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June 4, 2019 > Letter to the Editor: Union Pacific Corridor must be fixed

The East Bay Greenway Trail for bikes and pedestrians would run from Oakland through Hayward and onward to Milpitas. It was proposed in 1974, and a 1.7-mile segment runs along the abandoned Union Pacific Railroad line (UPRR) in Fremont, from Alameda Creek (near Vallejo Mill) to Central Park (near Paseo Padre). The first studies were published in 2008 (bit.ly/2Wovwx1) and 2009 (bit.ly/2K6r7bv). The city council approved $100,000 for a feasibility study and environmental testing in early 2018, and UPRR agreed to a price tag of $3 million.

However, city attorney Harvey Levine withdrew from the purchase agreement in early May 2019 (Letter attached). His letter to UPRR does not discuss the results of the environmental testing. The city council was not copied on the letter and did not vote on the withdrawal.

The letter cites the cost of soil removal, noise and dust. The soil removal, 10,000 truckloads or 150,000 cubic yards over eight months, would lower the trail to address privacy concerns. It's equivalent to digging a trench six ft deep and 70 ft wide along the 1.7mile segment. But the trench would serve no purpose, because Fremont already has storm channels in the area. The trail has to be higher than the surrounding terrain for drainage. The 2009 study called for removing only the top layer, 10,000 cubic yards, and capping any potential contamination with asphalt pavement (12 ft wide).

Neighbors would be impacted by excessive noise and dust. Consider that the city did not object when Mission Clay removed 21,000 cu yd from a former brickyard in Niles Canyon in 2018. That project sent 1,400 truckloads onto Old Canyon Road, Clarke Drive, Canyon Heights Drive, Pickering Avenue, and Mission Boulevard. The city approved the construction of a new elementary school on Osgood Rd, next door to a cement plant that generates 10,000 truck trips per year—year after year. An NBC Bay Area investigation found that the cement, sand and rocks are a point source for clouds of hazardous dust, that threaten children's health (bit.ly/2VQPaNK).

The letter also suggests that a right-of-way for an abandoned water pipeline could interfere with the trail. Google Earth shows the pipeline is off to the side of the former rail bed, not in the way. The easement for UPRR fiber optic facilities is not in the way either, so long as the asphalt trail is repaired upon completion of any work. Neither the 2009 study nor the 2016 scoping report indicated that easements were an issue.

The city needs a network of bike and pedestrian trails for recreational access including the Bay Trail, Niles Canyon Trail, Alameda Creek Trail and East Bay Greenway. The city attorney wants to conjure up a phantom apparition, a false narrative which exaggerates the impact of cleaning up the UPRR line. It does not justify scuttling the deal. The conversion of the rail line would improve safety for pedestrians and bicyclists, enhance our community, and encourage people to enjoy nature. Fremont should be in the vanguard of "green" cities. We ask you to let your elected representatives know that safe recreational trails must be built. The UPRR line must be fixed and utilized, not forgotten and abandoned.

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