

Update on the Willow Glen Trestle, Aug 4, 2015

A quick recap:

- * Western Pacific builds the trestle across the Los Gatos Creek in Willow Glen (constructed during 1921, opened in 1922), so as to connect San José to the WP network, including via the Feather River Canyon route across the Sierras to Salt Lake City. In so doing, it broke the monopoly previously long enjoyed by the Southern Pacific Railroad. The Western Pacific line carried freight and served some of the canneries and fruit-packers in the area, and played an important role in helping small local farmers to survive the Great Depression.
- * Around 2000, the last canneries close, and the present owner of the WP line discontinues freight service.
- * San José Parks' 2000 strategic plan, "the Greenprint", calls for the rail right-of-way to be purchased for a regional trail, now called the "Three Creeks Trail". Plans include incorporating the trestle into the trail network.
- * Various community members and groups help lobby various agencies for funding, giving presentations featuring the trestle and its historic nature. In 2011 San José has the funding and completes the purchase of this portion of the ROW.
- * 2013: City abruptly decides to instead demolish the trestle and replace it with a prefab steel bridge, citing the approaching deadline on a state grant.
- * Jan 2014: City declares the trestle is "not historic" based on a decade-old report and despite public testimony outlining recently uncovered documentation. In light of non-historic ruling, City approves trestle demolition & replacement.
- * Feb. 2014: Friends of Willow Glen Trestle sue in Santa Clara Superior Court, stating that the public testimony of historic qualifications should not have been dismissed and should have triggered City to prepare an "Environmental Impact Report" (EIR).
- * July 2014: Judge Huber of Santa Clara Superior Court rules in the Friends favor, ordering the City to prepare an EIR.
- * Oct. 2014: City files an appeal of the court ruling because it doesn't want to be required to prepare an EIR. Nonetheless, City undertakes an EIR for the replacement prefab bridge.
- * Jan 2015: EIR is completed and released for public comment, and it is updated in April.
- * May 6, 2015: San José's Historic Landmarks Commission unanimously votes to recommend Historic Recognition of the trestle.
- * May 19, 2015: City Council hears public testimony but then declines to grant historic recognition. Council then rules that, since they have said the trestle is not historic, they then can approve the EIR for the replacement prefab bridge.

The latest updates:

- * June 15, 2015: City tells Santa Clara Superior Court they've completed the EIR and petitions for permission to demolish the trestle
- * June 22, 2015: Judge Huber denies City's request.
[* June 25, 2015: Mayor honors Friends founder Larry Ames for his efforts "to save the historic Willow Glen Trestle".]
- * June 30, 2015: City petitions Appellate Court for permission to demolish the trestle, stating that, if demolition isn't begun by July 15, 2015, it risks losing its funding and also will have to reapply for all the permits.
- * July 9, 2015: 6th Appellate Court summarily denies the City's request.

* July 21, 2015: City's attorney notifies Friend's attorney that City doesn't need court permission and will begin demolition after 10 days. Friend's attorney replies that that would be "contempt of court". City's attorney withdraws the "10-day notice".

* July 28, 2015: City's attorney notifies Friend's attorney that matter will be taken to City Council at their Aug. 4th closed session. City's attorney refused to rule out possibility of Council approving immediate demolition.

* July 30, 2015: Friend's attorney petitions the 6th Appellate Court "for an immediate stay, an order to show cause for contempt of court and sanctions, and other appropriate order or writ of prohibition", stating that "The appellant City is inexplicably pursuing demolition of the Willow Glen Trestle, prohibited by the Superior Court's peremptory writ, without awaiting the resolution of this appeal or subsequent discharge of the writ."

* Aug. 4, 2015: statement from City lawyer's filing to Appellate Court after the Council's closed session: "the City does not plan to remove the trestle absent some kind of judicial action", which implies that they will continue with the appeal.

LLA quotes:

We look forward to working with the City.

We understand how the City might have felt rushed into a decision to spend a state grant, but just spending a grant to have spent it is a waste of taxpayers' money, especially if it needlessly destroys the valuable trestle in the process. And it is right for elected officials to change a rushed decision in light of new-found public awareness and support.

We hope that the City can find a way to apply their state grant to some other worthy project, and we are confident that they can get other grants to repair and adapt the Willow Glen Trestle for use in connecting the Los Gatos Creek Trail and the Three Creeks Trail. We would be glad to offer our help. It would be nice to have the Los Gatos and Three Creeks Trails connected today: we have already been working with the community and the City for decades to get this trail connection, but it is worth waiting a little longer to get it done right.

The City's own studies and reports state that the trestle can readily be preserved and adapted for trail use, at a cost less than for the demolition and replacement, and with less environmental impact to the creek. We have contacted a regulatory agency, which indicated that it would be quite willing to work with the City on revised plans that incorporate a retained trestle.

City planners often talk about "the sense of place" and the importance of preserving unique and historic or iconic structures: they add "character" to a region. The Willow Glen Trestle would make an ideal feature on the future extension of the popular Los Gatos Creek Trail, becoming a gateway to the charming Willow Glen district.

more information is available on our website:

www.WGTrestle.org