

A Bicycle Road Warrior's Report from the Streets of North Natomas

Notes: This document should be viewed in Print Layout view. The photo size can be increased by increasing the size of the entire document.

The single most difficult obstacle faced by the North Natomas bicyclist is getting into and out of North Natomas. Connecting with the American River Parkway trail or getting to downtown through Discovery Park can be difficult and dangerous to accomplish. When the parkway is flooded it is, of course, impossible to get to downtown or eastward on the trail. At best the trip requires the death defying act of going over the I-80 bridges (Truxel, Northgate and San Juan). In addition to the danger of crossing on/off ramps, the bridge sidewalks are often covered with broken glass & other debris.

Other possible routes in and out of Natomas, such as Elkhorn Blvd. and Del Paso, are fraught with problems which will be described below.

Beginning in mid-2004, when I began making the trip to Discovery Park on a regular basis, the least dangerous route (from my starting point at Northborough and Elkhorn Blvd.) has been as follows:

We wend our way through suburban streets to Del Paso and East Commerce (see North Park & Brookmere below). The green light for southbound East Commerce is so short that bicyclists can barely make it to the suicide lane before the light begins to turn.

We progress southward on East Commerce, through the Arco Arena parking lot to Arena Blvd., cross to Innovator and proceed south to a right turn on Natomas Crossing. Where Natomas Crossing dead ends we proceed through the barrier to Airport Road where we turn left toward San Juan.



After construction began in mid-2005 on the sewage pumping station at San Juan and Airport Road this stretch became progressively less pleasant and more dangerous due

to the construction. There are now additional construction projects about to begin along Airport Road which may make this route completely untenable forcing us to the Truxel I-80 bridge.

From the end of Airport Road the crossing of San Juan is dicey due the high speed of the traffic and absence of a traffic light.

The traffic lanes on the San Juan Bridge are narrow and there is no bike lane. There is no ramp to provide access to the sidewalk. Both the sidewalk and roadway are covered with debris which makes passage difficult and dangerous.



At Azevedo and San Juan the road narrows at the entrance to the traffic circle. There is no provision for bicycles. With the bikes carrying speed from the bridge downhill and the cars coming fast from the long, uninterrupted stretch of West San Juan, it can get interesting at the choke point. Danger seems to have been engineered in at this location.



Northwest Corner of North Park Dr. & Brookmere Way:

The existing trail which comes from the north and passes through Redbud Park ends abruptly in a curb configuration that requires the deftness of an X Games trick rider to negotiate. Hard to understand what the thought process was here.



At present it is difficult to see how this trail is going to connect to the Regional Park which is just across North Park Dr.

From the above obstacle the rider proceeds about 40 yards west on North Park to pick up the existing trail that parallels Broadwater Dr. at the west end of the Regional Park. In the left photo below the Redbud trail ends to the left of the car, the north end of the Broadwater Trail is in the foreground. In the right hand photo you can see an opening in the curb on the north side of North Park. This may, or may not, be a planned continuation of the trail north along the west side of the drainage ditch. The existing Redbud Trail is on the east side of the ditch.



The Broadwater Trail ends abruptly at the dead end of Town Center Dr. (left photo).



After 20 or 30 yards of sidewalk you are deposited (via an apartment complex driveway) onto Town Center Dr. just north of the traffic circle. The bike lane is very narrow and generally full of parked cars.

Regency Park:

When you enter the park at the north end, off Bridgecorss, you have a very pleasant ride through the park on a very fine trail. However, when you reach the south east corner of the park, at Honor Pkwy, you are confronted with the following:



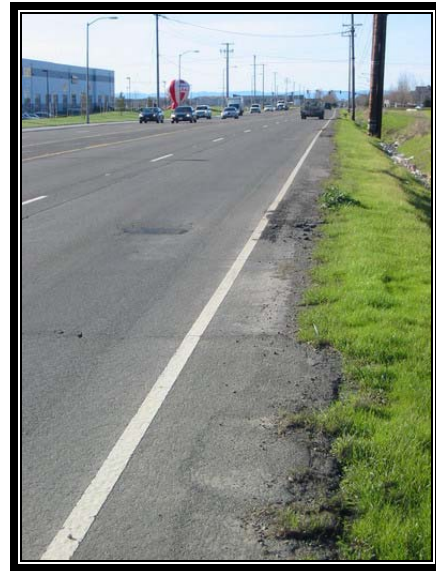
...a dead end with full curb.

To continue south to Regency Park Circle and Club Center Dr. you must turn right, proceed 15 yards to a driveway (at the red curb) and do a 180 across traffic (left photo). If you turn left on to the sidewalk you must proceed 50 yards to Regency Park Circle where you are unable to make a 90 right turn because of the curb configuration (right photo).



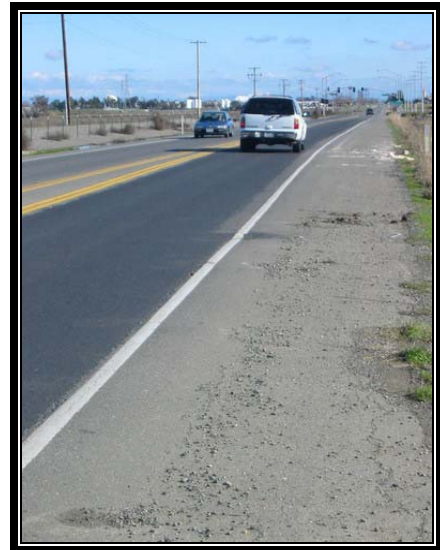
Del Paso Boulevard – East of Blackrock Dr. to Northgate:

Del Paso Blvd. is a potential route in and out of North Natomas. In theory you could follow it to the new Main St. bridge and eventually work your way over to the Rio Linda extension of the American River Bike Trail. In fact this route is not viable. East bound on Del Paso there are sections with neither sidewalk nor bike lane. Westbound from Northgate the bike lane along the Panhandle narrows to between 1 and 2 feet in sections. Like most other bike lanes it is covered in gravel, debris and broken pavement in places forcing the rider into the traffic lane to his/her peril. The following photos are from the Panhandle section of westbound Del Paso:



Elkhorn Boulevard:

Another possible route in/out of North Natomas is Elkhorn Blvd. to Rio Linda where connection with the Rio Linda extension of the American River Bike Trail is possible. However, at best Elkhorn is an unpleasant ride because of the volume and speed of traffic. At worst it is not possible because of the complete absence of a bike lane (between Natomas Blvd. and Highway 99 there is no bike lane). In places where bike lanes do exist they are either too narrow or are choked with gravel, broken glass and debris. It is possible to travel east from Sage View to Rio Linda, but the journey is marred by the above problems. Westbound from the East Drainage Canal the bike lane (which is covered with gravel and debris) becomes progressively narrower until it ceases to exist about a half mile east of Sage View. The rider is forced to cross the road and ride against traffic to Sage View where he/she can exit Elkhorn for Bridgecross. The following photos are of eastbound Elkhorn beginning at the northern terminus of the Main Drainage Canal Bike Trail at Natomas Blvd. and Elkhorn. The view is east to Sage View:





The following photos are of eastbound Elkhorn east of Sage View to the railroad tracks:

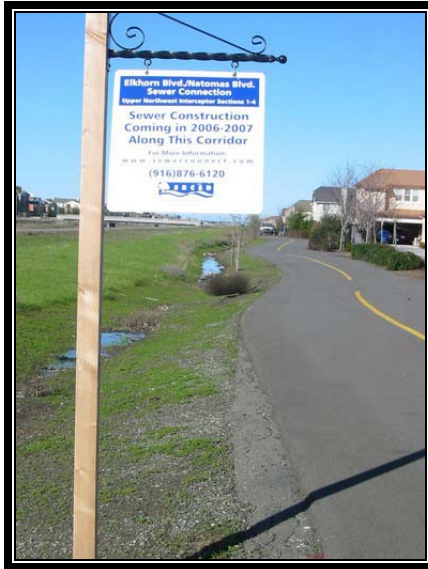




The bike lanes all along Elkhorn are covered with gravel and debris. This forces the rider to stay as far left as possible putting him/her much too close to traffic. Most of the time the rider is forced to utilize the traffic lane itself--keeping a constant eye on the rearview mirror, and at on-coming traffic, prepared to move right as danger approaches. Not a pleasant or safe way to ride.

Main Drainage Canal:

As all North Natomas bike riders know, there are major problems with connectivity and continuity among the various trail sections along the Main Drainage Canal. Additionally, the future of this entire section of trail is very muddled at this point. The ongoing project to build a sewer line from Citrus Heights to Elk Grove hangs over this area like a guillotine. We have known for some time that the sewer line was going to go right down Natomas Blvd. from Elkhorn southward. The exact route was less clear. On 19 Jan 06 I took the following photo on the east side of the canal just north of Del Paso:



It would seem that documenting existing problems with these trail segments might be an exercise in futility. This entire section of trail may be obliterated. The best approach might be to try to influence how things are put back together once the big pipe is laid to rest. However, for the record I'll document some existing conditions as examples of what not to do during reconstruction. The photo on the left is from the north side of Club Center looking south; the photo on the right is from the south looking north:



There are full curbs directly in front of each trail's end. There are driveways just to the canal side of the trail. However, these were not created with any consideration to the bike trail, but exist to provide access for levee maintenance. The center median in Club Center Dr. is an impenetrable barrier. The median extends westward across the canal nearly to Natomas Blvd.

Park Place:

The following photos are at the north end of a trail segment that begins at Del Paso and runs north along the east side of Park Place, next to Khol's, and ends at North Bend. The photo on the left shows the trail's abrupt end. A bike rider has to jog left into the Park Place driveway. There is a nice driveway with which to enter or cross North Bend. This, of course, is just coincidence with no special consideration given to the bike trail. The photo on the right is a view north across North Bend to a nice curb-less driveway, a bit of pavement, and a dirt path ending at a gravel trail segment northward along the canal. OK for mountain bikes, but not good for road bikes. A crosswalk across North Bend leading to a paved entrance to a paved trail would be a nice touch.



Del Paso at East Drainage Canal:

As the photo below shows, the southbound trail on the east side of the canal ends abruptly with a full curb at Del Paso. Were the trail to be continued southward this curb, plus the curbs in the median, would have to be modified. A crosswalk would have to be added:



On the west side of the canal and on the south side of Del Paso we have this:



This trail begins a block south at Terracina Dr. and runs behind the Granite Point Apartments. It may have been built by the developer. It curves to the left and becomes a sidewalk along Del Paso where it continues to the entrance to Park Place. For our purposes it would be nice if it went straight across Del Paso to join with the trail along the east side of Park Place. However, at present there is a curb and a center median and

no crosswalk. Below is a photo of the Del Paso median looking west to the south entrance of Park Place--note the narrow breaks between the curb stones (more on them below):



I'm always amused when a building or a park is built and people first begin to use it. In a short time foot paths begin to appear in grass and landscaping features get trampled as people, by their actual usage, show the designers where they should have included sidewalks and crossings in the first place. This median is a good example of that phenomenon. The following photo shows but one of five spaces between the curb stones where footprints and bike tracks in the mud clearly show that people are using the bike/pedestrian paths and want to cross this median here (at the logical connection point of the two trails) rather than 50 yards west at the traffic light.



Northbound Truxel:

It is possible to travel northward along the east side of Truxel from I-80. The road is wide and there are even sidewalks in some places. However, bicycle rides will go to great lengths to separate themselves from heavy, fast traffic. As an alternative to Truxel, what people actually do is go behind McDonald's, travel north through the long parking lot that serves the office buildings on Truxel, cross Arena Blvd. (with difficulty) and enter the detention basin shown in the following photo. They enter at the south west corner of the basin which is at the top right in the photo.



No matter which side of the basin you choose to follow, there is only one way out. You must pass from the sidewalk, across the narrow strip of decorative bark in the foreground. From the other side it looks like this:



It's a dicey maneuver with thin road tires. The dead end of Terracina Dr. is at the top of the hill. It is not easy or direct, but you can connect with the trail that goes behind the Granite Point Apartments that was pictured above. You can then cross Del Paso (at your

peril), proceed north along the east side of Park Place, cross North Bend to the east side of the canal, proceed north to the obstacle course at Club Center. From Club Center it is a relative walk in the park to Elkhorn. People who I have introduced to this route are totally baffled at the end of the ride and say they couldn't retrace it if their lives depended on it. Connecting the various trail segments would make it much easier.

Undoubtedly the road out of the detention basin is not a bike trail. It is clearly an access road to the water tower and possibly some associated pumping equipment. It's easy to say that people just shouldn't go this way, but the fact is, they do. Maybe we should try to make it better or provide a more attractive alternative.

Natomas Park:

The following photo was taken on the north side of Natomas Park on Danbrook Dr. just east of Crest Dr. It is the beginning of a very wonderful path that winds through the park all the way to North Bend Dr. It is a much appreciated asset.



However, it could be improved. At the beginning of the trail it is necessary to lift your bike over the following obstacle:



I would be happy to hear from anyone who has comments on, or suggested additions to, the above.

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