TO:       HONORABLE CITY COUNCIL

FROM:     CITY MANAGER  DEPARTMENT: PLANNING AND
          COMMUNITY ENVIRONMENT

DATE:     DECEMBER 13, 2004

SUBJECT:  STATUS OF MIDTOWN/MIDDLEFIELD ROAD TRAFFIC STUDY

This is an informational report and no Council action is required.

BACKGROUND
As part of Council’s May 19, 2003 approval of a new traffic signal on Middlefield Road at
the Midtown Shopping Center and Bryson Court (including new left-turn pockets for both
directions), Council directed the Transportation Division to conduct a feasibility study of re-
configuring Middlefield Road in the vicinity of Midtown from four to three lanes. Council
also asked staff to evaluate the need for the pedestrian signal near Baskin-Robbins and
Walgreens, along with consideration of any further measures to enhance pedestrian and
cyclist safety in the vicinity. Staff was directed to report back to Council with findings and
recommendations within a year of installation of the new Midtown traffic signal. The
minutes of the Council meeting of May 19, 2003 pertaining to these topics are attached
(Attachment A).

The Midtown signal was installed and made operational in July 2004. Staff convened an
informal panel of residents and business people to assist in the evaluation tasks directed by
Council. The advisory group, which initially was comprised of representatives of the
Midtown Residents Association Traffic Committee and other Midtown area residents, the
Palo Alto Bicycle Advisory Committee, and Midtown merchants, has since been augmented
by the addition of several residents of Ross Road and Cowper Street who have expressed
interest in participating. The composition of the advisory group is shown in Attachment B.

DISCUSSION
The study Council directed staff to undertake is underway and is comprised of several
elements. Staff received a Traffic Engineering Technical Assistance Program (TETAP)
grant from the Metropolitan Transportation Commission (MTC) for consultant assistance in
computer simulation of the effects of a three-lane design on the operation of the signal at
Middlefield/Midtown shopping center and Bryson Court. This work was completed prior to
installation of the new signal. With respect to the existing pedestrian signal at the northerly Midtown shopping center driveway, staff has collected data on pedestrian crossings and the number of times the signal is actuated.

Staff also plans an operational test of a three-lane configuration of Middlefield in the Midtown environs through placement of traffic cones on Middlefield between Moreno and Colorado Avenues for one midweek evening commute peak period, beginning at 4 p.m. and ending at 7 p.m. The intersection of Middlefield and Oregon Expressway will retain its current configuration in order to provide sufficient space for northbound drivers waiting for a signal change. The evening peak period is typically the time of highest traffic demand on Palo Alto arterial streets. During this period, staff will conduct twelve timed runs in each direction, as well as collect traffic volume data through placement of automated traffic counting tubes. For comparison purposes, staff will do a companion set of travel time runs and traffic count data collection without the traffic cones during a midweek peak period. This study methodology is considered best practice in traffic engineering.

A very important concern in a study of re-configuring Middlefield is any effect reduction in the number of through lanes might have with respect to traffic on nearby residential streets. Thus evaluation of travel time changes on Middlefield with a three-lane configuration between Moreno and Colorado are an important part of the Midtown/Middlefield traffic study.

Staff will present the empirical findings and evaluation of the data collected during the study to the informal study advisory committee. Staff will present findings and recommendations from this study for discussion by the informal advisory committee and the wider Midtown community before reporting to the Planning and Transportation Commission and Council.

**RESOURCE IMPACT**

No additional resources have been required to undertake the Midtown/Middlefield study directed by Council. Any additional improvements to Middlefield Road, Middlefield Road crosswalks, or Middlefield Road traffic signals in the vicinity of Midtown presented for Council approval would have to be funded from a $55,000 allocation in the Capital Improvements Program (CIP PL04003).

**POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

The following Palo Alto Comprehensive Plan Goals pertain to the Midtown/Middlefield study:

Goal T-3: “Facilities, Services, and Programs that Encourage and Promote Walking and Bicycling”

Goal T-4: “An Efficient Roadway Network for All Users”
Goal T-5: “A Transportation System with Minimal Impacts on Residential Neighborhoods”

Goal T-6: “A High Level of Safety for Motorists, Pedestrians, and Bicyclists on Palo Alto Streets”

PREPARED BY:_____________________________________________________
Joseph Kott
Chief Transportation Official

DEPARTMENT HEAD:_________________________________________________
STEVE EMSLIE
Director of Planning and
Community Environment

CITY MANAGER APPROVAL:__________________________________________
EMILY HARRISON
Assistant City Manager

cc: Midtown Residents Association