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## Editorial: San Jose needs to get serious about trail connections

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Imagine what it would be like if Highway 101 stopped dead in Sunnyvale and spilled traffic out onto city streets — then picked up again a few miles south in Santa Clara. How ridiculous would that be?

This is where San Jose is headed with its trail network.

The alarm sounded last week when the planning commission approved a storage building on an old railroad right-of-way that trail advocates thought was going to be part of the Three Creeks Trail, the only real east-west link that could turn San Jose's scattered trails into a network. The decision, portrayed by city officials as inevitable, is a symptom of unclear intentions and policies regarding trails.

That needs to change. The city needs a coherent trail policy that's consistent in its general plan for development, its Greenprint, or parks plan, and any other document on which city boards and commissions base their decisions. And then it needs a serious strategy for acquiring the rights of way — an area where the city's new parks foundation and other private groups could play a role.

Once thought of as bucolic escapes, trail networks today are part of the urban transportation system. Particularly in a place like San Jose, where new development is focused within existing borders rather than sprawling out, connected trails offer real

— and healthier — alternatives for getting to work and to recreational opportunities on foot or bicycle.

Railroad rights of way, like the former Union Pacific line from Willow Glen to Kelley Park, are prime opportunities that have spawned the national Rails to Trails movement (railstotrails.org). The Willow Glen segment is more broadly accepted as a potential trail, but the segment from Highway 87 to Kelley Park is equally important, even though it runs through some ugly industrial territory: It makes the critical link from the Los Gatos Creek and Guadalupe River trails to the Coyote Creek Trail, with the Tamien Caltrain and light rail station in the middle. Leaving this segment out would be like lopping out that section of Highway 101 and expecting the rest of it still to be as useful.

Fortunately, advocates are mobilizing through Save Our Trails (saveourtrails-scc.org), formed last year to prevent the loss of a Willow Glen segment of the Three Creeks Trail and now broadening its reach. Other organizations, including Friends of the Guadalupe River Park, are looking for grants to help build the trail network.

The recent setback was over the Stucco Supply Co. plan to build a storage facility on the right of way near Little Orchard Street. But don't blame the company. It bought the land fair and square from the railroad. The problem is ambiguous city policies.

One setback won't kill the trail plan, but more of the same will.

Mayor Chuck Reed has made the trail network part of his "green vision" for San Jose, and advocates are mobilizing. Ultimately, more money is needed to buy the Three Creeks Trail right of way, and that may prove to be the plan's downfall — but the first step has to be clarity in city plans and policies and a

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serious strategy to implement them. If these steps have not been taken by the time the economy revives, it will be too late.

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