



CITY OF PALO ALTO CITY COUNCIL ITEM 7A EXCERPT MINUTES

Special Meeting
September 23, 2019

The City Council of the City of Palo Alto met on this date in the Council Chambers at 5:02 P.M.

Present: Cormack, DuBois; Filseth arrived at 5:05 P.M.; Fine arrived at 5:50 P.M., Kniss, Kou, Tanaka

Absent:

Action Items

7A. Caltrain Business Plan - Direction to Staff Regarding Comments on the Draft Long Range Service Vision (Continued from September 16, 2019).

Ed Shikada, City Manager reported since the Caltrain presentation to the Council on May 13, 2019, Caltrain had developed a Long Range Service Vision. The Staff Report indicated that the Caltrain Board would review and possibly act on the Long Range Service Vision in early October, 2019. The October date was tentative, and the Council may have additional time to interact with the Board. The Council was able to direct Staff to reinforce the fact that Caltrain's service delivery directly related to the importance of advancing grade separation projects. Caltrain's existing service vision focused mainly on the frequency of service. Previous discussions had noted that the service level could not be achieved without significant investment in grade separations, which was acknowledged in the Long Range Service Vision. The question for the Council was whether the statement was sufficient. The Council was able to authorize and direct the Council's designee to the Local Policy Maker Group (LPMG) to share Palo Alto's perspective and position with the LPMG. Staff advocated for the City's position with their counterparts at Caltrain and other agencies. Options for the Council to discuss were Caltrain's commitment to address grade separations prior to adopting a Long Range Service Vision and a Feasibility Study of passing tracks in northern Santa Clara County before adopting a Long Range Service Vision.

Mayor Filseth noted the purpose of the item before the Council was to provide feedback regarding the Business Plan, which had to be accomplished by October 3, 2019.

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Mr. Shikada clarified that Caltrain staff had indicated the discussion may occur on a later date.

Mayor Filseth asked if Mountain View had expressed its position to Caltrain.

Mr. Shikada answered yes.

Herb Borock remarked that the City's main interest was the entity that would pay for grade separations. Caltrain assumed it could only operate with a funding source other than its operations. He questioned whether the City could influence Caltrain decisions now that Caltrain's environmental analysis had been approved.

Council Member Kniss inquired about the number of grade separations in San Mateo County.

Vice Mayor Fine indicated a total of 42 at-grade crossings needed to be separated.

Council Member Kniss requested the number of those grade crossings that had been separated.

Vice Mayor Fine did not know.

Council Member Cormack related that there were 18 at-grade crossings from Palo Alto to San Jose, 21 for Morgan Hill, unincorporated Santa Clara County, and Gilroy, and 30 in San Mateo County. The number of completed grade separations was unknown.

Council Member Kniss did not know how Caltrain could adopt a long range vision without a Feasibility Study. She did not believe Caltrain had discussed sharing the costs of grade separations.

Mr. Shikada advised that Caltrain had begun a discussion of an organizational structure to build and run a system contemplated in the Long Range Service Vision.

Mayor Filseth understood Council Member Kniss was highlighting the importance of a Feasibility Study.

Council Member DuBois agreed with the need to coordinate grade separations in the Caltrain Corridor. The City's letter needed to request clarification of the projection for fewer passengers at the California Avenue station under the high service model and Caltrain's view of how the California Avenue station was able to meet the needs of Stanford Research Park.

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Mr. Shikada remarked that Caltrain's approach to the Business Plan had been to obtain a macro-scale sense of the cost and potential ridership benefit of the options. Many questions about the Long Range Service Vision were able to be answered by refinements to forecasts.

Council Member DuBois felt Caltrain's forecasted level of service for the California Avenue station was important to the City as well as the interplay between the University and California Avenue stations.

Philip Kamhi, Chief Transportation Official reported Caltrain's travel demand model indicated at higher levels of service that more passengers would go to the station with the higher level of service, which was the Palo Alto station.

Council Member DuBois suggested a higher level of service at the California Avenue station would distribute traffic more evenly. Passengers were most likely to go to the University station because of it had a higher level of service, even if they were traveling to South Palo Alto.

Mr. Kamhi read a portion of an email from Caltrain, which stated actual ridership outcomes would vary based on realized changes to land use, service, and station access and egress options.

Council Member DuBois inquired whether Council Members supported locating four tracks at the California Avenue station.

Mayor Filseth asked if that could be addressed in a Feasibility Study of passing tracks before adopting a Long Range Service Vision.

Council Member DuBois was unsure whether the Feasibility Study would address his concerns. Including details in a comment letter beyond Staff's recommended points was useful. Perhaps Staff was able to learn the amount of Measure A and B funding that had been allocated and the process for the City to apply for those funds. He questioned whether the letter should ask Caltrain to urge Santa Clara Valley Transportation Authority (VTA) to consider bonding Measure B funds for grade separations.

Mr. Kamhi related that Caltrain had informed Staff that a portion of the Business Plan would address funding strategies. VTA had informed him that they had not officially stated they would not Bond Measure B funds.

Council Member DuBois stated the letter could refer to funding strategies and request support for bonding of any possible funds. He supported the formation of some type of construction authority if that was part of Caltrain's Business Plan. He was able to emphasize that in the letter.

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Mr. Kamhi recalled the City's federal lobbyist advising that a regional project would be more competitive for funding.

Vice Mayor Fine encouraged Council Members to focus on the highest value request of Caltrain. The letter needed to emphasize as strongly as possible that grade separations acceptable to affected communities throughout the Corridor were the most critical issue to resolve for the Business Plan to succeed. If Caltrain did not solve grade separations, the Business Plan was not going to work. The passing tracks were located to facilitate the service vision and High Speed Rail.

MOTION: Vice Mayor Fine moved, seconded by Council Member Kniss to thank Caltrain for their continued work on their business plan and emphasize that grade separations up and down the corridor are the most critical problem to solve in order for the business plan to proceed.

Vice Mayor Fine believed the service vision was the region's main priority while the City's main priority was grade separations. The letter was not the correct mode to address a construction authority.

Council Member Kniss indicated the City should continue to work with Caltrain and VTA in order to obtain funding for grade separations.

Council Member Cormack inquired whether Staff had communicated with Mountain View staff regarding the location of four tracks.

Mr. Shikada replied yes. Caltrain had indicated that it had not begun a specific study of an appropriate location.

Council Member Cormack requested the possible locations of passing tracks for High Speed Rail.

Mr. Shikada reported he had not seen an official statement of passing tracks being located in Redwood City for High Speed Rail.

Mr. Kamhi added that the Mountain View City Council had recommended Caltrain conduct a Feasibility Study of passing track locations before adopting a Long Range Service Vision.

Council Member Cormack felt that Caltrain had to recognize the enormous contributions of cities to grade separations. She inquired whether any Council Members were concerned about the subsidy issue or station modifications.

Council Member DuBois agreed that Staff should communicate with Caltrain regarding other issues, particularly funding. Focusing the letter on funding

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was appropriate, but other issues needed to be raised at the appropriate time.

Vice Mayor Fine indicated the letter could indicate the City was actively pursuing funding sources, and Caltrain's assistance would be welcome.

Mr. Shikada reported Caltrain's need to establish ongoing funding could be tied with grade separation funding in ways that could advance Palo Alto's interests. Staff was able to pursue informal priority issues identified by the Council.

Council Member Kou wanted to incorporate into the Motion "which should include among other key factors design criteria, funding, and implementation of responsibility."

Mr. Shikada agreed to include the language in the letter.

INCORPORATED INTO THE MOTION WITH THE CONSENT OF THE MAKER AND SECONDER to change the last word in the Motion from "proceed" to "succeed".

Council Member Kou suggested the letter request Caltrain work closely with Santa Clara County.

Council Member Kniss explained that San Mateo County imposed a tax, which was funding grade separations.

Council Member Kou inquired whether tax revenue or High Speed Rail funding was used to construct the 29th Avenue project.

Council Member Kniss was not aware of the funding source for the 29th Avenue project.

Council Member Kou believed the letter should refer to Palo Alto having the second highest capacity station.

MOTION PASSED: 7-0

Adjournment: The meeting was adjourned at 11:00 P.M.