



Architectural Review Board

Staff Report (ID # 10680)

Report Type: Action Items **Meeting Date:** 10/3/2019

Summary Title: Peninsula Corridor Electrification Project - Paralleling Station Perimeter Landscaping

Title: PUBLIC HEARING: Architectural Review Board Input on Peninsula Corridor Electrification Project (PCEP) Paralleling Station Design and Perimeter Landscaping for Installation Within Caltrain Peninsula Corridor Joint Powers Board (JPB) Right of Way in Palo Alto. Includes Removal of Existing Trees in JPB Right of Way Adjacent to Park Plaza and Planting of Shrubs and Vines Adjacent to the Station that Includes a Proposed 42' Tall Gantry Structure. Separate from the Landscaping Adjacent to the Station Enclosure, the JPB will Evaluate the Feasibility of Planting Trees Along Alma Street as Part of the PCEP Palo Alto Tree Mitigation Plan to Provide Screening of a Gantry. Environmental Assessment: The JPB Certified the Final Environmental Impact Report (EIR) and Adopted a Mitigation Monitoring and Reporting Plan (MMRP) in January 2015, Following Publication of the Draft EIR in February 2014 for Public Comment. For More Information Contact the Chief Planning Official Amy French at amy.french@cityofpaloalto.org

From: Jonathan Lait

Recommendation

Staff recommends the Architectural Review Board (ARB) provide comments on the paralleling station design and perimeter landscaping to the Caltrain Joint Powers Board (JPB). This item is not subject to discretionary review by the City of Palo Alto.

Report Summary

This report will support the Architectural Review Board's efforts to provide input on the Peninsula Corridor Electrification Project (PCEP) Paralleling Station (PS5) design and perimeter

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landscaping. The installation site is within the Caltrain Peninsula Corridor Joint Powers Board (JPB) right of way in Palo Alto. The City of Palo Alto has an existing, joint agreement with the JPB, approved by City Council on December 17, 2019. The agreement enables the City to provide input, including ARB input, within 45 days of receiving the PS5 drawings. The JPB submitted the PS5 plan set and project narrative (Attachment A) on August 30, 2019.

The PS5 site is located 1000 feet south of the California Avenue station, adjacent to existing Caltrain equipment sheds and the Park Plaza building located at 195 Page Mill Road/2865 Park Boulevard. The building features a blank wall on the track-facing facade. The paralleling station installation will be primarily visible by train passengers, and secondarily, by pedestrians across Alma Street.

The PS5 structures include a 42' tall structure (labelled "gantry"), an enclosed, rectangular KV station that would be 13'4" above grade, and a large transformer. Also proposed are exterior lighting (including wall-packs), four automobile parking spaces on a crushed stone surface, and landscaping. The drawings (Attachment B) propose the removal of existing trees in the JPB right of way installed in conjunction with the Park Plaza mixed use building (note on plan sheet C3102). The proposal is to plant shrubs and vines adjacent to a new eight-foot tall, galvanized chain-link fence around the area. The JPB is evaluating the feasibility of planting screen trees along Alma Street as part of the PCEP Palo Alto tree mitigation plan.

Background

The Council's December 17, 2018 report provides a summary of the Council Rail Committee recommendations and the joint agreement. The report is viewable here: <https://www.cityofpaloalto.org/civicax/filebank/documents/68157>. The Council Rail Committee considered the draft Agreement on September 26, 2018: (<https://www.cityofpaloalto.org/civicax/filebank/blobdload.aspx?t=60164.71&BlobID=66798>)

On January 10, 2019, the ARB and Historic Resources Board (HRB) jointly provided comments on the Electrification Project (PCEP). The January 10, 2019 report to the ARB/HRB is viewable at this link: <http://cityofpaloalto.org/civicax/filebank/documents/68341>. A video recording of the public meeting is available online: <https://midpenmedia.org/architectural-review-board-74-1102019/>. Meeting minutes are viewable here: <http://cityofpaloalto.org/civicax/filebank/documents/69418>. The HRB and ARB viewed paint samples showing color options for Palo Alto's two train depots and stadium stop (near Town and Country Shopping Center). The joint board chose a 'juniper green' color. The project team presented additional information about the pole types and confirmed the location of each type.

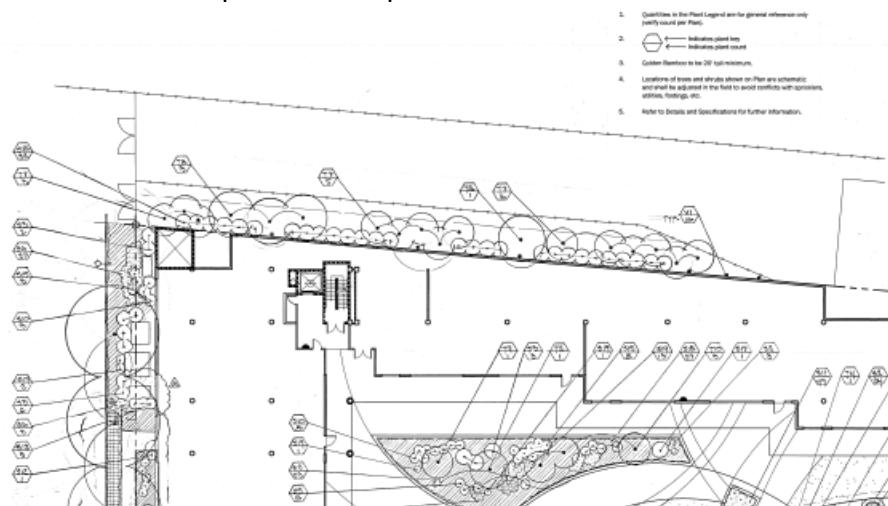
During the January 10 meeting, board members noted that PS5 will be visible from the train. Board members asked the JPB about the extent to which planting trees around the station is possible. The board member requested to understand to what extent vegetation would need to be offset for safety reasons, resulting in greater visibility. The board members noted that, in between the paralleling station and 195 Page Mill Road, there is a row of newly planted trees.

The board assumed these trees would remain. During the conversation, JPB staff noted vegetation around the paralleling station would include trees and vines. The board asked about landscaping along Alma Street and whether there could be planting on the edge of Alma.

Discussion

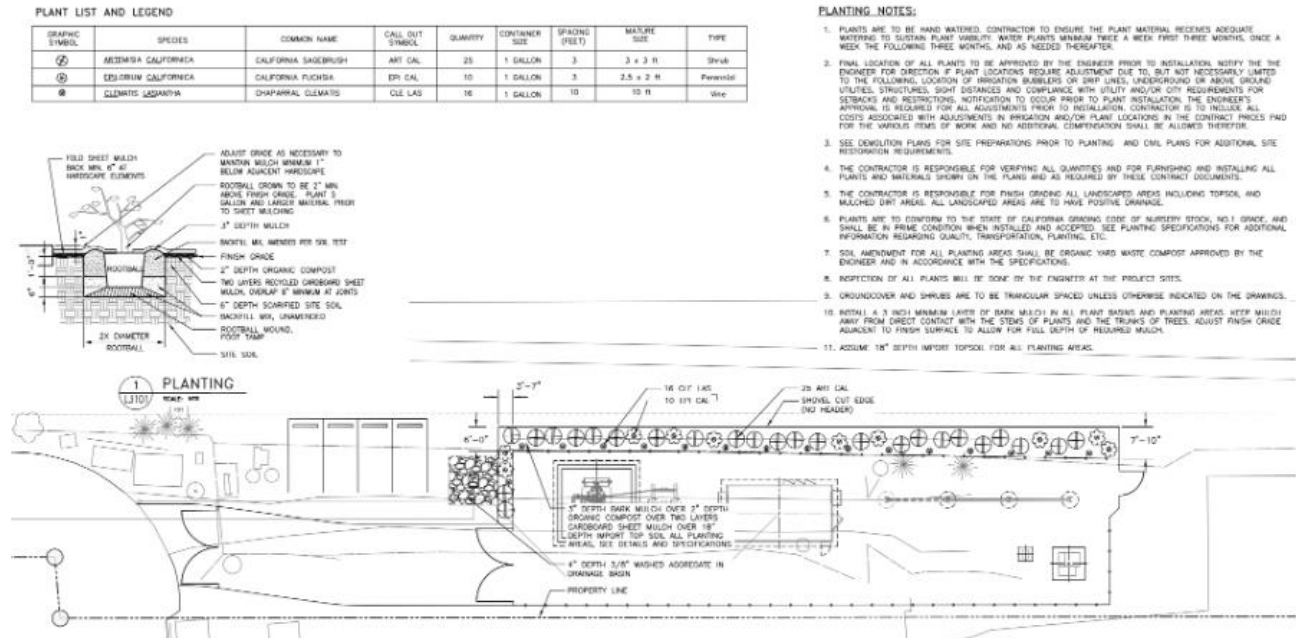
Existing Vegetation at Park Plaza and Proposed Plantings

The drawings show the area for the paralleling station abuts the JPB's westerly property line and the eastern wall of the Park Plaza building. The project includes removal of existing vegetation behind Park Plaza in the proposed PS5 area. Park Plaza adjacent trees outside the PS5 area can remain. The below image is clipped from Park Plaza 'as-built' drawings, showing the landscaping behind Park Plaza. The plantings for removal include four Coast Redwoods, 14 Canary Island Pines, 27 Saratoga Laurel shrubs, and four Angel Wing Jasmine vines trained on the building. The JPB does not plan to transplant the removed trees and shrubs elsewhere.



Proposed Planting

The below clip of the planting plan (following page) reflects the planting of vines (Chaparral Clematis) and shrubs (California Sagebrush and Fuchsia). This vegetation would be along a security fence between the paralleling station site and the rails. No trees are proposed. The JPB staff will finalize the tree plan, and separately explore the feasibility of planting trees along Alma.



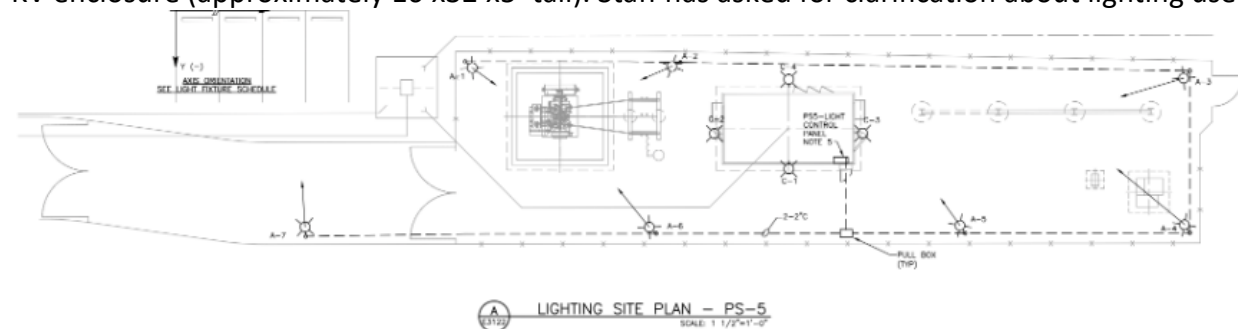
Project Narrative

The narrative notes the project has Green and Sustainability Program requirements. Regarding landscaping, the narrative states that the plantings and irrigation will: (1) have low water use, (2) be low in maintenance requirements, (3) enhance safety by not blocking views, and (4) enhance the visual appeal of the Caltrain system. The narrative also notes that plants will be:

- selected for drought tolerance, minimal maintenance and for beauty;
- native to California as much as practicable and will all be adapted to California;
- selected and placed to minimize the need for trimming; and
- selected to allow visual policing of the facility.

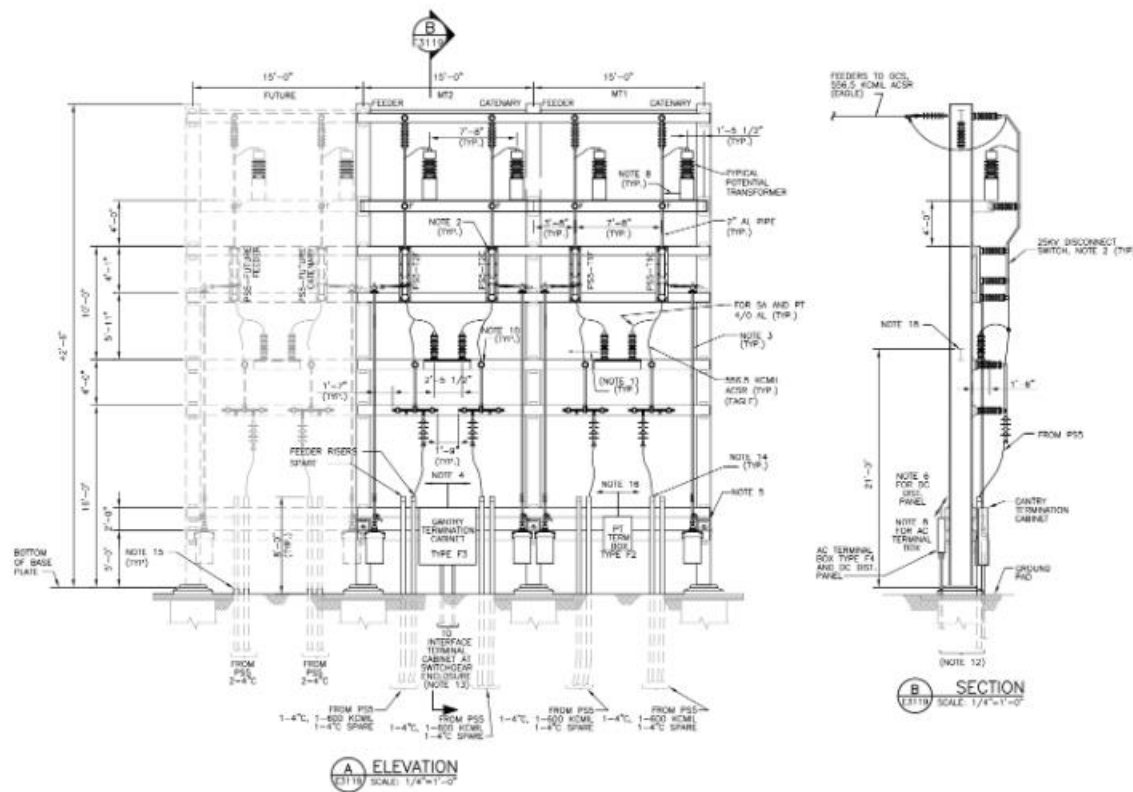
Lighting

The plans indicate a proposal for security lighting. An image from the plans show 11 lights would be directed toward the installation: seven “hazardous predator” LED lights, placed around the perimeter, and four “full cutoff” LED wall-pack lights placed on the rectangular 25 KV enclosure (approximately 16’x32’x5’ tall). Staff has asked for clarification about lighting use.



Gantry Structure

The largest structure on the site is the gantry structure. This structure is proposed to be 42'6" tall and 30 feet wide (with a potential future width extension of 15 feet) as shown in the below image of the elevation and section from the plans. Screening of this structure from train riders appears to be virtually impossible. Existing vegetation on the Alma side is unlikely to screen views of the gantry from Alma Street pedestrians and from residents east of Alma. Additional trees would help supplement the existing vegetation to interrupt views of the gantry structure.



Environmental Review

The Environmental Mitigation, Monitoring and Reporting Program (MMRP) associated with the PCEP Environmental Impact Report requires compliance with mitigation measures. One measure requires vegetative screening for the four Traction Paralleling Stations as a part of the electrification project. Therefore, planting of additional vegetation for screening would enable the project to meet the mitigation measures.

Public Notification, Outreach & Comments

As this is not an entitlement application review, there is no required noticing of the item. However, the *Daily Post* published a notice of the public hearing for this project on September 20, 2019, which is 12 days in advance of the meeting.

Public Comments

As of the writing of this report, the City of Palo Alto received no project-related, public comments on the paralleling station design.

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Attachments:

- Attachment A: Narrative Caltrain JPB(PDF)
- Attachment B: Drawings Viewable Location (DOCX)

¹ Emails may be sent directly to the ARB using the following address: arb@cityofpaloalto.org

**Caltrain Electrification Traction Power Facilities
Palo Alto PS-5 landscape narrative.**

1) Assumptions/configuration assumptions

Caltrain is committed to providing safe and convenient transit connections for residents and visitors to the Bay Area. While maintaining safe train operations is the first priority of Caltrain, it is also recognized that Caltrain is a part of and a reflection of the Bay Area communities. The Electrification update to the Caltrain system to provide more efficient and effective transit is also intended to create and maintain environmentally responsible facilities.

The Environmental Mitigation, Monitoring and Reporting Program (MMRP) requires vegetative screening for the four Traction Paralleling Stations that will be constructed as a part of the electrification project. Following the general Green and Sustainability Program requirements of the project, the plantings and irrigation are designed to be:

- Low water use
- Low in maintenance requirements
- Enhance safety by not blocking views
- Enhance the visual appeal of the Caltrain system

The plantings will be selected for drought tolerance, minimal maintenance requirements and for beauty. The plants will be native to California as much as practicable and will all be adapted to the California climate. Plants will be selected and placed to minimize the need for trimming, and will also be selected to allow visual policing of the facility. The plant installation methods will assist in creating a healthy soil through the use of organic compost and no reliance on chemical fertilizers, herbicides or pesticides.

Irrigation systems will conform to the State of California and local water efficient landscape ordinances. The landscape will be maintained in conformance with the requirements of the MMRP and the project specifications.

2) Design Criteria

Per the MMRP aesthetics requirements, the traction paralleling stations (TPS or PS) shall:

Use vegetative screening to visually buffer views of TPFs. Vegetative screening may be achieved in a variety of ways, depending on availability of space. Where feasible and necessary, the paralleling station standard design of 40' X 80' shall be modified to allow for more space for vegetative screening (such as 30' X 105' for example). Acceptable methods of vegetative screening that may be used include:

1. *Tree planting*
2. *Fencing with creeping vines.*
3. *Landscape buffer planting.*
4. *Vegetative wall/fence.*

Through discussions during the design and construction process it has been agreed to not include trees around TPS facilities and instead include additional trees for screening in select areas as part of the tree mitigation work included in the project. Trees can compromise the safety and reliability of TPS facilities.

3) Functional Requirements

Landscape shall not interfere with operations or compromise safety.

General biological impact avoidance measures for the entire project shall also apply to the required TPS vegetative screening installation and maintenance.

4) Applicable codes, standards, and regulations

There are four traction power stations that will receive landscape treatment as a part of the electrification project. Communities where the traction power stations are located have local requirements for landscape that will be adhered to with this project.

Plantings: Comply with MWEL0:

<http://www.cityofpaloalto.org/civicax/filebank/documents/52232>

Irrigation: Dedicated irrigation meter required for landscapes larger than 1,000 sf. Comply with MWEL0 above.

Site notes: Site is located 1000 feet south of the California Avenue station adjacent to existing Caltrain equipment sheds and a new mixed use development. The mixed use development features a blank wall on the track side and the views of the paralleling station will be primarily seen by passengers on Caltrain.

5) Environmental requirements

General biological impact avoidance measures for the entire project shall also apply to the required TPS vegetative screening installation and maintenance.

Use of chemical herbicides and fertilizers will be avoided.

6) PS-5 Design Narrative

Screen plantings will consist of low water use small shrubs and climbing vines native to California that are compliant with the Palo Alto model water efficient landscape ordinance. Plantings are placed to screen all exposed faces of the PS-5 enclosure that are not adjacent to existing buildings. As no water is available on site, the plantings will be hand watered for plant establishment per contract requirements.

As part of a separate agreement that is not in the contract, the JPB will include trees along Alma Street as part of the Palo Alto tree plan to screen an adjacent strain gantry.