

Park to Playa Trail Feasibility Study and Wayfinding Plan

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Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority

Prepared By:
Alta Planning + Design

Acknowledgements

Agency Staff

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City of Los Angeles Department of Transportation
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City of Culver City

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1. Introduction



The Park to Playa Trail will connect 13 miles of trails from Urban Los Angeles to the Pacific Ocean

1.1 Project Background and Purpose

The Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority (MRCA) commissioned this trail feasibility and wayfinding study for the seven-mile “Park to Playa” corridor within Baldwin Hills, a district of Los Angeles County. In 2000, the Park to Playa vision was first articulated: to connect the Ballona Wetlands area in Marina Del Rey east along Ballona Creek to the Baldwin Hills. The vision to create a seamless trail that connects urban residents with the Pacific coast will be realized through a cooperative effort between several agencies and jurisdictions. The final trail will be approximately 13 miles long and will connect the trail systems, parks and open spaces within the Baldwin Hills, along Ballona Creek, to the Ballona Wetlands and the Marvin Braude Bike Trail along the beach. This Feasibility Study (The Study) advances the Park to Playa vision by connecting trails and parklands within the Baldwin Hills and enhancing accessibility for residents in adjacent communities.

The objective of the Feasibility Study is to articulate a regional trail system by linking together and improving existing trail segments, identifying alignments to close gaps, and creating a plan that targets achievable projects. The Study’s scope includes planning the physical trail connections, improvements and amenities. The wayfinding plan will help users navigate the Park to Playa trail, brand the network, and transform the individual segments into a recognizable and memorable regional trail. The project area bridges five park jurisdictions. Trail use policies and standards vary within each of the jurisdictions. The Study responds to existing use policies and design approaches, while striving to provide a consistent identity along the Park to Playa Trail.

1.2 Site Setting

The ridge lines and canyons of the Baldwin Hills cover two square miles of open space located within the Santa Monica Bay watershed, a densely urbanized area in southwestern Los Angeles County (see Figure 1.1). As the last large open space remaining within urbanized Los Angeles County, Baldwin Hills provides refuge and respite to both wildlife and people. The coastal sage scrub vegetation features areas of valuable natural habitat for California native flora and fauna as well as space for passive and active recreation for community enjoyment.

The Baldwin Hills Parklands are owned and managed by a number of public and private entities, and its existing uses range from active recreation, to habitat restoration and preservation to active oil and gas production and processing.

The Study project area begins at the State of California-owned Stocker Corridor to the East, and crosses through and connects the land and trail systems of Los Angeles County’s Ruben Ingold Park; the City of Los Angeles Norman O. Houston Park; Kenneth Hahn State Recreation Area (KHSRA), which is operated by Los Angeles County Department of Parks and Recreation; the Baldwin Hills Scenic Overlook, owned and operated by California State Parks; and Culver City Park to the west, owned and operated by the City of Culver City (see Figure 1.2).



Figure 1.1 Ballona Creek Watershed

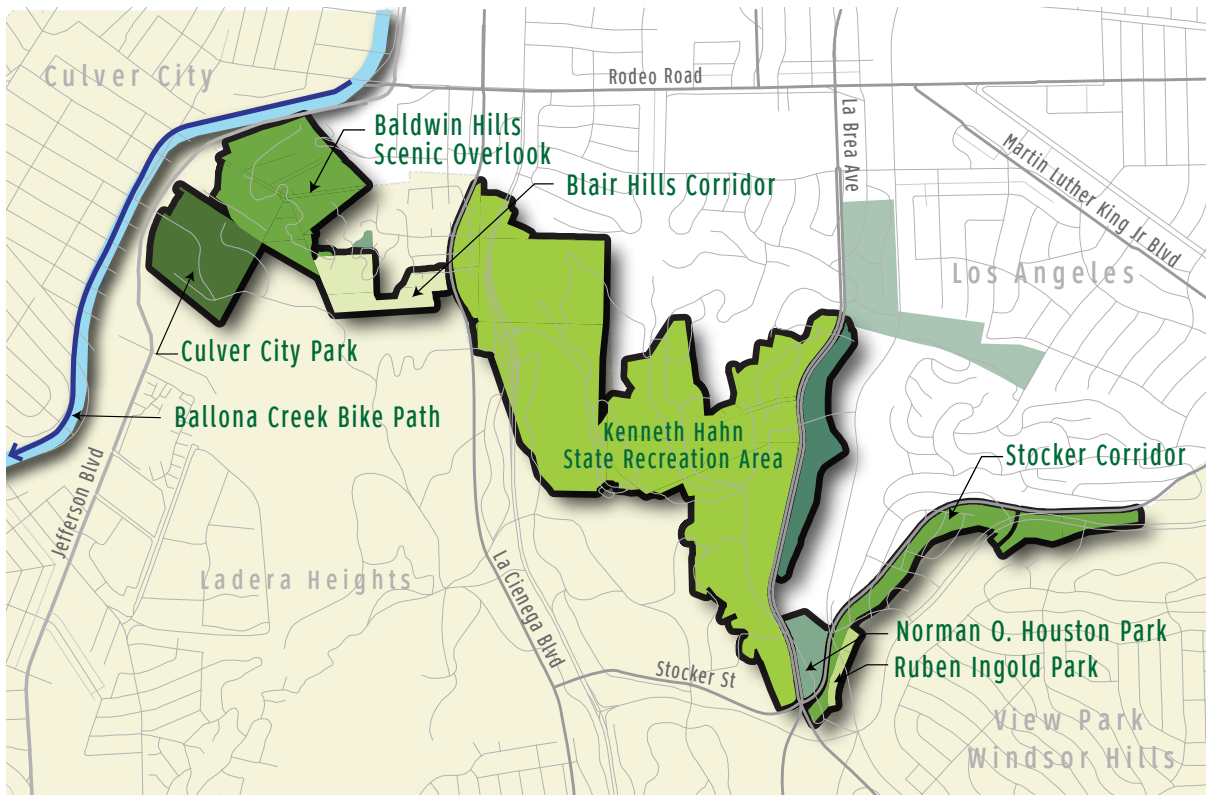


Figure 1.2 Park to Playa Trail Feasibility Study Study Area

1.3 Project Approach

In 2011, the MRCA, in partnership with the Office of Supervisor Mark Ridley-Thomas, retained Alta Planning + Design to prepare this Park to Playa Feasibility Study and Wayfinding Plan. The development of the Feasibility Study involved several phases, including coordination with project partners, data collection, evaluation of the existing environment and planning context, and extensive public participation at three key stages: 1.) route alternatives and corridor conditions stage; 2.) draft trail alignments and improvements stage; and 3.) draft Study report stage. The Study is designed to present the preferred trail alignments and recommendations for design, phasing, and implementation.

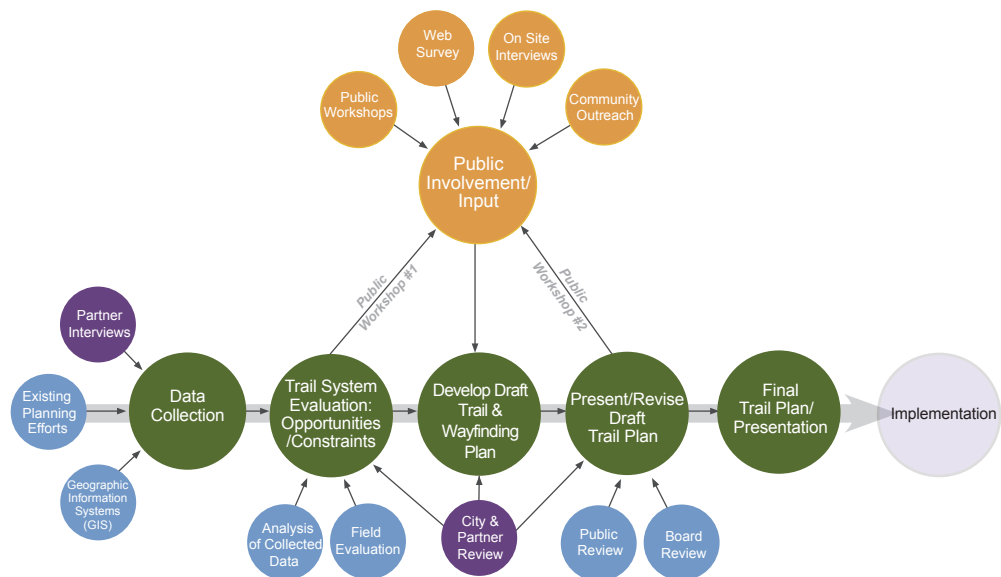


Figure 1.3 Project Approach

1.4 Project Partners

The Park to Playa Trail is a collaboration between numerous partners, including state agencies, regional entities, local governments and organizations as listed in Table 1.1. Project partners participated in technical advisory meetings and follow-up discussions to inform alignment recommendations and implementation actions.

1.5 Public Outreach

The public outreach program included information about the project posted on agency websites, an online survey, on-site interviews with trail and park patrons, and three public workshops. An overview of the public's comments and desires is presented in Chapter 2. A full report of public comments submitted at the public workshops can be found in Appendix A.

Table 1.1 Park to Playa Trail Agency Partners
Land Owners and Land Managers
Baldwin Hills Regional Conservation Authority
California Department of Parks and Recreation
City of Los Angeles Department of Recreation and Parks
City of Los Angeles Department of Transportation
City of Culver City
Los Angeles County Department of Public Works - Watershed Management Division
Los Angeles County Flood Control District
Los Angeles County Parks and Recreation
Agencies
Office of Second District Supervisor Mark Ridley-Thomas
Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority
Baldwin Hills Conservancy
California State Coastal Conservancy
Santa Monica Bay Restoration Commission

1.6 Project Objectives

The Park to Playa Trail (the Trail) is a regional network that ties together trails and paths in several jurisdictions and park facilities. The design of the Trail will vary depending on site conditions and uses and the policies and practices of the agency with jurisdiction over the relevant portion of the route. In this context, the participating agencies agreed to basic shared design objectives and a recommended design guidelines for the Trail.

The following objectives guide the planning and implementation of the Park to Playa Trail. The objectives are guidelines rather than adopted policies, but they are consistent with the policies and practices of the agencies involved in the trail project. In some cases there might be conflict between objectives on a particular trail section or feature. In these cases the policies and processes of the agency with jurisdiction would be used to make a determination, with the other participating agencies in a commenting role.

1. Provide a Park to Playa regional trail identity in terms of public awareness, involvement and useful public information;
2. Provide a trail that can be easily found and followed by users, with a unique design signature created by signage and design elements;
3. Provide connections to important destinations in the region by coordinating with other existing and planned trails, bicycle and pedestrian routes;
4. Be compatible with the facilities, policies and uses of the park and private lands on or adjacent to the trail route;

5. Respect private property rights and work only on a willing seller basis to acquire land or easements for the trail where public access does not currently exist;
6. Provide a safe and enjoyable trail experience by designing and managing to standards and best practices;
7. Provide a sustainable trail that avoids impacts on the environment or neighbors and requires minimal maintenance;
8. Improve the natural habitat along the trail by realigning inappropriately designed or unnecessary existing trails and disturbed areas and restoring them back to native landscape;
9. Provide or identify support facilities for trail users such as parking, restrooms, water, and bike racks,
10. Provide amenities such as benches, shade, interpretive materials, and art installations to make the trail a more enjoyable and informative experience.