



CITY COUNCIL RAIL COMMITTEE FINAL MINUTES

Special Meeting
November 27, 2018

Chairperson Wolbach called the meeting to order at 1:34 P.M. in the Council Chambers, 250 Hamilton Avenue, Palo Alto, California.

Present: Fine, Kou, Wolbach (Chair)

Absent: Scharff

Oral Communications

Jason Matlof wanted the traffic to be studied for the Embarcadero Underpass and an investigation into alternatives for Palo Alto Avenue.

Ellen Hartog stated that the Palo Alto rail corridor was marked for High Speed Rail (HSR) and the alternatives for grade separations that the City Council (Council) picked would have to accommodate HSR. She announced that the trench option with a rail on top for freight was the best option and that option could accommodate HSR.

Becky Epstein urged the Committee to eliminate the elevated rail options for South Palo Alto.

Council Member Fine asked for an update on how Staff was addressing the Motion made by the Council in June 2018 that stated that more study should be done to mitigate traffic at the Embarcadero Underpass.

Etty Mercurio, Apex Strategies (AECOM) explained that traffic counts were being performed around the Churchill Avenue area. The analysis would include what would happen if Churchill were to be closed and it would propose some mitigations to address any issues. That analysis was proposed to be done in January 2019.

Agenda Items

1. Project Schedule and Work Plan Update, Including Discussion of the

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Idea for Freight Train on Surface and Passenger Train Underground
(Continued From November 14, 2018).

Etty Mercurio, Apex Strategies (AECOM) gave an overview of what AECOM had been working on for the month of November 2018. She then gave an overview of the schedule for the upcoming months. November 28, 2018, was the next community meeting at 8:00 P.M. at Mitchell Park. The next Citizen Advisory Panel (CAP) meeting was scheduled for December 12, 2018. There was to be a discussion about the rail project at the City Council meeting that was scheduled for December 17, 2018. For January 2019 there was a CAP meeting scheduled for January 9th and a community meeting on January 23rd. In terms of freight operating on a separate track, Caltrain had design criteria for taking freight off the railroad tracks as the passenger trains came into the Transbay Terminal. AECOM had requested the design criteria for that from Caltrain but had not heard back from them. Pros of having the freight run on top of the passenger tracks included design constraints for freight trains would not impact the design of passenger trains and fewer conflicts between freight and passenger trains would occur. The cons included higher maintenance costs, safety issues, right turn pockets would be lost at Alma Street, a Design Acceptation for a 2 percent grade still needed to be obtained from Caltrain, and freight trains would need to sound their horns at Charleston Road and Meadow Drive.

Nadia Naik emphasized that the letter from the Sacramento lobbyist should be available online for the public. She was concerned that public comments were not going into the Agenda Packets for the Rail Committee (Committee) and were not available online. She noted that freight would be a single track and there was an example of the freight and passenger tracks both in the right of way in Milpitas, California. She stated that Palo Alto (City) needed to obtain a Design Exception based on the Caltrain's existing standards for Caltrain and freight. Obtaining that would help remove the constraint of a 2 percent grade. She suggested making quiet zones with quadruple gates to mitigate any noise from freight train's horns.

Roland Lebrun proposed that a rail tunnel start just north of San Antonio Avenue and merge just south of Redwood Junction. He wanted the Committee to receive a breakdown on how much a tunnel would cost and how much an underground station would cost. If two tracks were at grade and there was a tunnel, the capacity of the corridor would be increased. If that were the case then High Speed Rail (HSR) may invest up to half a billion dollars toward the tunnel.

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Parag Patkar announced that he is used to the freight trains horns and was not concerned about it. He wanted more information on losing the right turning lanes at Alma Avenue.

Council Member Kou wanted to know what entity would be responsible for maintaining the railroads if there were a passenger rail and a freight rail.

Ms. Mercurio articulated that it was not evaluated.

Council Member Kou inquired if there should be a CAP meeting before the City Council February 2019 meeting.

Rob de Geus, Deputy City Manager acknowledged that it was a possibility to accommodate that if needed.

Ed Shikada, Assistant City Manager concurred with Mr. de Geus that another CAP could be scheduled if it were warranted.

Council Member Kou voiced her appreciation with the work the CAP had done so far. She questioned what the date was for the next Technical Advisory Committee (TAC), if the Committee could receive the agenda for that TAC meeting, and if the TAC meetings were open to the public.

Ms. Mercurio disclosed that the TAC meeting was scheduled for December 10, 2018, and the agenda was looking at technical issues.

Mr. de Geus added that the TAC meetings were not public.

Council Member Kou asked if there was a liaison from the CAP that attended the TAC meetings.

Mr. Shikada acknowledged that there was no liaison from the CAP. He explained that the TAC meetings were run as a Staff meeting with debriefs to the TAC members and then Staff receiving technical input from the TAC around issues.

Council Member Kou inquired which Committees in surrounding Cities were contacted to receive an update on what was happening with those Cities.

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Ms. Mercurio explained that there was an update from Caltrain via the Local Policy Maker Group. One on one conversations were happening between Palo Alto and surrounding Cities as well.

Council Member Kou wanted more information about the 25th Avenue Project in San Mateo, California where they received funding from HSR.

Mr. Shikada reported that Staff would bring more information to the Committee on that later. One thing he noted was that the 25th Avenue project was providing passing tracks and that was one of the key components for HSR to provide funding.

Council Member Fine specified that the updated Work Plan and the letter from the Sacramento lobbyist should be put on the City's website. He wanted to know what the current maintenance costs were to the existing rail corridor and what future maintenance costs would be. He asked if freight was on the surface with the passenger train going into a trench, if was an existing alternative or would that alternative be a recommendation from the Committee to the Council.

Mr. Shikada confirmed that it was not currently an alternative.

Council Member Fine wanted a break down on the tunnel finances. He wanted more information on the regional tunnel alternative.

Chair Wolbach noted that the reason the tunnel was limited to Palo Alto was that the two other Cities did not show any interest in having a regional tunnel. He wanted more information about a tunnel and then freight running directly on top of the tunnel.

Mr. Shikada asked the Committee for clarity on what the concept was in terms of freight and a trench or tunnel. He added that the tunnel option was still one of the alternatives and Staff had planned to bring information about that alternative to the Committee in the next coming months. He was not in support of adding another alternative to the list.

Chair Wolbach inquired what part of the City Staff was looking to do a separated freight from passenger track concept.

Mr. Shikada stated that Staff was looking for clarification on that as well

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from the Committee.

Ms. Mercurio added that what AECOM had presented to the Committee was a broad overview of the concept of freight trains running separately from passenger trains.

Council Member Fine disclosed that the assumption was that there would be a hybrid option in South Palo Alto and then freight would remain at-grade.

Chair Wolbach voiced that he was under the assumption that there would be a trench or tunnel in South Palo Alto. He agreed that the tunnel option would be more feasible if all the constraints from freight were removed. He wanted to recommend to Council that the alternative be studied further.

Council Member Fine cautioned the Committee on adding new alternatives to the list.

Mr. Shikada articulated that there were several issues with the alternative of keeping freight at-grade in South Palo Alto. Those issues were who owned the property, who would do the maintenance, how to connect North Palo Alto to South Palo Alto, and all the other issues that came with a tunnel option.

MOTION: Chair Wolbach moved, seconded by Council Member Kou to recommend the City Council direct Staff and the consultant team to further explore the freight train on the surface and passenger train underground alternative.

Council Member Kou announced that the City was looking for an alternative that could withstand the growth of the City and commuters. She was in support of looking at all alternatives.

Chair Wolbach reported that with this alternative gave the City the option to remove or adjust the freight tracks in the future.

Council Member Fine wanted to know if it was a trench or a tunnel.

Chair Wolbach stated that his preference was the tunnel.

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Council Member Fine reiterated to Staff that the Committee wanted to have a study done on leaving the freight at grade with one track and tunneling or trenching the passenger electric trains below.

Ms. Mercurio explained that from an engineering standpoint a trench and tunnel were the same.

Mr. Shikada added that from a project manager perspective Staff would have to talk with AECOM and look at what the scope would be needed for that evaluation and the budget associated with that.

Mr. de Geus suggested tying the new alternative to the tunnel alternative that was already on the list.

Ms. Naik requested that the CAP members receive all informational documents before the upcoming CAP meeting. She clarified that the alternative was to have a tunnel with freight at-grade. The reason to having a tunnel instead of a trench was because a tunnel could go under the existing creeks where a trench could not. She listed several pros for having a tunnel versus a trench including cost, less traffic impact, and no underground stations.

Mr. Lebrun agreed with Ms. Naik and her comments. He suggested to follow the San Francisco guidelines for their tunnel alternative.

Phil Burton appreciated that addition of the alternative of freight running on top and the passenger train going into a tunnel. He suggested that at the next community meeting that there be clarification on the timeline.

Amie Neff agreed that it should be a tunnel underneath and not a trench. She was upset that AECOM was pushing the City towards a preference that better fitted AECOM and not the City.

Mr. Patkar asked for the cost analysis of the Compton trench and all the distances and obstacles they faced when building their trench.

Council Member Fine inquired what the framework for the discussion would be for the City Council meeting on December 17, 2018.

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Mr. de Geus articulated that the main point for the December 17, 2018 City Council meeting was to give an overall update to the Council. Staff was going to investigate before the City Council meeting the scope and cost for an alternative that included freight on the surface and passenger trains underground in a tunnel.

Council Member Kou commented that at the City Council meeting in December 2018, Staff was planning to present what the Committee had recommended for South Palo Alto and eliminating some of the options.

Mr. de Geus confirmed that was correct.

Council Member Kou restated that the Rail Committee had recommended to the City Council to eliminate the viaduct option at their October 2018 meeting. She wanted to know if that was going to be on the City Council's agenda for their December 2018 meeting.

Mr. de Geus clarified that the Motion did not specify to eliminate the viaduct but to postpone analysis on that alternative.

Mr. Shikada added that Staff was hoping to bring additional information on Palo Alto Avenue to the Council at the December 2018 meeting as well.

Council Member Kou advised that all informational documents and materials be presented to the Committee and to the CAP members before any Committee or CAP meeting.

Mr. de Geus disclosed that Staff tried at all costs to send out those items as quickly as they could.

Council Member Fine requested that Staff reach out to the Council Members who were not recused but were not on the Rail Committee before the City Council meetings and give them a quick overview.

MOTION PASSED: 3-0 Scharff absent

Update on Community Advisory Panel

Millette Litzinger, Senior Project Manager, AECOM stated that the rhythm was the Citizen Advisory Panel (CAP) reviewed the materials first, AECOM

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would refine it, then the Rail Committee (Committee) would review it, and then it would be presented to the community. In the CAP meetings, among other items, they discussed the community conversation and reported back what they had heard from the community. There was a website for the project that had a list of frequently asked questions.

Nadia Naik reminded the Committee that the CAP was not allowed to vote on issues. She reported that the CAP had a long conversation about keeping the viaduct option in the list of preferred alternatives. She wanted to have the key points that were discussed at the CAP meetings to be summarized and presented to the Committee. The CAP also discussed expanding the evaluation criteria.

Ms. Litzinger commented that the website did include a CAP tab that listed the agendas, materials, and a summary of each CAP meeting.

Update on Interagency Activities

Rob de Geus, Deputy City Manager declared that the Sacramento lobbyist was not available to attend the December 17, 2018 City Council meeting but his letter was presented to the Rail Committee (Committee) in the Committee's Packet. He announced there was a meeting scheduled on November 29th, 2018 with the Local Policy Makers Group and the group would be discussing the Business Plan Update for Caltrain.

Ed Shikada, Assistant City Manager announced that Caltrain had been increasing their public outreach on how Caltrain plans to anticipate volume and demand of commuters. Notably for Palo Alto, Caltrain was proposing passing tracks in the California Avenue Station area. Staff had requested more information on that proposal from Caltrain but had not received it at the present time. He added that Staff was having more robust discussions with the Santa Clara County Valley Transportation Authority (VTA) on their approach to Measure B implementation. Staff had made the suggestion to VTA that VTA's efforts were better spent coordinating construction along the corridor between Palo Alto, Sunnyvale, and Mountain View.

Nadia Naik advised that the Palo Alto lobbyist should attend the hearing that would be discussing the audit for High Speed Rail (HSR). She noted that Cities did not need passing tracks if HSR were not involved. She suggested that an item on passing tracks and how it impacts Palo Alto (City) should be put as item on a future Rail Committee (Committee) meeting's agenda.

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Roland Lebrun suggested the Committee attend the next CalMod meeting. He noted that Dumbarton Rail was the managing agency for the Capital Corridor and that the Committee needed to pay attention on how Caltrain was planning to enter the Transbay Terminal in San Francisco.

Council Member Fine announced that he was going to be at the Local Policy Maker Group (LPMG) meeting.

Council Member Kou requested that the Sacramento Lobbyist attend the HSR hearing.

Mr. Shikada stated that Staff would follow up with him.

Next Steps and Future Agendas

Rob de Geus, Deputy City Manager announced that there would be no Rail Committee meeting in December 2018 but there would be a Citizen Advisory Panel (CAP) meeting and a Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) meeting.

ADJOURNMENT: The meeting was adjourned at 3:11 P.M.