



CITY COUNCIL RAIL COMMITTEE FINAL MINUTES

Special Meeting
November 14, 2018

Chairperson Wolbach called the meeting to order at 8:34 A.M. in the Council Chambers, 250 Hamilton Avenue, Palo Alto, California.

Present: Fine, Kou, Scharff, Wolbach (Chair)

Absent:

Oral Communications

David Shen affirmed that he was representing the North Old Palo Alto Group and he was a member of the Citizens Advisory Panel (CAP). He stated that the North Old Palo Alto Group was opposed to all viaduct options. They wanted more studies of the Palo Alto Avenue railroad crossing and they suggested using the space from the soccer field to the south of the crossing to accommodate any alternatives. They wanted detailed studies for a solution for the Embarcadero Underpass. They supported the aggressive rail schedule that Staff was maintaining.

Agenda Items

1. Review AECOM Analysis for Charleston Rd and East Meadow Ave Alternatives Including Hybrid, Viaduct and Trench.

Rob de Geus, Deputy City Manager introduced Ety Mercurio from Apex Strategies (AECOM) who presented the item to the Rail Committee (Committee).

Ety Mercurio, Apex Strategies (AECOM) reported that the next community meeting was scheduled for November 28, 2018. In terms of design criteria, she explained that AECOM started with design criteria that was currently available. AECOM then identified design exceptions that pertained to Palo

FINAL MINUTES

Alto (City). For the trench alternative for the Meadow and Charleston Crossing, a shoofly track was proposed, and the train would go down 30-feet into the trench in order to obtain the 24 ½-foot vertical clearance. The shoofly would encroach roughly 20-feet into the intersection of Charleston and Meadow, so the turning lanes would be lost at those intersection during construction. Another constraint with the trench was high groundwater and it was estimated to be at about 13-feet below grade. A ground anchor would have to be constructed in the retaining walls of the trench for extra support. The ground anchors may impede into neighboring properties and landscaping could not be placed on the ground above the anchors. Meadow Drive and Charleston Road would have to be closed for the roadway bridges to be constructed for the trench alternative. One pro for the trench was that it had a less visual impacts. Some of the cons included blocking Adobe Creek and Barron Creek, the subsurface right of way acquisition for the retaining walls, high fences along the trench wall, and a long-term maintenance costs of pumping groundwater or rainwater. The trench was only feasible if Caltrain were to grant a 2 percent grade Design Exception. The hybrid alternative of rising the railroad and lowering Meadow and Charleston was the next alternative she discussed. The road was to be lowered approximately 5-feet and the tracks were proposed to be raised 15-feet. A shoofly would need to be constructed for this alternative as well and the turning lanes would be lost at Charleston and Meadow during construction. A sound wall would also need to be put in place during construction. Meadow and Charleston train bridges were proposed to be constructed separately in order to maintain traffic flow on Alma Street. A Design Exception would be needed from Caltrain for a temporary vertical clearance of 12-feet. Pros for the hybrid alternative included no issues with the existing creeks, all landscaping could be restored, and the shoofly was shorter than the trench alternative. Cons included complicated construction staging that could close portions of Alma and Charleston, limited vertical clearance, relocate the railroad crossover, and major utility relocations. The last alternative was a viaduct, a railroad that was raised on a structure, at Meadow and Charleston. The viaduct would be raised to the 21-foot maximum in the air. Sound wall barriers would be used to help mitigate noise and temporary fencing was to be installed to protect the shoofly. An analysis was being conducted to see if having the viaduct located over the shoofly tracks during construction was feasible in order to decrease impacts during construction. Pros for the viaduct included having the least impact on existing roads during construction, landscaping could be restored, a linear park could be installed, and it did not block creeks. Cons included it having the highest visual impact, it required a Design Exception of a 1.4 percent decrease to grade from Caltrain, and it required the relocation of a

FINAL MINUTES

crossover. She explained that AECOM had drafted an evaluation criteria matrix for Meadow and Charleston and she was looking for feedback on that from the Committee. AECOM was working on the order of magnitude in terms of cost and that was to be presented to the community at the next community meeting on November 28, 2018.

Ed Shikada, Assistant City Manager asked for clarification about the right-of-way and why that really meant property acquisition.

Ms. Mercurio explained that the hybrid did impact a couple driveways, the location for pumping plants, and drainage facilities. The trench had a right of way impact to some subsurfaces and the viaduct had no property right of way impacts.

Mr. Shikada reiterated that none of the above alternatives required any substantial private property acquisitions.

Chair Wolbach articulated that cost estimates for the alternatives would be reliant upon getting the Design Exceptions from Caltrain. He wanted to know if the cost estimates that were to be presented to the community would include a cost total if Caltrain did not grant the Design Exceptions.

Ms. Mercurio stated that the cost estimates were based off getting the Design Exceptions. She added that the trench option was only feasible to construct if the Design Exception of a 2 percent grade was obtained. In terms of the Design Exception of reducing the vertical height from 24 ½-feet to 18-feet, she explained that the vertical height difference would not reduce the length of the work that needed to be done, so it would be an incremental saving.

Mr. Shikada interjected that a separate cost analysis on the different heights of vertical clearance was not warranted.

Chair Wolbach announced that he wanted the two different vertical height limits to be addressed in the cost analysis.

Council Member Fine inquired if the shoofly tracks would be located at grade

FINAL MINUTES

in all alternatives.

Ms. Mercurio confirmed that was correct.

Council Member Fine asked if a 2 percent grade Design Exception was only needed in the south portion from San Antonio to Charleston for the trench alternative.

Ms. Mercurio stated no, it was on both sides of the trench.

Council Member Fine wanted to know if the assumption that grade crossings were to assume a train running at 110 MPH applied to all the grade crossings in the City.

Ms. Mercurio announced that was correct. She explained that was the design speed that was listed in the Train Design Criteria.

Council Member Scharff wanted to know between the viaduct and the hybrid, what the difference was in terms of height.

Ms. Mercurio explained that the viaduct, at top of the rail, was 21-feet above the road surface and the hybrid was about 15-feet above the road surface.

Council Member Scharff requested clarification between the hybrid and the viaduct in terms of visual impacts and noise.

Ms. Mercurio reported that the CAP suggested that AECOM create visuals of looking from the viaduct down and looking from backyards up at the viaduct. AECOM was in the process of doing that.

Council Member Kou commented that Caltrain was installing their electrification poles on the existing railroad tracks at the present time. She wanted to know why the viaduct or trench could not be constructed in the center landscaped area between the four lanes on Alma Street to mitigate traffic impacts during construction.

FINAL MINUTES

Ms. Mercurio disclosed that AECOM was analyzing that option of removing the shoofly and setting the viaduct in the center versus the west side of Alma Street. It would not work for the trench alternative because of the geometry and the speeds of the trains.

Council Member Kou wanted another version of the viaduct that showed it located in the center of Alma Street versus the west side of Alma Street. She requested that it be presented to the community at the November 28, 2018 community meeting. She requested that in terms of height, that AECOM start at the roadway, go up to the top of the train and then to the top of the electrification poles; not just to the bottom of the train. She wanted to know why AECOM had not thought of using struts to help support the walls instead of doing the ground anchors.

Ms. Mercurio declared that AECOM was analyzing using struts but those struts would not work in areas where the train was starting to descend into the trench. Using struts would limit the number of ground anchors but not eliminate them entirely.

Council Member Kou suggested that the tunnel alternative be presented to the community at the November 28, 2018 community meeting as well.

Ms. Mercurio explained that the tunnel option was going to be presented to the community at the January 2019 community meeting.

Council Member Kou requested for an update from the Santa Clara Valley Water District (SCVWD) in terms of Adobe Creek and Barron Creek.

Mr. de Geus announced that Staff had provided the letter to the Committee and the public that was received from the SCVWD. He added that there was a letter from Caltrain and a letter from 2017 that was sent to the Joint Powers Board (JPB).

David Herzl gave his appreciation about the visuals that AECOM had presented and he was in support of the trench alternative.

Donny Parke announced that she lived in South Palo Alto and she was in

FINAL MINUTES

support of having a tunnel for Charleston and Meadow.

Ellen Hartog recommended that a study happen that looked at freight trains staying at grade and the commuter train going below grade. She was concerned about the many impacts that all the above ground alternatives would bring to the community.

Steve Jennings explained that his house was located about 100-yards from Adobe Creek. He wanted more information on how the City planned to reroute Adobe Creek if the trench alternative were chosen.

Davina Brown supported all below ground alternatives.

Nadia Naik stated that the City had already looked at how to get around the creeks in a discussion that City Council (Council) had in October of 2014. She suggested that at the next community meeting AECOM present all the alternatives equally and she requested a Geotechnical Report that analyzed the soils around the rail tracks.

Khurshid Gandhi requested that the numbers for the height of the alternatives be from the ground, to the top of the train, and to the top of the electrification poles. She supports all underground alternatives for the railroad tracks. She likes the idea of locating the railroad tracks to the middle of Alma Street instead of to the West of it. She wanted to see a study showing what safety measures were in place for a viaduct when an earthquake was to hit.

Florence Keller agreed that it was great that Council and the Committee determined that there should be no eminent domain but she raised the question of if people could live in their homes or sell their home with the noise and visual impacts the trains would cause if they were above ground.

Cedric de La Beaujardiere asked how far back from the trench would the tree exclusion zone extend as a function of the track depth and what was the distance of the western trench wall from the western right of way boundary south of Meadow. He wanted the 3D images to show the tree removal that would have to happen in neighbors' backyards and show the impacts to the creeks. For the viaduct, he asked for a cost estimate that did not include

FINAL MINUTES

the shoofly tracks. He wanted a map of the homes surrounding the viaduct and what the height would be for the structure that would be located behind those homes.

Roland Lebrun announced that the design speed should be for 125 MPH trains instead of 110 MPH trains.

Chair Wolbach asked Staff what their recommendations were for the item.

Mr. de Geus commented that Staff was looking for feedback on the alternatives for Charleston and Meadow. Also, any feedback on the letters and on the other information Staff had supplied to the Committee. Staff was suggesting that additional analysis needed to be done before elimination of alternatives were to happen.

Council Member Fine announced that he agreed with Council Member Kou that it was a good idea to move the viaduct to the middle of Alma Street. He also agreed that the elevations of the full height of all the systems would be good to know. He wanted the elevation matrix to be done for all the alternatives and he asked if the CAP had any feedback on the matrix.

Mr. de Geus answered that the CAP's reaction was that they appreciated the evaluation matrix.

Millette Litzinger, Senior Project Manager, AECOM added that AECOM was looking to fill in the matrix, have the CAP review it, and then present it to the public.

Council Member Fine suggested adding water impact issues and psychosocial costs to the evaluation matrix.

Ms. Litzinger explained that Staff had directed AECOM to add additional technical information into the pros and cons instead of in the evaluation matrix.

Council Member Fine requested more information on how the cost

FINAL MINUTES

estimations were going to look.

Ms. Mercurio stated that AECOM was looking at what the varies factors were associated with the cost of each alternative and looking at utilities. AECOM was following Caltran's Project Study Report Procedures for cost estimating.

Council Member Fine advised that the cost estimations should be broken out into construction costs, process costs, mitigation costs, hard costs, and soft costs. He wanted Staff and AECOM to contemplate future connectivity within the City. He wanted more work done on whether it was pumping issues or water issues on the various alternatives. Also, more work was to be done on the tunnel alternative.

Council Member Kou wanted to see story poles constructed to show a real-life visual to see how tall the trains will be. She wanted to add in the modifications and upgrades to Charleston into the diagrams and the evaluation matrix. She wanted more information on if traffic would be increased by 30 percent at the intersections of Charleston and East Meadow. She wanted to see Loma Verde added into the Circulation Report. She asked AECOM if there were emergency exits that needed to be put in, in terms of the viaduct.

Ms. Mercurio explained that all the alternatives had to evaluate emergency exits. At a minimum, all the alternatives had walkways on both sides in case of an emergency.

Council Member Kou inquired where would all the substations for Caltrain's electrification be located along the corridor.

Ms. Mercurio declared that she would reach out to Caltrain to see where all the substations were located. If the substations were located near the railroad crossings then those those would have to be accommodated for in all the alternatives.

Council Member Kou asked if the hybrid would be tall enough for emergency vehicles to be able to pass underneath it.

FINAL MINUTES

Ms. Mercurio confirmed that the 15 ½-foot standard would allow any emergency vehicles, buses, and trucks to pass under safely.

Council Member Kou wanted to know what inverted siphons were.

Ms. Mercurio explained that AECOM was looking into that solution and it was how to move a creek from one side of a trench to the other side. Water agencies did not like that solution because inverted siphons had high maintenance issues.

Council Member Kou requested a summary of the letters that the Committee received from the SCVWD, Caltrain, and the JPB.

Mr. Shikada stated that Ms. Mercurio just stated that SCVWD was not happy with the inverted siphons solution.

Ms. Mercurio announced that the presentation did not include inverted siphons and that AECOM had to finish their evaluation for that. Also, any drains or large drainage pipes were to be evaluated and those would be added to the construction cost estimates.

Council Member Kou stated in terms of noise and vibration, she hoped that the City, Committee, and Staff would continue to remember that community member's homes abutted the rail corridor.

Council Member Scharff agreed with Council Member Fine that the Committee, Staff, and Council needed to think about how an alternative might look in the future in terms of connectivity and bikes and pedestrian connectivity. He asked Staff for pictures of an existing viaduct to see what it looked like. In terms of the trench alternative, he wanted more information on if an easement or new regulation had to be passed to restrict homeowners from building basements. Also, how to restrict people with their landscaping in their backyards. He wanted to know whose land would need to be taken for the new pumping stations that would have to be built for the trench alternative.

Ms. Mercurio disclosed that AECOM was still evaluating the pumping plants

FINAL MINUTES

and if those pumping plants could fit within the Caltrain right-of-way.

Council Member Scharff wanted to know what the maintenance cost would be for the pumping stations. He wanted more information on the pumping of groundwater for the trench alternative. He clarified that the viaduct would not be feasible if the City was not able to obtain a 1.4 percent Design Exception for Caltrain.

Ms. Mercurio confirmed that was correct but added that Caltrain did approve a Design Exception of 1.3 percent for San Bruno.

Council Member Scharff advised that Staff break out some of the challenges for the trench alternative and explain them better.

Chair Wolbach wanted to know what the above grade alternatives would look like if they were carrying only passenger trains versus passenger trains and freight trains.

Ms. Mercurio quickly answered that Caltrain was designing a portion of their line without freight. Caltrain disclosed that they would give AECOM the design criteria so they could review it.

Council Member Fine asked for a bulleted list of how construction would be phased in, what would happen, when, and why for each of the alternatives. He suggested having a workup of what the worst-case scenarios of property impacts would be in terms of the trench alternative. Also, more information on what all the alternatives looked like in terms of the Sustainability and Climate Action Plan (SCAP).

Gary Lindgren announced that many residents were worried that Palo Alto Avenue or Churchill Avenue would be closed. He suggested using the hybrid alternative at Palo Alto Avenue and then elevating the tracks to 21-feet above grade at Churchill. The raised rail or viaduct would pass Meadow and Charleston and then taper down to grade at San Antonio.

Mr. Beaujardiere requested that AECOM show what the impacts would be for people living near the pumping stations. The impacts should include how

FINAL MINUTES

much water would be pumped out and if there were any problems with properties subsiding above the water table that would be pumped dry.

Ms. Hartog stated that she was in support of separating the passenger trains from the freight trains.

Ms. Mercurio answered Mr. Beaujardiere's previous question on the distance from the walls to the property lines. AECOM was working on visuals to show where the ground anchors would be located relative to property lines.

Council Member Kou inquired if AECOM had investigated if a viaduct could support a freight train running on it.

Ms. Mercurio confirmed that all the alternatives considered the seismic criteria as well as freight trains running along them.

NO ACTION TAKEN

The Committee took a break from 10:20 A.M. to 10:27 A.M.

2. Project Schedule and Work Plan Update, Including Discussion of the Idea for Freight Train on Surface and Passenger Train Underground.

Rob de Geus, Deputy City Manager stated that this item would be a standing item on all the future agendas for the Rail Committee (Committee). He introduced Ety Mercurio with Apex Strategies (AECOM) who presented the item to the Committee.

Ety Mercurio, Apex Strategies (AECOM) gave an overview of the schedule for the upcoming months. A community meeting was to take place on November 28, 2018, which was to focus on the Charleston/Meadow alternatives.

This Item introduced and continued to a date uncertain due to a fire alarm at 10:30 A.M.

FINAL MINUTES

Discussion with State Lobbyists – Townsend Public Affairs

This Item was not heard.

Update on the Community Advisory Panel

This Item was not heard.

Update on Interagency Activities

This Item was not heard.

Next Steps and Future Agendas

This Item was not heard.

ADJOURNMENT: The meeting was adjourned at 10:30 A.M.