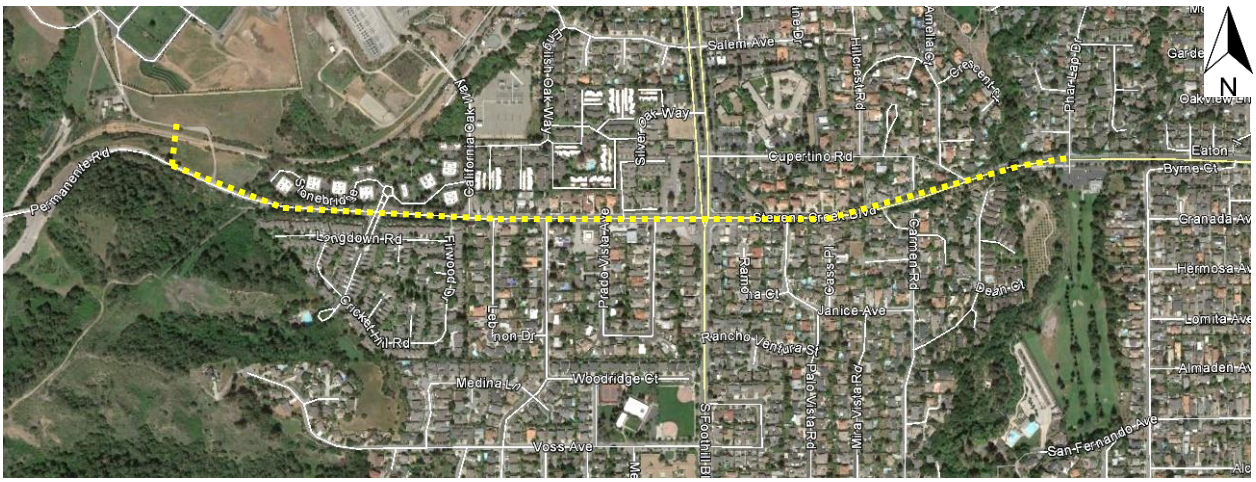


Figure 8 - Study Segment 4 Area

Other Recommendations

- Stevens Creek is important habitat for Steelhead which is a Federally-listed threatened species. Any construction near the Creek will require an extensive environmental review process by State and Federal wildlife agencies. Any future trail projects should try to improve habitat values in and around the Creek channel.
- Existing public lands near Stevens Creek should be maintained as public land to preserve habitat and future trail opportunities.
- Extension of the Stevens Creek Trail is an important regional goal that can benefit each jurisdiction. The four cities should support each other with future efforts to continue with master planning and implementation of trail segments within each jurisdiction through continued collaboration and support for funding opportunities.

List of Attachments

Attachment A: High-Level Themes – SCT Public Input Meetings

Attachment B: Citizens Working Group Recommendations to the Joint Cities Working Team on the Stevens Creek Trail Feasibility Study

ATTACHMENT A

High-Level Themes – SCT Public Input Meetings

High-Level Themes
SCT Public Input Meetings

The following themes from each of the three SCT Public Input meetings were compiled by Shawn Spano, meeting facilitator, and shared with the participants at the end of each meeting.

May 21, 2015 Meeting in Sunnyvale

- Use existing infrastructure (to minimize costs and impacts)
- Connect trail using Mary Ave and existing overpass bridge
- Utilize multiple paths through city streets and neighborhoods (don't have one designated trail/path/route)
- Use alignments that ensure safety for residents and trail users (away from the middle school, have access for emergency vehicles, safe for bicyclist, etc.)
- Use alignments that minimize vehicle spill over onto neighborhood streets
- Use alignments that minimize costs (no new overpass bridge)
- Use alignments that don't result in lose of neighborhood parking spaces
- Use alignments that minimize disruptions to neighborhoods (creating one-way streets, removal of existing trees, etc.)
- No alignment or connection preferences – do not pursue the trail project extension

June 1, 2015 Meeting in Cupertino

- Keep trail as close to the creek alignment and open spaces as much as possible, if possible, while minimizing environmental impacts
- Corollary is to keep trail/path/route off city and residential streets as much as possible
- Use alignments that ensure safety for residents and trail users (cars pulling out of driveways on residential streets)
- Use alignments that minimize impacts to the neighborhoods (lose of parking, traffic, congestion, etc.)
- Use and upgrade existing infrastructure (use existing overpass bridge, build protected bike lanes)
- Use alignments that minimize costs (no new overpass bridge)
- Preference is to complete the trail project extension, and the benefits that will result from this (health, recreations, and commuting), as long as negative impacts (safety, cost, etc.) can be maintained

June 8, 2015 Meeting in Mountain View

- Keep trail/path/route off city and residential streets as much as possible, including busy streets like Stevens Creek Ave. The main reason given was safety for residents and trail users (cars pulling out of driveways on residential streets)

- Keep trail as close to the creek alignment and open spaces as much as possible, if possible
- Do not have a single designated route/path through residential areas. Have numerous routes available and let bicyclist and pedestrians choose what they want to use (will lessen the impact to a single neighborhood)
- Use and upgrade existing infrastructure (use existing overpass bridge, build protected bike lanes)
- Trail preference mentioned most often was creek corridor/Bernardo Ave. Second most was Heatherstone to Mary Ave and existing overpass bridge
- Preference is to complete the trail project extension, as long as negative impacts (safety.) can be maintained

ATTACHMENT B

Citizens Working Group Recommendations to the Joint Cities Working Team on the Stevens Creek Trail Feasibility Study

Citizens Working Group Recommendations to the Joint Cities Working Team on the Stevens Creek Trail Feasibility Study

The Citizens Working Group, comprised of three citizens from each city, was selected by the Joint Cities Working Team (JCWT)to assist agency staff, the consultant team and policy representatives to prepare a feasibility study for connecting the completed segments of the Stevens Creek Trail in Mountain View and Cupertino. The Citizens Working Group reviewed technical feasibility findings including ownership and land availability information, habitat and wildlife data, geologic and hydrological materials, assessments of on-street conditions, institutional opportunities and constraints, and cost estimates over the course of two years. The Citizens Working Group members were provided a summary of themes from community input meetings held in May and June 2015 and were provided copies of all written comments submitted by the public on the draft feasibility study report. Their volunteer efforts have culminated in these recommendations discussed at a meeting of the group on June 17, 2015. These recommendations set a long-range vision for the development of the trail. A map is also attached that shows the preferred trail alignment and key connecting routes.

Citizens Working Group Recommendations

1. Alignment Themes

- Extend the Stevens Creek Trail as a pedestrian/bike path as far south as possible to keep the trail separated from automobile traffic to the greatest extent possible in order to create a family-friendly and recreational route that enhances the bicycle and pedestrian networks of the four cities.
- Enhance the habitat along the creek corridor with the development of the trail.
- For existing bike routes that are in the area but not part of the recommended alignment modest safety improvements (such as adding sharrows, other street markings, and/or additional signage) should be considered.

2. Recommendation Details by Segment

a. Dale/Heatherstone Pedestrian Overcrossing to Fremont Avenue

- The preferred alignment and top priority is to extend the Stevens Creek Trail through the 22 acres of open space along State Route 85 from Dale/Heatherstone to Fremont Avenue. The trail should incorporate habitat enhancements and the 22 acres along the creek corridor should be managed as passive open space.
- Develop the project in phases, as needed, to construct as soon as possible. Suggested phases include Dale/Heatherstone to Remington and Remington to Fremont Avenue.
- Include a neighborhood access point at Remington Avenue.
- Continue to explore the potential for an overcrossing over Highway 85 to provide a connection to Mountain View High School, which would provide

an east-west connection between Mountain View and Sunnyvale via Remington Drive. This is the lowest priority feature in this segment.

- The preferred crossing of Fremont Avenue is a pedestrian/bike overcrossing to Bernardo Avenue to continue the separated pedestrian/bike path.
- A second connection to Fremont Avenue is also recommended via a trail underpass beneath State Route 85 connecting to Fremont Avenue west of the Highway 85 interchange adjacent to the southbound off-ramp. A preferred alternative to make this connection is to pursue a trail easement along the creek through the parking lot located at 1195 W. Fremont Avenue (current Stanford medical office).
- When the Fremont Avenue bridge over Stevens Creek is replaced in the future, consider a trail underpass to facilitate pedestrian and bicycle crossings of Fremont Avenue and provide an access point to the trail.

b. Fremont Avenue to Homestead Road

- If a pedestrian overcrossing at Fremont Avenue is considered feasible, the preferred alignment to extend the Stevens Creek Trail is a separated off-street pedestrian/bike path along the soundwall on Bernardo Avenue. This pedestrian/bike path would continue the experience of the trail by providing a route free from automobile traffic.
- The feasibility study indicates that a road reconfiguration of Bernardo is necessary to support the off-street pedestrian/bike path. Conduct traffic and parking studies to determine the feasibility of either one-way traffic or two-way traffic with loss of parking.
- If a separated pedestrian/bike path were not feasible on Bernardo, the second choice would be to modestly enhance Bernardo, Belleville and Fallen Leaf streets with bicycle safety improvements and wayfinding signage to the trail. None of these on-street routes would be designated as the Stevens Creek Trail. Even if the off-street route on Bernardo is considered feasible, evaluate bicycle safety improvements that could be made with modest improvements to Belleville and Fallen Leaf.
- Connect the pedestrian/bike path on Bernardo to the pedestrian/bike path on the north side of Homestead Road in Los Altos. The Homestead Road path currently extends from Stevens Creek west to El Sereno Avenue near the Grant Road/Foothill Expressway intersection. Continue to explore either a) widening the existing Homestead Road Bridge over State Route 85 or b) placing a new pedestrian/bike bridge parallel and just to the north of the Homestead Road bridge and making path improvements in Sunnyvale west from State Route 85 interchange to Stevens Creek to provide for a continuous off-street path. Extension of the Homestead Road path could proceed as a

stand-alone project intended to improve walking and bicycling access to Cupertino Middle School and Homestead High School.

- Bicycle safety improvements to existing on-street bike lanes on Mary Avenue and Fremont Avenue.

c. Homestead Road to Stevens Creek Boulevard

- A new grade-separated crossing of Interstate 280 is recommended to provide access to the Stevens Creek Trail on a direct route along low-volume, low-speed streets. The potential grade-separated crossing alternatives in order of preference include:
  i. The preferred crossing is a trail underpass beneath Interstate 280 using one of the existing tunnels that convey the Stevens Creek flows to San Francisco Bay. This option is potentially technically feasible but was previously not supported by Caltrans. The use of one of the tunnels should continue to be pursued as a long-term solution to extending the trail south. The tunnel route would connect Barranca Drive to Madera Drive. The trail would use Madera Drive to Phar Lap Drive to access Stevens Creek Blvd., where it would connect to the existing trail in Cupertino.
  ii. An alternate choice is a pedestrian overcrossing that spans both Interstate 280 and the UPRR tracks connecting Peninsular Avenue to Madera Drive.
  iii. Another option to consider if the previous two alternatives for crossing I-280 were considered infeasible is a pedestrian overcrossing that spans only Interstate 280 connecting Caroline Drive to Somerset Square Park located off Stokes Avenue.
- Safety improvements to Mary Avenue from the Don Burnett Bicycle-Pedestrian Bridge to Stevens Creek Boulevard and the Stevens Creek Boulevard crossing of State Route 85. These improvements are important, but should not be considered part of the Stevens Creek Trail. The State Route 85/Stevens Creek Blvd. interchange is not appropriate for the wide range of cycling abilities that currently use the Stevens Creek Trail in Mountain View and Cupertino.
- Pedestrian and bicycle improvements along Foothill Expressway/Foothill Blvd. between Vineyard Drive and Cristo Rey Drive. These improvements are important, but should not be considered part of the Stevens Creek Trail. The expressway environment is not appropriate for the wide range of cycling abilities that currently use the Stevens Creek Trail in Mountain View and Cupertino.

d. Trail Connection to Rancho San Antonio County Park and Open Space Preserve

- A pedestrian/bike path that extends along the north side of Stevens Creek Boulevard west from Stonebridge to undeveloped open space land behind the Gate of Heaven Cemetery is recommended to provide access to Rancho San Antonio County Park. This alignment would include a pedestrian/bike bridge over the UPRR tracks to provide a connection to the Hammond-Snyder Loop Trail in Rancho San Antonio County Park. This route is viewed as an important recreational amenity for the community and could be developed as a stand-alone project.
- A trail staging area with parking, restrooms and signage is recommended. The additional parking area would provide a more convenient access into Rancho San Antonio County Park and would also help reduce parking demand at the busy Rancho San Antonio parking lots.

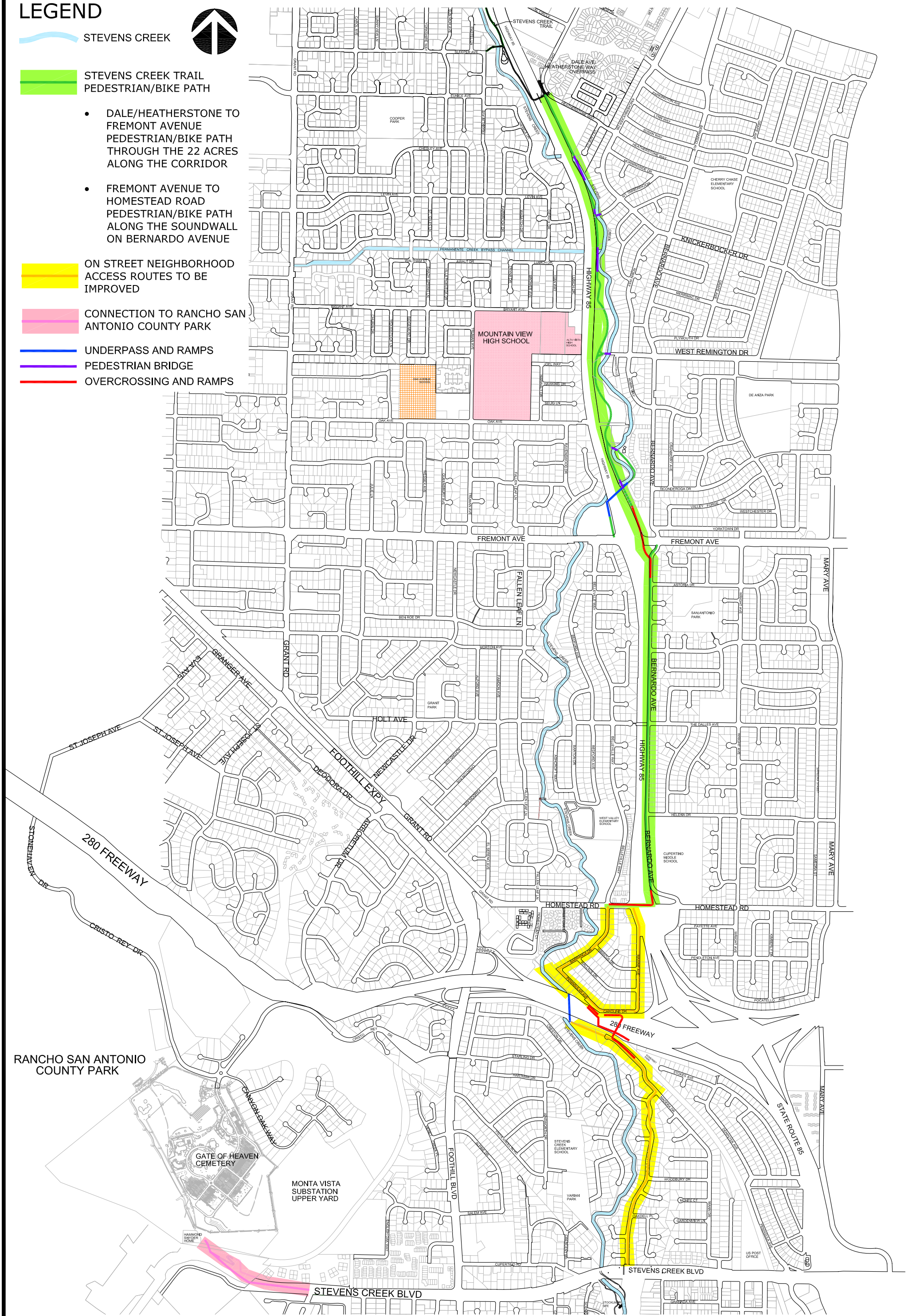
3. Additional Recommendations

- Encourage the Joint Cities Working Team to continue to collaborate throughout the trail planning and development process.
- Continue to seek long-term opportunities to make the creek corridor publically accessible.
- Retain all publicly owned land along the creek corridor.
- Connect the Stevens Creek Trail to a trail using the UPRR corridor when and if this land becomes available.

The feasibility study is the first step in a trail planning process. The feasible alignments identified in the Stevens Creek Trail Feasibility Study report provide a range of choices for decision makers to consider for extending and improving connections to the trail. The next step is an evaluation of the study findings, the public input and the Citizens Working Group recommendations by the Four Cities Working Team. This will be followed by presentations to the four respective city councils. The next step would involve the development of a trail master plan for the alignments selected by the four city councils. A trail master plan would be evaluated under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). All future trail planning and environmental review will provide opportunities for public involvement.

LEGEND

- STEVENS CREEK
- STEVENS CREEK TRAIL PEDESTRIAN/BIKE PATH
  - DALE/HEATHERSTONE TO FREMONT AVENUE PEDESTRIAN/BIKE PATH THROUGH THE 22 ACRES ALONG THE CORRIDOR
  - FREMONT AVENUE TO HOMESTEAD ROAD PEDESTRIAN/BIKE PATH ALONG THE SOUNDWALL ON BERNARDO AVENUE
- ON STREET NEIGHBORHOOD ACCESS ROUTES TO BE IMPROVED
- CONNECTION TO RANCHO SAN ANTONIO COUNTY PARK
- UNDERPASS AND RAMPS
- PEDESTRIAN BRIDGE
- OVERCROSSING AND RAMPS



STEVENS CREEK TRAIL FEASIBILITY STUDY
CITIZENS WORKING GROUP PREFERRED ALIGNMENT