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Must Be Present to Win – A Bike Advocate Success in Sunnyvale

by AK Leung | Nov 27, 2017 | Advocacy, Featured, SVBC Members, Wins | 2 comments



guest blog by: Tim Oey

In September 2017, Sunnyvale bicyclists almost lost a great connection between the Borregas Avenue bike route and the Bay Trail. Luckily a few key people were at a public meeting and

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eventually convinced Sunnyvale staff that a safe route in both directions was critical for bicyclists of all abilities.

Here is the story of how this evolved and some pitfalls along the way.

Sunnyvale's Water Pollution Control Plant has been running for 60 years and is in the process of a much-needed rebuild so it can continue to serve an expanding population and generate cleaner recycled water to keep the San Francisco Bay healthy. As part of this rebuild, Sunnyvale needed to close Carl Road to allow the Water treatment plant to expand. This would sever the current Borregas to Bay Trail connection as well as close Bay Trail public access parking along Carl Road. The plan was to create new a new route for bicycles and pedestrians to go from Borregas to the Bay Trail as well as a new parking area for cars. Borregas, with its two bike/ped bridges over 101 and 237, is the northern end of Sunnyvale's premier north-south bicycle route.

The Sunnyvale Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Commission and its support staff were not informed of this pending major bicycle and pedestrian change, nor were Bay Trail staff. I was invited by Larry Klein, one of Sunnyvale's council members, to a public outreach meeting to review the final design of what was called the "Caribbean Drive Parking and Trail Access Enhancements Project." I almost did not attend because it seemed it should be a slam dunk to maintain or even improve this great bicycle and pedestrian connection to the Bay Trail.

Alas, the devil is often in the details.

While local city staff are getting better at handling bicycle and pedestrian issues, they still have a strong bias favoring motor vehicles that lines up with our strong car culture. Call it car privilege.

So the redesign they came up with provided great motor vehicle parking as well as reasonable pedestrian facilities, but would have required bicyclists to dismount and walk their bikes along a

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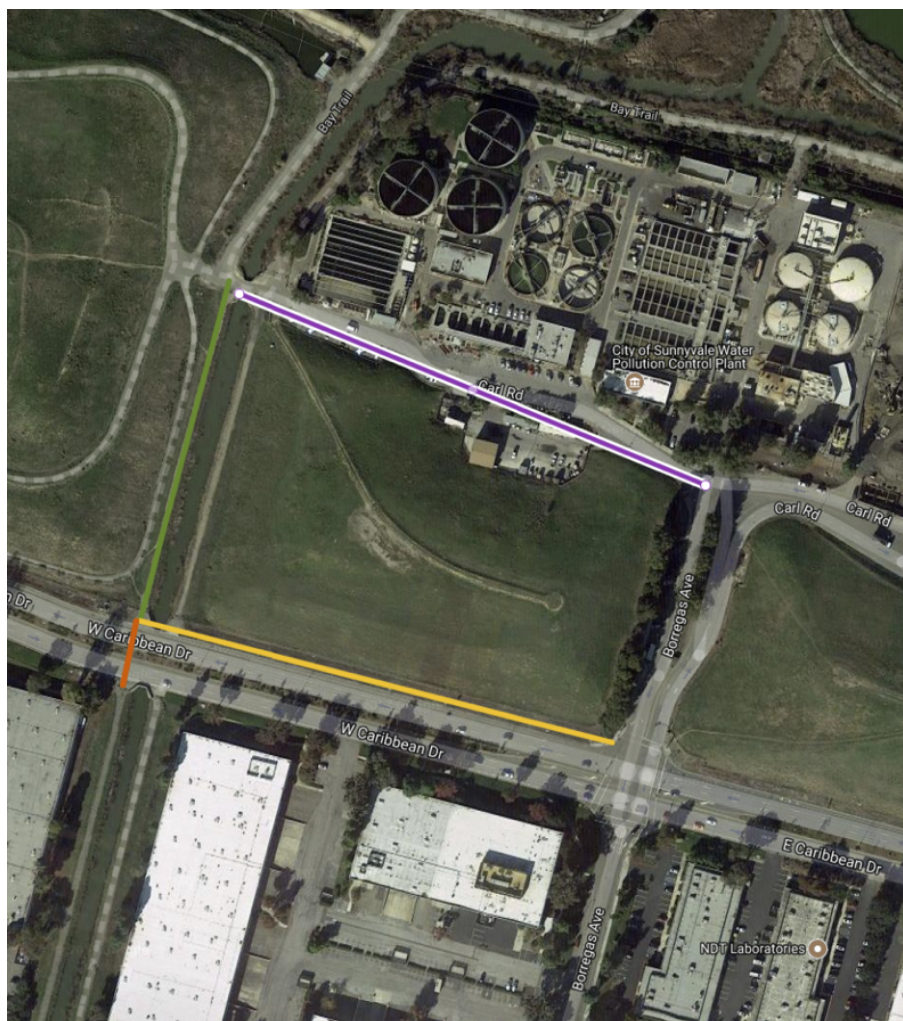
SVBC's Santa

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pedestrian sidewalk in the southbound direction for several years until a new bike/ped crossing of Caribbean was built sometime in the future. Even then, bicyclists would be routed on a bike lane along the busy and high-speed Caribbean Drive instead of the much slower Borregas Ave & Carl Drive.

In the following Google Map aerial view, the purple line is Carl Road, which will be closed; the green line is the new bike access trail along a water canal; the yellow line is the sidewalk along Caribbean; and the red line is the future at-grade bike/ped crossing of Caribbean.



During the presentation, Sunnyvale staff were quite insistent that there was no space for a multi-use path instead of a sidewalk on the north side of Caribbean and that the plans were too far along to change. When pressed, they came up with alternative detours for bicycles to go through the Yahoo campus or through a little-

known back access way behind and through the Sunnyvale SMART station.

Later, I and others visited the site in person to discover that there was about 26 clear feet between Caribbean and the fenced-in landfill that provided plenty of space for a two-way multi-use trail instead of a pedestrian sidewalk. Also, the detours through Yahoo and the SMART station had navigational challenges and some safety issues in addition to being longer and out of the way — sometimes adding a couple of extra miles to what should have been a short connection.

Thanks to a flurry of dialog from some council members, myself, and many other advocates including Bay Trail staff and former council members, Sunnyvale staff did finally come up with a proposal that included a multi-use trail on the north side of Caribbean to provide safe and easy access between Borregas and the Bay Trail for bicyclists of all ages and abilities. This was confirmed in an email communication from Sunnyvale staff in late October.

In the end we should now get a connection between Borregas and the Bay Trail that really is an enhancement over the current Bay Trail connection, but it was touch-and-go for about a month. If not for the quick and concerted effort, we could have been stuck with degraded bicycle access.

Some key takeaways from this experience:

- 1) Never assume. It is amazing how many ways things can go wrong.
- 2) Must be present to win. **We need bicyclists at as many public meetings as possible** to make sure we catch design issues before they are set in stone (literally). It is often surprising how many developments can have a big impact on bicyclists and pedestrians.
- 3) Our network is our strength. Only by leveraging our network did we have enough influence to change plans in the very late stages of this project. Also by having a big network, we can cover more

territory and meetings. We need a network of alert advocates to ensure we eventually get a great network of beautiful routes throughout Silicon Valley. Being a member of the Silicon Valley Bicycle Coalition is HUGE! Please encourage your friends to join us!

Thanks!

Tim Oey is currently the president of the Friends of Stevens Creek Trail, vice chair of the Sunnyvale Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Commission, life member of both the Adventure Cycling Association and League of American Bicyclists, and a SVBC member since 1989.

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2 Comments



Matt on November 27, 2017 at 8:05 pm

Reply

Is there a public website with a list of meetings that bicyclists should attend be attending? The Events section here seems to only have SVBC-related events on the calendar.

> I was invited by Larry Klein, one

of Sunnyvale's council members, to a public outreach meeting to review the final design of what was called the "Caribbean Drive Parking and Trail Access Enhancements Project."

Do you have to be invited to these events explicitly? It'd be great to collect relevant events in one place, maybe even with filtering by community/region.



colin on
November 28,
2017 at 1:24 pm

[Reply](#)

Hi Matt,

We do our best to put all relevant meetings that we know about on our calendar, marking those hosted by other organizations with an asterisk. We rely on our members and readers to let us know about meetings in their area. You can click the blue "Submit an Event" button at the top

left of our **Events Calendar** to help keep it up to date. Most cities have e-notify services you can sign up for. With 36 jurisdictions in our area, plus various special districts and transit authorities, we need help from Coalition members to flag important events. Thanks!

Organization

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EIN: 77-0338658

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