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Laguna bike path seen as commuter benefit

by Dan Watkins

As local officials continue to debate the logistics of a long range transportation solution countywide, a county owned right of way between Sebastopol and Santa Rosa is being viewed as a way of lessening the commute load between the two cities.

The former Northwest Pacific Railroad right-of-way running parallel to Highway 12 was purchased by the county last year for a hiking, biking and horseback trail, but one county parks official sees the biking possibility as much more than recreation.

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"The trail would be a way of encouraging people to use alternative transportation," said Philip Sales of the Sonoma County Regional Parks Department.

Preliminary plans show a tree-lined eight-foot path for hiking, biking, and horseback riding along a three-and-a-half mile portion of former railroad right-of-way.

The trail would eventually stretch from Gravenstein Highway North, over the Laguna de Santa Rosa, to Merced Avenue along Highway 12. A portion of railroad right-of-way from

Hurlbut Avenue to North Main Street still must be attained by the county's regional parks department before the entire trail could be built. Sales said that the projected plan is for a contiguous trail that connects Forestville with Santa Rosa.

According to Sales, the trail would help to "raise people's consciousness" about the environment. The trail would be used for

recreation and could potentially become an attractive alternative for active West County commuters to Santa Rosa.

No motorized vehicles would be allowed on the trail except for maintenance and emergencies.

The construction of the trail, estimated to cost about \$500,000, is set to begin in the spring.