

680 Trail

by Sandy Goldman
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As we go to press, the Marin County Open Space District continues to move forward with its preferred alignment for the 680 Trail to connect Terra Linda/Sleepy Hollow Open Space Preserve (OSP) to the Loma Alta OSP across the top of Sleepy Hollow, mostly on easements across land owned by San Domenico School. The proposed trail is at least 5 feet wide, up to 8 feet in some locations, to accommodate pedestrians, cyclists, and equestrians. Citing the goal to keep grades at or below 7% and provide good visibility around corners, trail planners are using much less of the existing network of trails and dirt roads than Friends would like. Many members of the environmental community would prefer that the connection between the two OSPs use much longer sections of the existing San Domenico Fire Road, Upper Solstice Trail, and Meditation Trail. These could be improved by implementing well-known techniques to reduce erosion. This would avoid creating substantial new cuts across the steep, unstable hillsides of Sleepy Hollow. The un-used existing fire roads would continue to be subject to erosion.

The County's geotechnical re-port for the proposed alignment states: "In total, the complete Alternative 4 alignment contains 14 stream crossings and 17 swales. Of the 14 stream crossings, 6 may be adequately crossed by rocked fords or armored fills, and 8 will require bridges. Springy areas and headwall swale crossings, where near-surface flow and wet soil conditions exist, may require the

addition of drain rock and base rock to improve trail tread strength and durability. A turnpike or similar structure may need to be constructed at Catchment 42 to overcome limitations of low soil strength and saturated conditions. Some of the areas limited by slope will likely require either fillslope or cutslope retaining wall structures to both gain needed trail width and to prevent future slope adjustments caused by

construction of the trail." Note that Catchment 42 is a 2.81-acre drainage located on the Loma Alta OSP/San Domenico School boundary where the proposed trail has switchbacks on the steep slope. The geotechnical report also documents the Natural Resource Conservation Service assessment that the entire length of the proposed 680 Trail corridor occurs on soils susceptible to severe or very severe erosion and their use for hiking, horseback riding, or cycling is unsuitable because of their slope and low soil strength. Other impacts of the proposed route include loss of native grassland and oak woodland.

There is an obvious contradiction in the Open Space District's position on decommissioning redundant existing trails on San Domenico property—something we advocate. The District claims these trails will be used less once the new trail is completed. However, the District states that it cannot decommission them because they are on private property. That seems implausible, as most of the new 680 Trail will be built on private property, also owned by San Domenico School.



The proposed alignment of the 680 Trail crosses the face of the wooded hill seen here with a cloud's shadow passing over it. The trail will traverse San Domenico School property, linking Sleepy Hollow–Terra Linda Divide and Loma Alta Open Space District preserves. Photo by Charles Kennard

The analysis of this trail has been extremely expensive and there is every reason to expect that construction will also be costly, including as it does, 14 bridges, and retaining walls up to 50 feet long and four feet high. Construction of the 680 Trail as proposed is an unwise, inappropriate use of limited resources. There are better ways to reconnect the two OSPs, and if these ways had been taken seriously earlier, all costs could have been reduced.

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