



Western Regional Office
235 Montgomery Street, Suite 769
San Francisco, CA 94104

tel 415.814.1100
fax 415.989.1255

www.railstotrails.org

July 25, 2012

Mr. Robert E. Doyle
General Manager
East Bay Regional Park District
2950 Peralta Oaks Court
Oakland, California 94605

Subject: Support for the East Bay Regional Park District Community Transformation Grant (CTG) application

Dear Mr. Doyle:

We have been a longtime supporter of the East Bay Regional Park District's emphasis on health, outdoor activity and green transportation. With that in mind, we are writing in support of the East Bay Regional Park District's application for a Community Transformation Grant (CTG).

One of the key elements which make the East San Francisco Bay area a healthy and vibrant place to live is the tremendous asset of the East Bay Regional Park District. With 112,000 acres of accessible parkland, 1,200 miles of trails – including over 200 miles of paved trails which serve as a transportation alternative making it easier for commuters and students to get to mass transit hubs – the District plays a critical role in both the physical and mental wellness of our region, as well as providing a substantial health and quality of life benefit. Indeed, the District has been a preventative health care provider in the East Bay for 78 years.

Over the years, the District has supported the international *Healthy Parks, Healthy People* (HPHP) initiative – the only regional or local government to do so in the United States. In support of HPHP, the District proposes to lead a multi-sector collaborative – the Get Outdoors! (GO!) Network for Healthy Kids – to further strengthen the relationship between health, education and outdoor activity providers. The GO! Network brings together school districts, the medical community, the U.C. Berkeley Center for Weight and Health, and EcoVillage (regional non-profit focusing on sustainable, healthy food and nutrition). This well-rounded collaborative uniquely addresses *Active Living and Healthy Eating* in the impacted communities of Oakland and Richmond, California.

The GO! Network has several key components:

- The Full Service Community School and District model – using schools as sites to holistically meet student, family and community needs. This includes **Parks Prescription** strategies to train teachers and school district staff in the health related value of outdoor activity.
- California **Children's Outdoor Bill of Rights** (COBOR) – a statewide resolution which recommends ten outdoor activities every child has the “right” to experience before the age of 14.
- Shed light on **transportation and policy barriers** which can literally keep kids from experiencing the outdoors. The District and its' partners will work with other stakeholders – including our agency – to address those challenges. The Rails-to-Trails Conservancy would welcome the opportunity to advise the collaborative on transportation related matters. Ultimately, the GO! Network will provide a concrete example of a truly **transformative, replicable model** to promote outdoor activity, increase communitywide awareness of opportunities to move outside, fund collaborations and reduce park access barriers.



rails-to-trails
conservancy

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Currently, the District's facilities are used by 14 million visitors a year. Expanding the District's reach into our education and health care communities will further enhance the wellness and health of the East Bay – particularly in the urban corridors of Oakland and Richmond where families have limited safe outdoor options.

The District's facilities and programs improve our region's economic competitiveness by providing low-cost, safe outdoor activity opportunities in an urban environment. Connecting the District's role in our community with schools and health care providers will help reduce health care costs for employers, address chronic diseases before they happen, enhance the quality of life for residents, and provide schools additional resources and promotional assets – all of which further bolster business and worker recruiting efforts for our region.

Finally, the District is a model public agency in the East Bay which successfully links communities together in a manner that has the regional interest at its core. The District is financially sound and has significant local matching funds of its own, as well as other state and federal grants – including a \$10.2 million TIGER II award in 2008 for their paved trail network.

Supporting the GO! Network for Healthy Kids will serve as a model and catalyst for regional wellness and livability. Rails-to-Trails Conservancy enthusiastically supports this proposal and we urge your favorable consideration.

Sincerely,

Laura R. Cohen, J.D., LEED AP
Director, Western Region
Rails-to-Trails Conservancy