

December 3, 2020

Dear San Jose Mayor and Council,

On behalf of Silicon Valley Bicycle Coalition, we are writing to amplify concerns about the quality of San Jose's trails.

By way of background, Silicon Valley Bicycle Coalition's mission is to improve the community, environment and economy through the everyday use of the bicycle. The organization covers San Mateo and Santa Clara County and works collaboratively with public agencies towards the goal of 10% of trips by bike by 2025.

We are writing because we have failed as a society to create a community in which all can afford to live in Silicon Valley. As a result, SVBC increasingly fields complaints from people who ride bicycles that the trails have too much trash and don't feel safe. In fact, this is an issue that impacts all trail user groups, not just bicyclists, according to the [City of San Jose's 2020 Trail Count Report](#).

SVBC's response has been to bring a greater awareness of housing issues to our membership and to encourage bicyclists to get involved in addressing the root causes of homelessness. We have encouraged our members to say "yes" to housing in their backyard. We have taken our members on several affordable housing tours to learn about housing. And as an organization we have supported ballot measures to fund housing.

That said, while we as a community are responsible for addressing the root of the housing crisis, getting to the root requires a long time horizon. The reality is that trail safety concerns exist today and are an impediment to ridership.

We also want to make it clear that we as an organization believe that many of the trail safety concerns are unfounded. That doesn't matter though. Legitimate or not, these fears are real to trail users.

At this point, **this problem must be elevated above the many worthy priorities** that demand public agency attention. Why?

1. **Covid Offers Opportunities:** Covid has caused many people to dust off their bikes and rediscover their love of bicycling. Unfortunately, these potential new riders are having an experience on our trails that is not positive, stymying our ability to capitalize on this moment.
2. **Climate, Resilience, Health, Affordability:** Achieving modeshift goals as a part of our collective efforts to slow, reverse or adapt to climate change will not happen as long as people are discouraged from walking and biking. As well, walking and biking are key components of a transportation ecosystem that is affordable, resilient and healthy. This is the transportation system we must build towards.
3. **Behavior Change:** Behavior change science tells us that it is in times of major life events that we have the best chance of creating lasting behavior change. We have that opportunity now.
4. **Trails are It:** SVBC recently completed a transportation survey of 1,000 residents in Santa Clara County. Trails scored the highest in terms of the type of bike infrastructure people desire most.



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Shiloh Ballard

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**It is now that we have a window of opportunity to get people to fall in love with riding a bike and start doing it for everyday use.** That is why this issue must be addressed immediately and be elevated in city, county and agency priorities.

We understand that there are several stakeholders working to address these concerns. The San Jose Conservation Corps, Downtown Streets Team and the Guadalupe River Park Conservancy with funding from Valley Water will be growing a program to patrol and maintain the trails. And, there are other entities that have a hand in trail quality, like PRNS. **These are great programs but they need to be grown dramatically as is evidenced by current trail quality. They must be adequately resourced.**

Admittedly, SVBC has not been deeply involved in this issue. Regardless, we would like to offer our thoughts about solutions:

1. **Safety:** Adequately fund programs that put official, friendly people on the trails who can create the feeling of safety. These are civilians, not police officers.
2. **Trash:** Adequately fund the clean-up of trails.
3. **Encampments:** Apply compassionate solutions to those living outside, especially within the context of a highly contagious and dangerous virus. This includes things like installing dumpsters and porta potties. It also includes the City and County's ongoing efforts to provide long term solutions to housing and homelessness and for all cities to be a part of the solution.

We understand that these are not new ideas and that the City, County and other agencies have been pursuing ways to address this problem. Thank you for your efforts. And, **the reason for this letter is to underscore that we must do more and we must do it quick.**

SVBC would also like to note that people who ride bicycles recognize they have a role to play in being a part of the solution. SVBC plans to continue to help its constituency understand the complexity of these issues so that people who ride bicycles are also people who support housing (in their backyard.)

As well, in as much as it would be helpful, SVBC is very interested and willing to recruit and train people who ride bicycles to become volunteers who patrol the trails.

We are very interested in working with you on how to address this issue today before this window of opportunity closes. **Please elevate this as a priority and put more resources into funding the near- term solutions that can have an impact immediately.**

Sincerely,

Shiloh Ballard  
Executive Director

cc: Santa Clara Valley Water District, County of Santa Clara

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Creating a healthy community, environment, and economy through bicycling