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Fixed-up Bay Trail links MV, Sunnyvale

Trail upgrades, paid for by Google, will continue into next year

by Kevin Forestieri

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Getting around Mountain View's bayshore just got a lot easier. Last week, local politicians and top brass from Google gathered near the windy wetlands to celebrate a new stretch of resurfaced trails, designed to help improve access to the Baylands north of Moffett Field.

The resurfacing project, paid for by Google to the tune of about \$2 million, marks the latest improvement in a decades-long effort to link the San Francisco Bay's trail system between Mountain View and Sunnyvale. The smooth, even surface extends about 4 miles, from Stevens Creek Trail to Carl Road in Sunnyvale, skirting closely alongside properties owned by NASA Ames, Lockheed Martin and the U.S. military.

At a ribbon-cutting event on Friday, May 20, Rep. Anna Eshoo told attendees that it took an enormous amount of hard work and dedication to complete the trail, which finally links the "two most important cities in the area" together. While plenty of agencies played a role in pulling the project together, Eshoo commended former Sunnyvale Mayor Julia Miller for spearheading the effort to build the contiguous trail 19 years ago.

"This is a gift for future generations," she said.

Opening the trail was a Herculean effort involving more than a dozen agencies, including the Association of Bay Area Governments (ABAG), the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, NASA Ames, the 129th Air Rescue Wing and the Santa Clara Valley Water District. Several private companies besides Google were involved in the creation of the trail, including PG&E, Cargill Salt and Lockheed Martin.

Miller, who now serves as a member of the El Camino Healthcare District, told the *Voice* that she made it a top priority to build out the trail and bridge the "Moffett gap" that prevented commuters and residents from traveling into Sunnyvale from Mountain View along the Bay Trail. The effort hit an unusual snag, Miller said, when a munitions bunker maintained by the 129th Air Rescue Wing was located too close to the trail and had to be moved for safety reasons.

In 2010, the multi-agency effort finally hit a breakthrough and was able to bridge the Moffett gap, resulting in 25 miles of contiguous trails from East Palo Alto to San Jose -- the longest stretch in the entire Bay Area, according to Laura Thompson, project manager for the San Francisco Bay Trail.

Taking bolt cutters to the fence that once blocked the trail was just the first step. The bayside pathway connecting Mountain View and Sunnyvale was contiguous but hardly a smooth ride. Miller described the trail as an uneven dirt path with potholes and overgrown vegetation. As the trail saw more use by bicyclists, Thompson said, it became increasingly difficult to traverse -- particularly

during the wet winter season.

Resurfacing the roughly 4 miles of Bay Trail was no easy feat, and took years to accomplish. Thompson said the improvements required extensive collaboration with the nearby property owners to squeeze in a trail through some of the tightest spots along the path.

"Lockheed (Martin) actually moved a fence inward to make room," Thompson said. "There's not a lot of right-of-way to work with there."

Linking the network

The new and improved Bay Trail bordering Mountain View and Sunnyvale is part of a larger effort to build, connect and improve a 500-mile trail system spanning the entirety of the San Francisco Bay. The Bay Trail Plan, which was adopted by ABAG in 1989, has been humming along for the past few decades, with 350 miles of trail now built.

The only trouble is that all of the proverbial low-hanging fruit is gone. ABAG President Julie Pierce explained at the ribbon-cutting ceremony that the last 150 miles include some of the hardest and most expensive segments, similar to the Moffett gap. The recent resurfacing project by Google, Pierce said, will serve as a good example of what a public-private partnership can achieve along the most challenging parts of the shoreline.

Anyone who would like to test the newly improved trail is going to have to wait a while. The 4-mile stretch will be closed from May 23 to June 4 in order to finish improvements on the last 1,000 feet leading to Stevens Creek Trail. When the trail does reopen, residents can get on the trail through the entrance points near Crittenden Lane in Mountain View, or Carl Road in Sunnyvale.

The next step, after fixing the link with Stevens Creek Trail, will be to head further south, improving the next 2 miles of Bay Trail to the border of Santa Clara, Thompson said.