



Editorial: A bike path growing on Garden Highway

Published Tuesday, Feb. 03, 2009

Sitting atop a flood-control levee that protects Natomas from the Sacramento River, the Garden Highway is poised for a monumental construction project starting this year. The Sacramento Area Flood Control Agency is planning to repair and widen levees along this stretch of river and other parts of Natomas, starting in Sutter County and working south. Some of the construction work will be disruptive to residents and destructive to hundreds of trees. But at the end, Natomas will be far safer place, and the stage will be set for major improvements in habitat and recreation and for a safer Garden Highway.

At the moment, SAFCA is fully focused on the task of working with landowners and securing needed funds and permits to repair 25 miles of levee. Yet despite those challenges, it is not too soon for SAFCA and the region to recognize an opportunity in Natomas. A wider levee could be the foundation for a bicycle and hiking trail that would stretch from Sutter County down to Sacramento.

This idea was discussed at SAFCA's meeting Thursday. To their credit, both Supervisor Roger Dickinson and City Councilman Ray Tretheway voiced support for the idea. Dickinson noted the "serious safety issue" that bicyclists face on the Garden Highway. Tretheway mentioned the potential for bike commuting and recreation along this scenic river corridor. "This could be a destination for the entire region," he said. Although the county is examining the future potential of a multiple-use trail on the Garden Highway, this is a project that needs to be thought through now.

Help will be needed in securing funding and working with SAFCA, the local reclamation district and Garden Highway residents on the logistics of designing and maintaining such a trail. With the change in the White House, the next federal transportation bill is expected to put more money into bicycle projects and other alternatives to the automobile. A bike and foot path along the river in Natomas deserves to be part of that mix.