



THE CITY OF SAN DIEGO  
**REPORT TO THE CITY COUNCIL**

DATE ISSUED: October 8, 2008

REPORT NO. 08-144

ATTENTION: Natural Resources and Culture Committee  
Agenda of October 15, 2008

SUBJECT: Ruffin Canyon Public Trail Tunnel

REQUESTED ACTION:

Provide a recommendation to City Council on whether the existing Friars Road undercrossing should be opened for public use as the Ruffin Canyon Public Trail Tunnel.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

Support the opening of the Ruffin Canyon Public Trail Tunnel and forward a recommendation to the City Council to that effect.

SUMMARY:

Background

An existing, improved undercrossing traverses Friars Road midway between Fenton Parkway and Northside Drive (Attachment 1). Originally constructed in 1968 as a truck crossing below Friars Road to serve adjacent mining operations, the undercrossing consists of two cell box culverts, with each cell measuring 15' by 15'. In the mid 1990s as mining operations were coming to a close and the site was being planned for development, the concept of utilizing the undercrossing as a pedestrian tunnel first emerged. Working closely with the Mission Valley Unified Planning Committee, planning consultants and City staff included the pedestrian tunnel in the Mission City Specific Plan, adopted by the City Council on April 21, 1998. The Specific Plan includes an extensive system of pedestrian trails and sidewalks that function as a cohesive element. The pedestrian tunnel is an integral component of the system, linking different land uses with one another and with public spaces, including nearby Ruffin Canyon. The pedestrian tunnel is recognized as critical to the establishment of a continuous pedestrian and bicycle linkage from the residential areas north of Friars Road, through commercial and office uses on the south side, and to the San Diego Trolley and the San Diego River corridor.

## Policy Discussion

The Mission Valley Community Plan, the Mission City Specific Plan, and the Draft San Diego River Park Master Plan include policies for the creation of an extensive pedestrian circulation system, as well as specific policy language for the provision of a public trail connection from Ruffin Canyon through the Mission City development site and under Friars Road to Fenton Marketplace. The Mission Valley Community Plan acknowledges that, in the past, there has been little effort to encourage or provide for pedestrian circulation as a significant mode of transportation. Therefore, the Community Plan emphasizes the need to provide physical linkages in the form of pedestrian paths and bikeways between new and existing development, public and private amenities, and the San Diego River corridor. The River corridor is recognized by the Community Plan as the focal point or “spine” of an expansive open space linkage system for Mission Valley and surrounding communities. With pedestrian pathways along the San Diego River serving as the base for this open space linkage system, creating connections to these pathways, such as the opening of the pedestrian tunnel, is an integral component to promoting walkability in the developing urban node of Mission Valley.

In accordance with Mission Valley Community Plan policies, the Mission City Specific Plan includes policies for alternative circulation systems and mobility options which aim to provide a network for pedestrian and bicycle travel that would serve as a safe and convenient alternative to motor vehicle use. A key component of the Specific Plan’s pedestrian and bicycle network is the Mission City Trail, which extends from the Serra Mesa community, through the residential component of the Mission City Specific Plan Area, under Friars Road through the pedestrian tunnel, and across Fenton Marketplace to such amenities as the Mission Valley Library, San Diego Trolley and the San Diego River. In addition to the mobility component of the trail, the Specific Plan also envisions that the extension of the Mission City Trail through this area would provide hiking and nature viewing opportunities, expanding the passive open space experience for area residents.

The Draft San Diego River Park Master Plan also includes numerous policies for establishing and expanding walkability throughout the communities adjacent to the River. The Draft Master Plan specifically states that pedestrian safety and continuity of pedestrian movement is improved by eliminating conflicts and interactions with vehicles, and that “the construction and use of grade separated pedestrian passages is encouraged, such as the one under Friars Road at Fenton Marketplace.” (Pg. 50) The creation of similar passages are encouraged in order to improve pedestrian movement between the river valley and upland neighborhoods and canyons. Therefore, as cited in the Draft San Diego River Park Master Plan, the Ruffin Canyon Public Trail Tunnel should not only be opened to allow for public access, but should also serve as a model for possible future trail connections along the River.

## Related Projects

The proposed opening of the Ruffin Canyon Public Trail Tunnel to the public will have a positive impact on the ongoing efforts of the San Diego River Conservancy to create a River Park along the entire length of the San Diego River, as well as with their efforts to establish rim-to-rim trail connections from communities adjacent to the river valley as part of their San Diego

River Tributary Canyons Project. The Conservancy is currently in the process of planning a continuous trail connection from Ruffin Canyon, located north of the River, to Mission Valley, and from Mission Valley south to Normal Heights Canyon. This project includes a proposed footbridge across the river, as well as wayfinding information and interpretive signage to demarcate the urban trail that will connect the upland communities to the canyons. Once implemented, the project would provide for a system of trails and sidewalks connecting adjacent upland communities such as Serra Mesa and Normal Heights to and across the San Diego River and the urban attractions of Mission Valley, including the trolley line. The opening of the pedestrian tunnel will be key to linking community centers north and south of the River to Mission Valley along canyon trails and designated urban paths with minimized pedestrian-automobile conflicts.

### Next Steps

The process of opening the Ruffin Canyon Public Trail Tunnel to the public involves two steps: 1) completion of physical improvements to the tunnel, and 2) certification of a legal agreement covering the ongoing maintenance of the tunnel. The H.G. Fenton Company, developers of the adjacent property on the north side of Friars Road, have already completed several improvements to the tunnel and have agreed in principal to completing the construction of the remaining improvements, pursuant to their existing Encroachment and Maintenance Agreement (EMRA). The improvements completed to date include the construction of two concrete wing walls projecting at an angle away from the south side of the tunnel entrance; the installation of an electrical box; paving of the tunnel floor; and the placement of gates on both sides of the tunnel. The remaining improvements to be implemented by the H.G. Fenton Company include: the installation of ceiling-mounted lighting running the entire length of the tunnel, painting the walls and ceiling, and staining the floor. H.G. Fenton Company is currently working with the City Attorney's Office in drafting an agreement to replace the EMRA and to transfer the improvements to the City.

With regard to the ongoing maintenance of the tunnel, Sudberry Properties, developers of the adjacent property on the south side of Friars Road, have agreed in principal to accept the long-term maintenance responsibilities. The City Attorney is working with Sudberry to finalize a maintenance agreement which addresses issues of security, liability, opening hours, and specific maintenance duties. The maintenance agreement will address issues of security, liability, opening hours, and specific maintenance duties. This agreement will then be scheduled for a hearing of the City Council for approval, along with the recommendation from the Natural Resources and Culture Committee regarding the opening of the tunnel.

### FISCAL CONSIDERATIONS:

None with this action.

PREVIOUS COUNCIL and/or COMMITTEE ACTION: None.

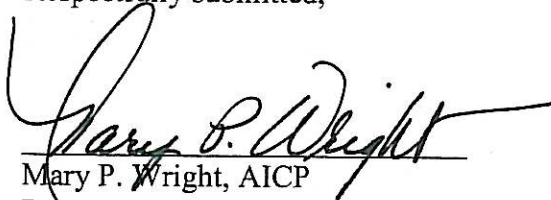
### COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION AND PUBLIC OUTREACH EFFORTS:

On April 7, 2004, the Mission Valley Unified Planning Committee voted 11-0-3 to support the public tunnel under Friars Road. On September 5, 2007, the Mission Valley Unified Planning

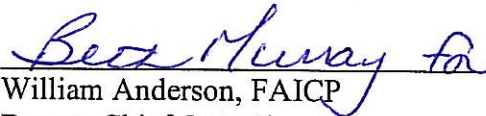
Committee voted 16-0-0 to again reaffirm its support for the opening of the tunnel to the public. On February 21, 2008, the Serra Mesa Planning Group voted unanimously to support the opening of the pedestrian undercrossing.

KEY STAKEHOLDERS & PROJECTED IMPACTS: Key Stakeholders include: Mission Valley Unified Planning Committee, Serra Mesa Planning Committee, Friends of Ruffin Canyon, Friends of Normal Heights Canyon, San Diego River Conservancy, San Diego River Park Foundation.

Respectfully submitted,



Mary P. Wright, AICP  
Deputy Director  
City Planning & Community Investment



William Anderson, FAICP  
Deputy Chief Operating Officer  
City Planning & Development

ANDERSON/WRIGHT/BSS

- Attachments:
1. Project Location
  2. April 7, 2004 MVUPC meeting minutes
  3. September 5, 2007 MVUPC meeting minutes
  4. February 16, 2008 Letter from Serra Mesa CPG
  5. Mission Valley Community Plan Pedestrian Circulation Map
  6. Mission City Specific Plan - Planning Area Map
  7. Mission City Specific Plan - Circulation Plan
  8. Site Photos