

REDWOOD PATHWAYS STRATEGY: AN ACTION PLAN FOR TRAIL DEVELOPMENT



CHAPTER 2. FEASIBILITY OF A “REDWOOD PATHWAY”



FEASIBILITY OF A “REDWOOD PATHWAY”

Assessing the feasibility of something as conceptual as the redwood pathway turned out to be very challenging. The “public,” and even those active in the Avenue Trails Committee, were unable to decide exactly what the Redwood Pathway should be—and frequently the definition changed with the composition of the group discussing it. Among the definitions proposed were the following:

- a separate, multi use path parallel, but out of sight of, the Avenue;
- a pathway design for equestrians;
- improvements designed to attract more touring cyclists;
- safer off-road paths for local high school athletes to train on; and,
- bicycle lanes along the Avenue.

In many cases, the group eventually looked to the project team to provide suggestions for a clearer definition, and for an **achievable** definition that would meet all, or most, of the goals of community participants.

Therefore, to assess the “feasibility” of the Redwood Pathway, it became necessary to first identify the goals that community members wished the pathway to achieve and then to determine if there was any way possible for a pathway to meet those goals.

COMMUNITY GOALS FOR A REDWOOD PATHWAY

The following goals are based upon public input documented during the Redwood Pathway Project public meetings and resident survey, as well as several previous planning efforts. Input records and resulting documents were reviewed for trail-related goals and information. A list of the planning efforts and documents that have been incorporated into this project includes:

- Public input offered during Avenue of the Giants Community Action Planning
- Public input from the Community Plan Update process and the resultant Avenue of the Giants Community Plan
- Efforts and goals of the Avenue Trails Committee
- Public input record of the Humboldt Redwoods State Park General Plan process
- Humboldt Redwoods Park General Plan

Community goals to guide trail development, adapted from those of the Avenue Trails Committee using public input from the Redwood Pathways Project, are as follows:

- To recognize the intrinsic value of the Redwoods along the Avenue, as well as the scenic and natural values which make the area attractive to both residents and visitors, and to promote a pathway that *does not remove any mature redwoods* or substantially impact water quality or scenic values.
- To improve the safety of cyclists and pedestrians traveling *along* [on] the Avenue.
- To create a safer thoroughfare *parallel to* the Avenue of the Giants for pedestrians, local cyclists, touring cyclists, equestrians and tourists.
- To facilitate potential economic and community benefits of a thriving trail network.
- To stimulate local economic development by attracting and retaining recreational users of both land and water trails.
- To encourage the creation of an interconnected trail network including facilities for hikers, backpackers, touring cyclists, mountain bike users, equestrians, and river users—connecting existing trails where possible.
- To improve communications between local communities and government agencies.
- To establish ongoing working relationships with State Parks, Caltrans, and the County of Humboldt to facilitate the development of a path along the Avenue.
- To work with government agencies to identify needed visitor facilities and services and to provide for their development.



Specific trail-user groups mentioned in the Redwood Pathways public input include:

- Local athletes currently training (running) along the roadway
- Pedestrians, primarily residents walking between neighboring communities
- Local cyclists, including youth
- Touring cyclists
- Equestrians
- Hikers utilizing nearby park trails
- Residents with small children (strollers) and pets (primarily dogs, but several other species were mentioned as well.)
- Wheeled users, such as those using skates and/or wheelchairs
- Tourists visiting the area who are looking for a nearby, relatively un-strenuous walk

“REDWOOD PATHWAY”, DEFINED

Ultimately, the goals can most reasonably be met by a *series* of **connected pathways** along the corridor. This series of “Redwood *Pathways*” would, when completed, serve to connect communities, existing State Park trails and amenities, and river access points; would provide

safe alternatives to the Avenue for local non-motorists; and would become a focal point for visitors to the area, eventually stimulating visitor service-related businesses.

Where possible, the pathways should be separate from, but roughly parallel to, the Avenue of the Giants, and should remain on the same side of the Eel River as the Avenue. (The existing parallel path on the opposite side of the river does not meet the needs of Pathway proponents. It is accessed by a seasonal bridge and is too far out of the way.) Where a separate path is not possible, or is only possible in the extreme long-term, more immediate improvements to the shoulder of the Avenue should be considered as an interim measure.

Developed in stages as funding becomes available, each pathway section should connect two destination points, and should be designed to connect to other sections, as well as meet the needs of as many user groups as the topographic and habitat-related constraints allow. Sections connecting destinations that cater to specific user groups, should strive to meet the needs of those same groups, if at all possible. (For example, a section of trail along the Avenue connecting two equestrian trails within the state park, should be designed to meet the needs of equestrians; if the destination is two communities and the primary users are student athletes, the trail section design would meet the needs of runners; etc.)

Also, the pathways design's should be sensitive to the surrounding habitat and scenic values, as preserving these values is necessary to tourism, as well as to residents—they contribute to the atmosphere and quality of life that attracted resident to these communities! While making paths direct is a consideration, including some meandering and variation is also important to provide a diverse experience for users, as well as to avoid impacts to redwoods, wetlands, and streams.

SO, IS IT FEASIBLE?

“A goal never set is, by definition, impossible to achieve.”

This quote, worded in various ways during *many* different discussions throughout the Redwood Pathways project, is a good general summary of the feasibility of a “Redwood Pathway.”

It is the considered opinion that, if the definition of a “Redwood Pathway” is expanded to include a *series* of interconnected paths that cater to a *variety* of users, **development of such a path is both desirable, and ultimately, feasible.**

Trail development takes both time and funding, though as well as the support of the community and public agencies. Continued interest and support from the community is necessary for the redwood Pathways to be feasible in the long term.

FEASIBLE ≠ EASY OR INEXPENSIVE

Constraining factors are numerous. The existing Avenue of the Giants is narrow and winding, already constrained in many places by huge mature Redwoods. In several places along the Avenue, these redwoods are so close to the roadway that vehicle lane widths are constricted. Most of the length of the Avenue also has no existing shoulder, although unimproved pull-outs are periodically present.

The Avenue also crosses many small streams and watercourses, including the Eel River. Any pathway(s) would need to bridge many of these same watercourses. To keep the pathways from crossing the Avenue of the Giants, and thereby increasing the hazard to users, it would be best to place it on only one side of the road, presenting numerous areas where sheer slopes and steep banks would need to be traversed. To maintain a consistent elevation, desirable to trail users, presents additional topographic challenges. All of these issues are not insurmountable, however, given enough resources.

Further, although much of the land surrounding the Avenue of the Giants is publicly owned by Caltrans and the State Parks, there are likely to be critically important linkages required through private property. Particular care should be taken to include private property owners in the trail development and design processes. Listening to and addressing landowner concerns is a vital component of successful trail planning and development.

Even areas where trails are proposed within state jurisdictions are not without constraints. State Parks restricts both bicycles and dogs from most trail facilities. The impacts associated with various uses within the Park are valid concerns. A reasonable solution would have to be found that protected resources and accommodated community transportation needs.

Feasibility, ultimately, seems to be a question of available resources and prioritization. If economic development and stimulation of southern Humboldt and northern Mendocino communities is a priority, resources and support will become available. Residents, community groups, resource organizations, and agencies will work together to find resources. Improving what is already a draw for thousands of touring cyclists and Park visitors each year, and returning the once thriving tourist destination to its former glory, will require more than trail development alone.



The area surrounding the narrow, winding Avenue of the Giants presents both opportunities and constraints to developing a redwood Pathway. Note the sloping bank below the roadway—a possible opportunity, and the steeper bank above (located to the left of the road.)

TRAIL DEVELOPMENT AS ECONOMIC STIMULATION

Douglas Fir, a many year resident of Southern Humboldt and primary force in the Piercy-based **Institute for Sustainable Forestry** has articulated a big vision for the area that relates trails and economic development:

The “redwood corridor” role could become a gateway to the Lost Coast and mountains to the west, which are becoming more and more of a destination for nature-based tourism. The potential exists for the southern Humboldt area to become even more of a world-class destination, especially for seasonal “through-cyclists”, European cyclists, backpackers, river activities, and nature based tours. A network of trails would be part of the “economic engine” which helps to drive soft, low-tech, low-impact economic development in the region.

To develop the Redwood Pathways corridor into an international destination for even more tourists, and thereby achieve “tourism development” discussed in *Prosperity!* Humboldt County’s Overall Economic Development Plan, will require a multi-faceted approach. Development of that approach is outside the scope of this project, however, it should be noted that trail development, promotion, and development of packaged tours utilizing trails, along with development of the support facilities and businesses such visitors will require, can be a vital facet of any comprehensive tourism related, economic stimulation plan for the area.

Excerpt from *Prosperity! The North Coast Strategy*:

Humboldt County contains many opportunities for outdoor recreation including...Humboldt Redwoods State Parks; Richardson Grove State Park; King Range National Recreation Area;...and numerous rivers... Attractions include the giant Redwoods...recreational waterways...historic places...and [various festivals and events].

In addition, several key issues and future opportunities listed in the Tourism section of *Prosperity!* directly relate to the development of a Redwood Pathway. These include:

- **A workforce with poor customer service skills and low level of knowledge about Humboldt County activities for tourists.**
- Relationships with park systems are not conducive to collaborative planning and maximizing opportunities for tourism.
- The image of Humboldt County to the outside world needs improvement. National publicity does not always highlight the positives and guidebooks are known to have erroneous information.
- Much of Humboldt County is not tourism pedestrian friendly.

Future Opportunities:

- 1) Technology will play a key role in increasing tourist visits as more and more people use the Internet to plan vacations, book tickets and make reservations for lodging. **Quality web sites that are well linked throughout the county will be a must** to compete for dollars.
- 2) People who enjoy nature based, educational, adventure and eco-tourism are attracted to smaller unique shops. Prices are rarely an issue. Attracting and keeping these tourists will require attention to developing an interesting array of shops.
- 3) **Many visitors come to partake in the natural environment.** In order to accommodate the needs of those people **Humboldt County needs to develop pedestrian friendly roads, bike and walking trails linking businesses and attractions** catering the same clientele.

- 4) There are many opportunities to combine activities of other industry clusters with tourism. Opportunities include **development of tours and opportunities to work and study within the regional parks.**
- 5) **Vendors need to band together to develop tour packages. Communication about tourism in Humboldt County needs to be cohesive and comprehensive.** A monthly calendar in print for wide distribution throughout the county and over the Internet is essential.

Finally, a few industry needs, identified and specifically recommended projects that are consistent with Redwood Pathways goals and development, are identified in Prosperity!

Industry Needs:

- Additional coordination of efforts by the area’s tourism businesses, economic professionals, transportation interests and other businesses that can add value to local tourism opportunities.
- Better information about specific markets. The marketing of our unique attractions is important to not only bring more tourists here, but to get them to extend their stay.
- Opportunities for improving the level of customer service and knowledge of local attractions and activities for staff.
- Stronger partnerships with State and National Parks working toward common goals.

Industry Specific Projects

- Improved amenities for pedestrians.
- Better collateral materials about nature and heritage based tourism opportunities in Humboldt County and throughout the region.

Finally, increasing the safety and non-motorized access for the area’s extremely rural population, in addition to the benefits of economic stimulation, can only benefit southern Humboldt and northern Mendocino community quality of life. The development of safe and pleasant travel ways for non motorized uses within and between communities helps to improve their “livability.” It provides more options for those who don’t drive – children, the elderly, and some disabled folks, as well as for those who do. It facilitates social interaction, recreation and exercise and helps to reduce traffic problems and protect the environment. A “walkable” community enhances the quality of life for residents, is more enjoyable for tourists, and is attractive to individuals and businesses seeking to relocate from other areas.

OPPORTUNITIES

However, ultimately, there are many favorable factors, supporting the concept of trail development. Trail development has a great deal of support from residents in southern Humboldt, and even support within northern Mendocino, although these are small populations compared to the more urban areas in each county. The Avenue Trails Committee is actively pursuing trail improvements and working to educate, and secure support from, others regarding Redwood Pathways.

Involved agencies have also recognized the public support for and concept related to Redwood Pathways development. The Redwood Pathways concept is supported in the Avenue of the Giants Community Plan, a component of the Humboldt County General Plan. The concept of trail development and corresponding tourism development is consistent with the goals for economic stimulation of the area, as documented in the Humboldt County

OEPD. Development of a Redwood Pathway is also mentioned in the Humboldt State Parks Master Plan, and the Park Superintendent has indicated initial interest.

Much of the land that the pathways would cross is state owned—by Humboldt Redwood State Park and by Caltrans, minimizing private property concerns. In the southern portion of the project corridor, beyond the Avenue of the Giants, numerous frontage and low-volume roads exist which roughly parallel SR 101. These present substantial opportunity for roadside trail development.

In addition, Caltrans District 1 is conducting an assessment of the Pacific Coast Bike Route (PCBR). The PCBR is a bicycle route that was designated by the legislature in the 1970's and is traveled by thousands of touring cyclists each year. (An Oregon survey of cyclists had roughly 4,000 respondents indicate that their destination once leaving Oregon was San Francisco.) The PCBR currently follows SR 101 through the Redwood Pathways corridor and Caltrans' is assessing possible route changes and facility improvements. This indicates a willingness to consider improvements to and rerouting of, the PCBR—a definite opportunity for Redwood Pathways development.

Business owners in the area have, in the past, expressed cautious interest in trail development. Further, several indicated substantial interest in, and support for, improved promotion of the existing and planned recreational and trail-related tourism opportunities. Of particular interest was the concept of creating a map for the Redwood Pathways project area, that was similar to the Humboldt Bay Area Bike Map, see appendix.

Combined, these opportunities support the feasibility of continued development efforts for Redwood Pathways.

SOUTHERN HUMBOLDT COMMUNITY PARK

The Southern Humboldt Community Park is an approximately 500-acre parcel along the South Fork Eel River, located west of, and down the hill from, Garberville. It was purchased in 2001 by a private, non-profit umbrella organization called Southern Humboldt Working Together. The property is currently zoned Agricultural Exclusive and is basically undeveloped except for a farmhouse and some out-buildings. Some farming and very informal recreational uses (walking, hiking) are occurring while the Community Park's board of directors works with the community to plan for future uses of the park. The Community Park has the potential to provide trails, camping, and other facilities for locals and visitors. Developing non-motorized access to and from the Community Park will be important for safe and enjoyable use, and members of the park's board have expressed interest in collaborating to connect Redwood Pathways trail segment to and through the Community Park.

GARBERVILLE TOWN SQUARE

An active group of Garberville residents has formed and raised funds to purchase an undeveloped lot off the main street through Garberville. This community group plans to develop the lot into an open town center with green space, information kiosks, and other amenities. They too have expressed interest in future collaboration toward mutually beneficial projects between the town center and the Redwood Pathways project.

THE EXISTING RAIL CORRIDOR THROUGH THE EEL RIVER

One final, longer-term opportunity exists in the North Coast Railroad line. Although the North Coast Railroad Authority has a plan for re-establishing rail service along the line, it can not be ignored that, **should efforts to re-establish rail use fail**, the existence of an unused rail corridor presents definite trail opportunities. Although the rail line does not parallel the Avenue of the Giants closely, it is an improved corridor with existing bridge crossings and a relatively even grade, perfect for hiking, biking, and horseback riding. Relatively few improvements would be necessary to convert the rail corridor to non-motorize, multiple use. Therefore, efforts to re-establish rail service in the area of the Redwood Pathways project should be monitored and action taken to convert the corridor to trail use, if rail efforts are abandoned.

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