

During the last half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, political and economic changes have led to a decline in rail use for both commerce and travel in the United States. Throughout the country, much of the rail infrastructure that once served as critical transportation corridors has been and is being abandoned. Investment to create this extensive rail system was immense, and in an effort to preserve the public investment and historical value of these rail corridors, a movement has developed in the past several decades to preserve or convert abandoned rail corridors to trails for public access and transportation. Growing interest in outdoor recreation and non-motorized transportation has spurred increasing development and use of rail-trails nationwide. In California there are 241 miles of rail-trails. Across the U.S., over 30,000 miles of railroad corridor have been or are being converted to trail (see the Rails-to-Trails Conservancy website at [www.railstotrails.org/news/trailfacts/default.asp](http://www.railstotrails.org/news/trailfacts/default.asp)). These trails are a growing network, serving people of all ages on foot, bike, horseback and wheelchair.

Multiple-use trails can be used for recreation as well as for human-scale transportation not offered by roadways. Trails, a significant aspect of our historic infrastructure, are being revisited as an invaluable facet of contemporary North American communities (Rails-to-Trails Conservancy, 2000).

The Arcata & Mad River rail corridor is located in Humboldt County – 3,500 square miles of rugged coastline, forested mountains, river valleys, coastal terraces, and agricultural lands located in northwestern California. The main population center of the county, located around Humboldt Bay, is approximately 280 miles north of San Francisco and 80 miles south of the Oregon border.

The Arcata & Mad River line (affectionately known as the Annie & Mary) is the end of the Northwestern Pacific (NWP) railroad that extends up the north coast of California from the San Francisco Bay area to and just beyond Humboldt Bay. The Annie & Mary corridor departs the main NWP line in the City of Arcata, travels northeast through the community of Glendale and the City of Blue Lake and onto its terminus in the milltown of Korb (Figure 1.1). The project area, basically from the Arcata city limits to the terminus of the line, is almost seven miles in length. Trains have not run on the Annie & Mary since 1992, nor does it appear that rail service will be possible in the near future.



*The historic rail station in Blue Lake has since been converted into a museum.*

Owned and managed by the North Coasts Railroad Authority (NCRA), the A&M is one of the few publicly-owned rail corridors in the U.S. Since 1997, a diverse group of citizens, local businesses and elected officials from the surrounding communities of Blue Lake, Arcata, McKinleyville and Eureka has worked to advocate development of a trail on the Annie & Mary corridor. The Natural Resources Services (NRS) Division of Redwood Community Action Agency completed a preliminary assessment of the trail concept in December of 2000. This *Feasibility Study*, funded by the State Coastal Conservancy, is the next phase of the research and planning process.

# **Figure 1.1, Project Vicinity Map**

**(back-to-back page, b&w, 8.5x11)**

## A. PROJECT AREA

The focus of this study is on a portion of the Arcata & Mad River rail corridor between its junction with West End Road in Arcata's Aldergrove Industrial Park and the end of the line in Korbel (Figure 1.1). Though the A&M corridor continues southeast through the City of Arcata, the NCRA has indicated there is greater potential for restoring service from the main line, through the city, to the Aldergrove Industrial Park – consequently, the portion of the line south of the Industrial Park (and West End Road) is not considered in this study.

## B. PROJECT PURPOSE AND GOALS

### B1. PROJECT PURPOSE

The purpose of this *Feasibility Study* is to research and document the opportunities and constraints related to development of a multiple-use trail on the Arcata & Mad River rail corridor. Trail development options have been assessed with sensitive consideration of landowner interests, compatibility of adjacent land uses, and possible management options. Recommendations herein subsequently factor in safety, environmental and cultural resources, long-term trail maintenance, and the likelihood of securing funding for implementation.

It is intended that this document provide the NCRA, elected officials, potential trail managers, adjacent landowners and the public at large with information they can use in the next steps toward the Annie & Mary's future.

### B2. PROJECT GOALS

This *Feasibility Study* was conducted with the following goals in mind:

- Explore realistic methods of keeping the historic Annie & Mary corridor intact.
- Identify feasible options for development of a high-quality, multiple-use trail that would enable future public access for non-motorized recreation and transportation on the A&M corridor.
- Determine possibilities for the routing, design, funding, construction and management of a trail along (and/or nearby) the A&M right-of-way, linking the communities of Arcata, Glendale, Blue Lake and Korbel.



*Presented in this study are options for preventing the deterioration or loss of the historic Annie & Mary corridor, and keeping it intact as a multiple-use trail.*

## C. TERMINOLOGY

**A&M** – Arcata & Mad River, or Annie & Mary, railroad corridor.

**Alignment** – trail route, particularly where it would be located off of the rail corridor.

**Alternative Route** – For the purpose of this study, this term describes potential routes outside the A&M right-of-way.

**Alta** – Alta Planning + Design, trail design consultants (see [Appendix M](#)).

**Corridor** – The linear parcel owned and/or managed by the North Coast Railroad Authority between Arcata and Korbel.

**HBMWD** – Humboldt Bay Municipal Water District.

**Multiple-Use Trail** – A route no less than eight feet wide, with a hard surface, dedicated to non-motorized travel, including: cyclists, walkers, wheelchair users, strollers, equestrians, and/or in-line skaters, depending on the hardness of the surface, intended uses, and so forth.

**MUTCD** – Manual of Uniform Traffic Control Devices.

**NCRA** – The North Coast Railroad Authority, the public entity which owns and manages the Arcata & Mad River corridor.

**NRS** – The Natural Resources Services Division of Redwood Community Action Agency (RCAA), coordinators of this project (see [Appendix M](#)).

**Rail-Trail** – For the purpose of this study, this term describes the proposed trail on (or near) the railroad corridor. This trail would be an ‘interim’ trail, designed to preserve the ability to restore rail service in the future.

**Rail-with-Trail** – A trail adjacent to an active or inactive rail-line.

**Rail-to-Trail** – A rail corridor is converted to a trail temporarily or permanently. The trail is on the former rail-line corridor.

**Railbanking** – The federal railbanking statute is a means by which an inactive rail line can legally be preserved for future rail use. Railbanking preserves all forms of ownership for the railroad including easements.

**ROW** – Right-of-way, either by fee title ownership or easement.

**RTC** – Rails-to-Trails Conservancy, policy and rail-trail clearinghouse consultants to this project (see [Appendix M](#)).

**Spencer Engineering** – Spencer Engineering & Construction Management, Inc., engineering consultants to this project (see [Appendix M](#)).

**SR** – Abbreviation for State Route, a more inclusive term than ‘highway’ or ‘freeway’, which are held to specific standards.

## D. SUMMARY OF FEASIBILITY ISSUES AND ACTION ITEMS

The Arcata & Mad River Railroad corridor has a significant place in U.S. history. The A&MRRR and its predecessor, the ‘Union Plank Walk, Rail Track, and Wharf Company Railroad’, was, if not the very first, **one of the first operational railroads** in the western United States. This fact should be confirmed and should serve as a significant motivator for preservation of the corridor.

Trail development on some portions of the A&M corridor would **conflict with adjacent land uses**, and other potential trail routes have been researched and recommended in these cases (Table 1.1).

**Considerable investment** in the corridor will be necessary to develop a multiple-use trail (Table 1.1). Primary investments will be renovation and retrofitting of the trestle and bridge structures to facilitate trail use. In general, however, multi-use trail development cost estimates (with standards similar to road construction) are in accordance to a typical range of \$250,000 to \$1 million per mile.

A summary of highlights and ‘action items’ is provided at the end of every chapter in this document. Highlights of those action items are as follows:

- **Railbank the A&M Corridor.** The A&M corridor should be railbanked – a federal statute allows preservation of rail corridors for future rail use while allowing interim use and maintenance (see Chapter 2) – immediately to preserve the NCRA’s ability to use it in the future, whether for rail or for trail. The **NCRA should receive funding support** for this effort, as it will ensure the state’s investment in the corridor is maintained. It is unlikely that rail service will be restored on the corridor in the near future.
- **Blue Lake Is Ready.** The City of Blue Lake is interested in developing a trail on the portion of the A&M corridor within city limits and assuming management of it as a trail – even in light of the fact that they have no resources to do so. First, however, funding and permits must be secured (Chapters 8 and 9). Further research is necessary to determine if one segment of trail can be permitted before others (Chapter 9).
- **Plans Should Include A&M Rail-Trail.** None of the other local governments that could potentially serve as trail management agencies are ready or yet willing to take on management of a trail on the corridor – however public sentiment appears to be in strong support of using the corridor as a trail. Local government plan updates should reflect this level of support, and the public should continue to make its interest known if, in the current climate of local government funding challenges, trail development on the corridor is still considered an important endeavor.
- **Design Trail To Accommodate Neighbors.** Many landowners adjacent to the corridor are concerned about how trail design, function and management will impact their privacy, safety, and quality of life. Trail planning and designs should very carefully consider their interests.
- **Develop A Regional Parks and Trails District.** A plan for a practical mechanism of funding trail maintenance will likely be necessary to help local governments consider taking on development and maintenance of a trail on the A&M corridor. Additional research needs to confirm the indication in this study that it is possible additional sales tax would be supported for this purpose. A related consideration should be given to the potential for creation of a Regional Parks and Trails District. In particular, the Humboldt Bay Municipal Water District needs financial help maintaining the Mad River Bridge – which supports a water transmission line – in the short term.
- **Funds Are Available Now.** A significant amount of recreational trail, historic preservation, and non-motorized transportation funds are available through numerous state funding programs as a result of voters’ approval of the ‘California Clean Water, Clean Air, Safe Neighborhood Parks, and Coastal Protection Act of 2002’ – otherwise known as Proposition 40. In this time of extreme budget shortfalls, however, this kind of funding is not expected to last beyond the next two or three years. In order to best utilize these funds, trail development action should be taken soon. Local funds should be raised to address pre-implementation funding needs.

**Table 1.1**  
**Comparison of Alignment Recommendations and Costs (priorities in italics).**

<b>Reach</b>	<b>Preferred Alignment</b>	<b>Feasibility Issues</b>	<b>Estimated Cost (1,000)*</b>
<b>Arcata</b>	<i>Alternative B: original corridor, with 600 feet of trail slightly below grade to improve privacy for adjacent landowners.</i>	<i>More costly than at-grade trail, however the trail will be a better ‘neighbor’ with this design.</i>	\$825
<b>Parks I</b>	Alternative A: original corridor, but with as many accommodations for the adjacent landowner in question as possible.	Shared use and privacy design issues will need to be addressed individually with adjacent landowners to ensure the trail is a good neighbor.	\$1,600
<b>Parks II</b>	Alternative A: original corridor and trestles.	Retrofit of the trestles, not to mention maintenance of them, introduces a substantial cost increase to trail development, however their historic significance and visual role on the corridor (as well as the logistical difficulty of re-routes) make the original corridor the preferred choice.	
<b>Bridge</b>	Original corridor.	Full retrofit of the bridge and approach trestles will be costly – though partial retrofit for minimum trail structure needs could be possible.	\$1,710
<b>Glendale</b>	Alternative C: almost completely separate from the original corridor and parallels the northern side of State Route 299.	The public and most agencies seem to feel that pursuing approval of Caltrans right-of-way encroachment is much preferable to the myriad of design and safety problems presented on the original corridor through Glendale.	\$1,115
<b>Blue Lake West</b>	<i>Original corridor.</i>	<i>This of all reaches is probably the most immediately developable as a city facility: driveway/road crossings and Powers Creek trestle replacement are the main issues.</i>	\$350
<b>Blue Lake East</b>	<i>Alternative C: as a short-term approach, the trail would end at Hatchery Road and connect with the City’s Trail Loop.</i>  (Alternative B: as a long-term approach, the trail would connect the A&M corridor, Mad River levee and Hatchery Road to form a loop.)	<i>From the perspective of trail users, development of both options is ideal, but landowner needs and concerns must be addressed. If land uses change east of Blue Lake, trail development may be less of a concern to adjacent landowners – hence consideration of Alternative B as a ‘long-term’ option. In either case, bike/ped facilities on Hatchery Road will also need improvement.</i>	\$17
<b>Korbel</b>	Not recommended for trail development at the current time.	Unless Simpson Timber Co., who owns most of the corridor in this reach, wishes to pursue trail development in the future, it would not be developed as a trail.	\$0

\*Not including additional right-of-way access acquisition. See [Chapter 7](#) for details about cost estimates.

Refer to [Chapter 6](#) for a detailed description of planning reaches and analysis of alternatives.