



Bay Area Ridge Trail Council

2025 STRATEGIC PLAN SUMMARY

Adopted December 2021



Realizing the Ridge Trail Vision

The mission of the Bay Area Ridge Trail Council is to plan, promote and sustain a connected hiking, cycling and equestrian trail on the ridgelines around San Francisco Bay – linking people, parks and open space for today and future generations.

The Ridge Trail can be enjoyed today with 400 miles of completed trail ready to explore. Bay Area residents (and visitors) can reach the world-class Ridge Trail within a short trip from home, work or school. The Ridge Trail brings people and communities together and offers opportunities for exercise, recreation, and solitude in nature.

The Bay Area Ridge Trail Council (Council) is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit founded in 1992 and dedicated to planning, building and promoting a continuous 550-mile Ridge Trail. The Council partners with park agencies, local governments, land trusts, landowners, and volunteers throughout the Bay Area to advance trail development. In addition to planning and building the trail, the Council advocates to connect the full loop, and hosts events and trail outings to inspire people to enjoy and steward the trail.



Letter from the Executive Director

The Ridge Trail has a clear and compelling mission – one that has been constant since our founding over three decades ago. And yet, we find ourselves at a unique historical moment, which only elevates the importance of connected trails and parks.

As we kicked off this Strategic Plan in 2021, the world was in the grips of a global pandemic, while also grappling with grave economic and political uncertainties, racial and social justice reckoning, a changing climate and unprecedented wildfires. Taken together, it often felt overwhelming. Yet, there is a silver lining to the uncertainty, isolation and chaos. We see a **renewed appreciation for the importance and benefits of parks and trails** – for physical and mental health and well-being, and community vitality.

Today, the Ridge Trail is at a critical junction – **with 400 miles open to explore and 150 planned miles yet to connect.** And while the easy trail sections are done, and some of the most challenging gaps remain, we've been laying the foundation to tackle the challenges. Our Gap Analysis and Action Plan (2020) surveyed all of the outstanding gaps and explored strategies to close them.

This Strategic Plan takes us further by fleshing out key initiatives and actions, setting priorities, and weaving program elements together into a cohesive whole. **Specific strategies target key trail challenges** like: access across private land gaps, complex transportation crossings, supporting circumnavigators, engaging new communities, and raising funds to plan, build and maintain the trail.

As with any strategic planning process, we looked at opportunities, constraints and potential new directions. Our strategies fit within **three overarching goals: to open more trail miles, to enable more people to enjoy the trail, and to build and sustain the Council to fulfill our mission** and realize our shared vision.

Success will depend on the continued support and steady commitment of our amazing park, land trust and other partners. With this Plan as a guide, our dedicated Board, talented staff, and passionate volunteers are ready to "hit the trail." Together, we'll scale the next peak!

Janet McBride

Janet McBride
Executive Director,
Bay Area Ridge Trail Council

The Ridge Trail is “an inspiring regional trail that connects us not only to places within the Bay Area, but also links people and communities.

By encouraging safe and inclusive experiences in the outdoors, we aim to foster a sense of belonging on the trail.”

- Taylor Jang

*Bay Area Ridge Trail Council Board Member and
Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Taskforce Member*





2025 STRATEGIC PLAN

THREE OVERARCHING STRATEGIC GOALS

The 2025 Strategic Plan will guide and focus our work over the next several years. The full version of the Plan is backed up by assessments of each strategy, balancing impacts on time and resources with the future benefits, including the potential to close challenging trail gaps. With a solid foundation in place, we stand ready to step up the pace on opening more trail miles and connecting more people to nearby nature.



1

COMPLETE THE TRAIL

Plan, advocate, and partner to close gaps, open 35 miles of new trail, extend our longest stretches, and secure the future trail corridor.



2

EXPERIENCE THE TRAIL

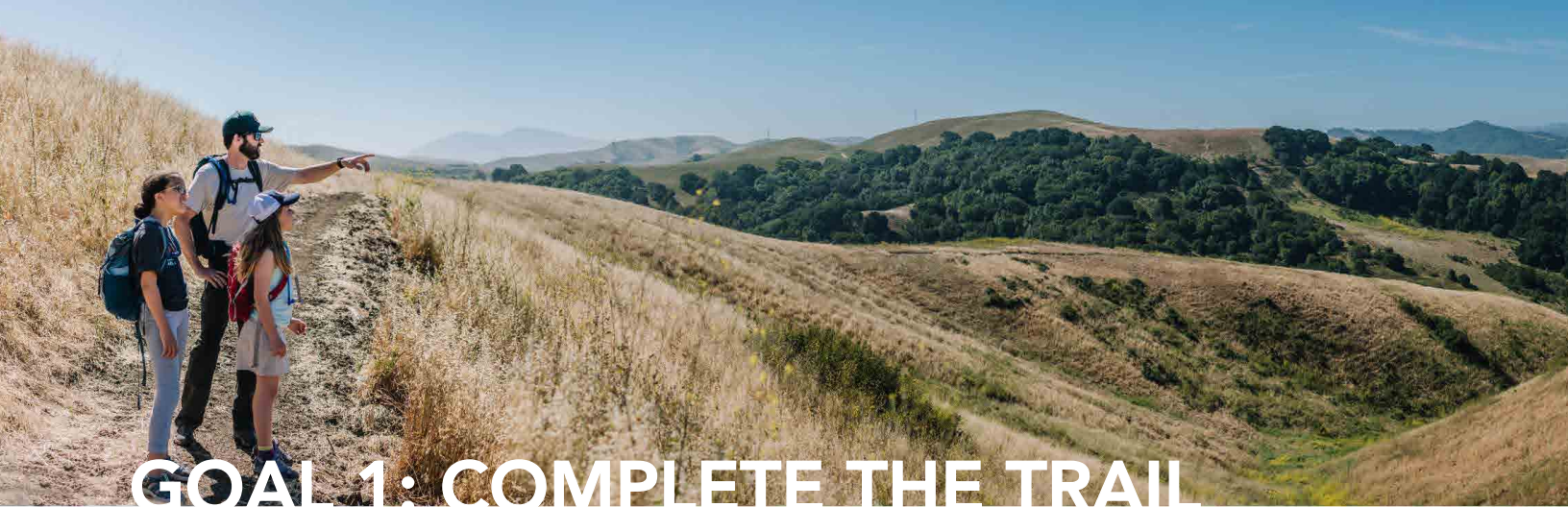
Host outings to get more people out to enjoy and care for the trail. Raise public awareness with events, signs, and outreach so more people know about the Ridge Trail.



3

BUILD AND SUSTAIN THE COUNCIL

Strengthen organizational capacity and financial stability, and promote diversity, equity and inclusion to help realize the Ridge Trail vision.



GOAL 1: COMPLETE THE TRAIL

Plan, Advocate, & Partner to Close Gaps, Open New Trail, and Protect the Route

- Dedicate 35 new primary Ridge Trail miles by 2025, using the *Gap Analysis & Action Plan* to guide near-term trail planning, building, and opening.
- Protect the trail corridor and advance mid- and long-term trail openings through focused-area planning, exploration of new routes and solving for complex transportation crossings.
- Engage with park partners to coordinate Ridge Trail priorities and secure funding to overcome trail development challenges.
- Use our Very Important Trail (VIT) initiative to host outings on properties with restricted access to build long-term relationships with private landowners and conservation groups.
- Engage members in advocacy to support and speak up for Ridge Trail projects and priorities.



Trail Challenges and the Path Ahead

Opening future trails will require new strategies and creative partnerships, as the remaining gaps become increasingly complex and expensive to close. More of the future route needs to cross private property, conservation lands, or roads and highways, yet ultimately, the trail needs to tie together into a cohesive whole. Looking for multi-benefit solutions is essential. Challenges such as routing the trail across major roadways entail expensive infrastructure improvements, yet such crossings could serve both people and wildlife, if properly designed. Public trail use on private lands requires careful consideration, establishing long-term relationships, and ongoing communication. With a solid *Gap Analysis and Action Plan* as well as partner support, we're ready to face the trail challenges ahead.

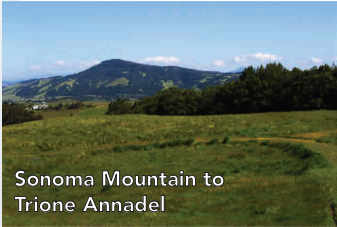


Strategic Plan 2025

- Potential to Open by 2025
- Connection Study Area
- Managed Access Area
- Transportation Crossing



Sugar-Hood Loop



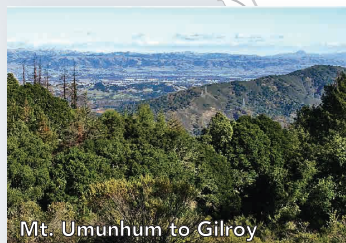
Sonoma Mountain to Trione Annadel



Carquinez Strait Scenic Loop Trail



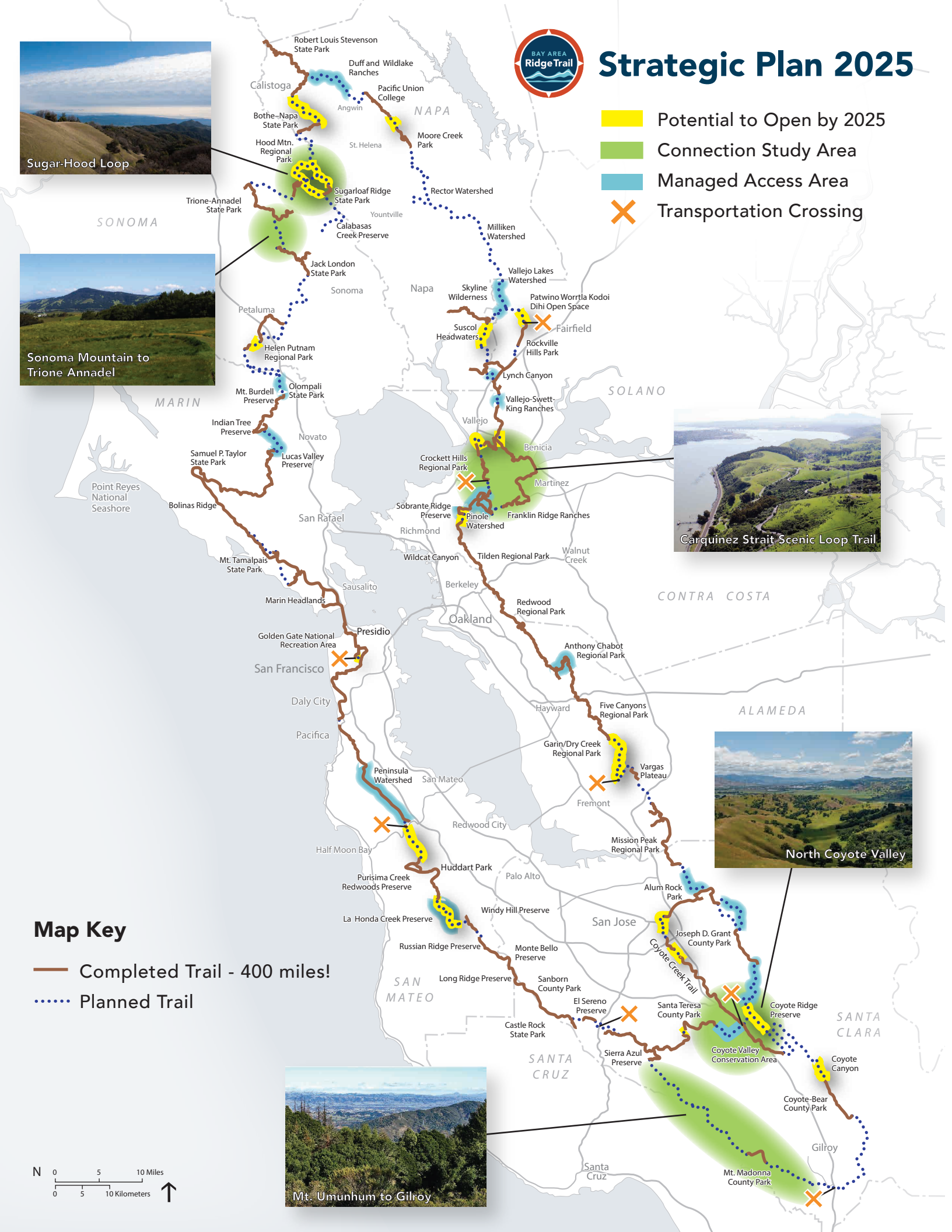
North Coyote Valley



Mt. Umunhum to Gilroy

Map Key

- Completed Trail - 400 miles!
- Planned Trail

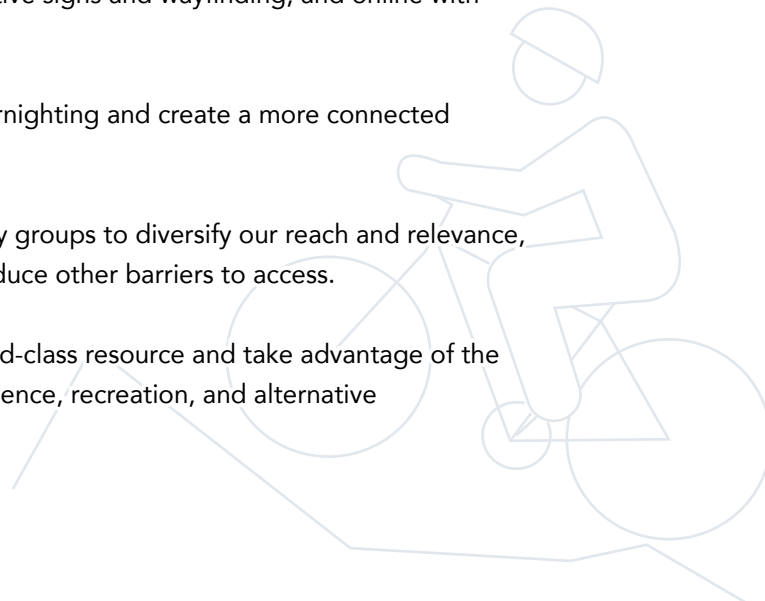




GOAL 2: EXPERIENCE THE TRAIL

Get More People Out on the Trail and Raise Awareness

- Help more people enjoy & care for the Ridge Trail through signature events, outings, volunteering and stewardship.
- Increase Ridge Trail visibility in the field with interpretive signs and wayfinding; and online with improved maps, apps, and social media.
- Promote circumnavigation, multi-day trekking, & overnighting and create a more connected community through events, outreach and resources.
- Cultivate partnerships with a wide array of community groups to diversify our reach and relevance, connect residents with limited transportation, and reduce other barriers to access.
- Expand awareness of the Ridge Trail as a unique world-class resource and take advantage of the current spotlight on trails and nature for respite, resilience, recreation, and alternative transportation.



Circumnavigation: The Ultimate Trail Adventure

As longer stretches of Ridge Trail are knit together (80 continuous miles on the west and 43 on the east!), there is growing interest in multi-day treks and camping or visiting inns along the way. Circumnavigating—traversing all dedicated sections of the Ridge Trail—is the ultimate adventure, right in our own Bay Area backyard. Circumnavigators are on a quest to complete the trail and so are we! We support and inspire circumnavigators with events, resources, maps, and apps – and by working to build a network of overnight camps, huts, and other facilities.



GOAL 3: BUILD & SUSTAIN THE COUNCIL

Expand and Leverage Organizational Success

- Prioritize diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) on the trail, in the organization, and in our plans, programs and communications. Build stronger community connections to help create a sense of belonging for all trail users.
- Increase and diversify revenues (including a full mix of individuals, institutions and events) to drive financial stability for the Council.
- Grow the Trail Opportunity Fund (TOF) as a flexible funding source to accelerate trail progress and make targeted allocations that allow the Council to be a more active partner, and cushion revenue peaks and valleys.



Trail Opportunity Fund

Trail progress can be slowed or stymied by a lack of available funding. The Trail Opportunity Fund (TOF) enables the Council to overcome obstacles and accelerate trail development. The TOF functions as a quick action fund, allowing the Council to be nimble and respond to unforeseen needs or opportunities, and keep critical and time-sensitive trail projects moving ahead to the next phase of development. In addition to overcoming blocks in trail development, TOF allows the Council to offer expanded programs, to leverage public, private, and institutional funding, and to be more active partners. Growing and effectively targeting TOF will be key to mission success.





OUR PARTNERS

Working in partnership is an essential and core value and a strategy to grow and maintain the trail. The Ridge Trail Council collaborates with park agencies and local governments, land trusts, landowners, other stakeholders, and volunteers to plan, acquire, design, build, care for, promote and protect the Ridge Trail. Additional key partnerships with public and private entities provide funding that is instrumental in bringing the Ridge Trail closer to our bold vision of a world-class 550-mile fully connected trail. Over 50% of our budget comes from individual members, who have supported the Ridge Trail – mile by mile – for over 30 years with their dedication to our vision. We are grateful for the leadership, passion and commitment of our agency members, partners, sponsors and individuals.

Agency Members



Key Funders



"The last few years have shown us how much access to parks and open space matters. Our mission is not only to complete the trail but also to deliver a world-class trail experience for all users."

Our focus throughout the strategic planning process led us to develop a plan that responds to the demand for access to trails, is transformational in its scope and intent, and sets the Ridge Trail up for success."

*- Karen Rhodes,
Bay Area Ridge Trail Council
Board Member and Vice Chair*





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*Connecting people, parks and open spaces in
the Bay Area*

