

Project blazes walk-bike path in Castroville

MacGregor "Goya" Eddy, For The Salinas Californian 4:08 p.m. PST December 15, 2016



(Photo: File)

Elected officials and county transportation staff broke ground Monday morning on a \$10 million project to build a pedestrian/bicycle overpass and railroad crossing in Castroville. As Deb Hale, director of the Transportation Agency for Monterey County, spoke about the merits of the project, pedestrians crossed the railroad tracks behind her, walking along a dirt path through an open field.

"I walk home through muddy fields," said Kenneth Boyte of Castroville. Boyte, who teaches at North Monterey County High School. "There are trucks working in the fields," said Boyte. "and there are students walking near them," Boyte said. He was pleased to hear that a safer way for students traveling to and from Castroville was being built.



Students on their way to North Monterey County High School in Castroville walk through open fields and cross railroad tracks and a busy boulevard to get to campus. (Photo: Provided)

Next, the task will be to get more students to walk and bike to school.

As it is now, a bike rack sits empty in front of the main office of North Monterey County High School. Meanwhile, every morning a line of cars and buses backs up along Castroville Boulevard, bringing students to school. On the side of the boulevard is an unused path leading to the high school. The path is unused because it leads to Highway 156. Because walking on the highway is not safe (or legal), the students who walk to school from Castroville must cross fields, railroad tracks and the busy boulevard.

Tax dollars at work: The total cost of the Castroville project will be \$10 million, according to Doug Poochigan, civil engineer with Monterey County. The funding comes from a mix of federal and state grants as well as local funds. A \$6.6 million Active Transportation Program state grant provides the largest infusion of funds, making the project possible (reported in this column Jan. 15.) The ATP grants are intended to make bicycling and walking safer, thus encouraging active methods of transportation. Active transportation, such as walking and bicycling, has the dual benefits of increasing physical fitness and reducing greenhouse gas emissions from motor vehicles.

Official guides for pedestrian planning recommend that pedestrian overpasses and underpasses be a last resort solution. Bicycle and pedestrian advocacy groups sometimes oppose overpass bridges because they are an expensive solution to an engineering problem and funds might be better used provide miles and miles of protected bicycle lanes and improved sidewalks.


It's unfortunate that, in Castroville, such an expensive project is a solution of last resort.

However, the presence of working railroad tracks makes the Castroville overpass project necessary. There will be, we hope, more trains on that track in the future. When the Amtrak Capitol Corridor train is extended to Salinas there should be more train traffic on that stretch of tracks. That train line now ends in San Jose.

County connection: Once completed, the pedestrian/bicycle path and railroad crossing will benefit Monterey County residents and visitors to the area, not just Castroville residents. Cyclists or hikers travelling from Salinas or the Monterey Peninsula cities to Santa Cruz County will have a safer route to enjoy.



"I have been looking forward to this much needed pedestrian route in our community, said John Phillips, Monterey County supervisor who represents District 3, including Castroville and north county. "I applaud the work of local and state planners in the design and implementation of this project."

Follow MacGregor "Goya" Eddy on Twitter at @Goya1949. Contact her by email at wecouldcarless@gmail.com or mail to: We Could Car Less, in care of The Salinas Californian, 123 W. Alisal St., Salinas 93901.




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