

Baumb, Nelly

From: Michael Price <mjpcert@seqx.com>
Sent: Saturday, April 17, 2021 1:06 AM
To: Council, City
Subject: Comments on the Churchill grade crossing project
Attachments: comments-on-the-Partial-Underpass-for-Churchill-2021.04.16.pdf

CAUTION: This email originated from outside of the organization. Be cautious of opening attachments and clicking on links.

I have attached a letter with my comments on the Churchill grade crossing project. This is intended as a comment for the upcoming City Council meeting.

Thank you,
Mike Price

I am writing this letter to express my concerns about the state of the design of the Partial Underpass proposal for Churchill Ave. I originated this proposal in 2019 and participated in discussions with City staff and AECOM when they began design work on it in 2020.

During discussions in XCAP meetings and in their report, facts and opinions about the Partial Underpass were presented that were based on the AECOM design. This design received less attention than other alternatives due to budget and time constraints. Many issues were raised that AECOM explained could only be resolved during the next phase of design work; work that could not happen if the project was not approved.

In short, incomplete and inaccurate assessments of the proposal were used to make a decision about whether or not to proceed. Correcting these assessments could only occur if the project were to proceed. A conundrum.

Concerns about the design included the following:

- Visual aesthetics
- Caltrain encroachments
- Property takings
- Construction impacts and delays

Some or all of these were factors in the XCAP decision to prefer closing the intersection. However, no definitive statement can be made on any of these because the design has not progressed far enough to allow an accurate evaluation of any of these to be completed. At this point, any opinion on the extent or significance of these issues involves a lot of speculation.

To get a more complete assessment of the project, additional design work should focus on three issues:

- a. Reduce the scale of the design
- b. Give aesthetics more priority
- c. Apply some creativity in construction techniques

Each of these will be discussed in turn.

Reducing the scale of the Partial Underpass

The underpass is overkill for the city and neighborhood in which it is located. The most pertinent requirement is to allow for school buses to be able to safely navigate the underpass. With that in mind, there are changes that can reduce the size of the underpass, such as:

1. Reduce the width of Churchill underneath Caltrain

There are many significant benefits of reducing the width of the Churchill underpass:

- a. reduce the visual impact of the intersection.
- b. shorten the bridge span, which may allow for a single span eliminating the central support pillars.
- c. a shortened bridge span also may permit a thinner bridge deck which would permit a shallower underpass.
- d. a shallower underpass will reduce the road grades on Alma and Churchill.

One way to reduce the width of Churchill is to remove the right turn pocket from Churchill to Alma southbound. The pocket in the AECOM design is smaller than the current right turn pocket, so its contribution to traffic flow is minor. Since the traffic light at Alma will only control the southbound lane of Alma, there are opportunities to adjust signal timing to prioritize the main traffic patterns in the morning and evening. Given that there will be no interruptions for pedestrian & bike traffic or for Caltrain, a single lane should be able to handle the traffic well. This change has the following advantages:

- a. assuage concerns about induced traffic on Churchill
- b. reduce the width of underpass thereby reducing the span for the rail bridge which may permit a thinner bridge which will permit a shallower underpass
- c. reduce the visual impact of the underpass
- d. provides more space between Mariposa and the pedestrian/bike bridge over Churchill

2. Optimize lane shoulder widths

There is a stated desire on AECOM's part to include 8 foot shoulders, because this is standard. But no such shoulders exist on Alma, or on any of the other underpasses: University, Embarcadero, or Oregon Expressway. Certainly there is a need to improve safety, but those other underpasses are hardly death traps. Surely some compromise is possible.

If the lane and shoulder widths can be optimized, encroachments can be reduced. This will also contribute to reducing the width of Churchill, which has the many positive consequences mentioned above.

3. Investigate raising the rails a bit to further reduce underpass depth. This is a more attractive suggestion if the construction requires a shoofly (more on that below.) Reducing the depth of the underpass reduces the slope of the streets, which would be good.

Improve the aesthetics of the design

Someone with an architect's or urban planner's eye should be involved in the design. There's no reason a residential road intersection must look like a freeway.

1. Explore alternative bridge designs

If the bridge span can be reduced (by reducing the width of Churchill), alternate bridge designs become more feasible. A thinner bridge deck can contribute to a reduction in the depth of the underpass which will reduce the slopes of the streets.

AECOM favors a concrete bridge, but metal bridge design is well understood and, as the bridge over San Francisquito Creek demonstrates, can last 100 years or more. A metal bridge also presents opportunities for creative bridge design. There are many attractive rail bridges in the world. Surely a designer can be found to design one for Palo Alto. Civil infrastructure need not be merely utilitarian in appearance.

2. Don't assume roads and bridges must be industrial in appearance

The current design has too much visible concrete. Decorative elements are needed. The retaining wall along Alma is an opportunity for some creativity. Someone remarked that no one will visit Palo Alto to look at our grade separations. Why not? There are many civil engineering projects that attract appreciation. Don't assume that something appealing and innovative is not possible.

Reducing construction impacts and delays

It may take a couple of years to construct the underpass. The construction should be arranged to minimize impact on the community. Avoiding the need for a shoofly is important. Some ideas follow:

1. Consider alternate methods of bridge construction. AECOM looked at the jack box method and found it unlikely to simplify construction. In situ construction (such as the method from Art Engineering) should also be evaluated. Other techniques should be investigated. Compare the construction of concrete and steel bridges for their impact on disruption and cost.

2. Caltrain may require the use of a shoofly. This will greatly increase the disruption, cost, and length of the project. Caltrain may want to dictate construction methods, despite these impacts on the city. City staff and elected officials will need to be prepared to push back.

In conclusion

There are many other suggestions for design changes that will improve the underpass. These have not been adequately considered. The additional time and budget will not be overly burdensome and the potential benefits could be large.

When faced with difficult problems with no clearly superior solution, what's needed is to get more involvement. The Partial Underpass proposal was motivated by the lack of reasonable alternatives for Churchill. What was needed was a novel solution that provided different tradeoffs and advantages. The same is true for Meadow and Charleston (apparently).

Palo Alto should engage a wider group of people. Not just those who are advocates for their neighborhoods, but those who can bring a problem solving attitude and a willingness to search for solutions to problems. There's a lot of creativity in the world. Why not take advantage of it?

The Partial Underpass may, in the end, prove to be too expensive, unfeasible, or objectionable. That can only be determined with further work on the design. Work that will address the uncertainties that now prevent truly informed decisions. I believe, in the end, that a design can be produced that will address most concerns and permit a informed evaluation of alternatives for Churchill.

Michael Price
Palo Alto

Baumb, Nelly

From: Stinson Valerie <stinsonvalerie37@gmail.com>
Sent: Wednesday, April 21, 2021 9:57 AM
To: Council, City
Cc: stinsonvalerie37@gmail.com
Subject: Grade Separation at Charleston

CAUTION: This email originated from outside of the organization. Be cautious of opening attachments and clicking on links.

Dear Palo Alto City Council Members,

We believe that the only option that continues to provide quality of life for those of us living next to Alma in Greenmeadow neighborhood is:

Option 4: Underpass where Charleston/Meadow are lowered to run under the tracks and Alma

Anything that rises or lowers below current track grade will be severely devastating to our quality of life during years of construction and God-forbid, during execution. Noise of construction, as well as noise and vibration of any (higher or lower) alternatives would yield a negative impact to homeowners on BOTH sides of Alma and the track. As it is now, those of us closest to Alma and the tracks feel vibrations in our homes when trains pass. The creek also seems to cause extensive work arounds and cost, which we don't endorse.

Please consider the neighborhoods on BOTH sides of Alma, when making your decision. Vote for Underpass option for Charleston/Meadow.

Thank you,
Val Stinson

Baumb, Nelly

From: james hempatead <kimohmp@comcast.net>
Sent: Monday, April 26, 2021 12:01 PM
To: carlin otto
Cc: Council, City; cma group
Subject: Re: [cma_neighborhood] No Elevated Train !

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Carlin

Thanks for the information, great points

Kimo

On Apr 26, 2021, at 10:42 AM, carlin otto wrote:

Dear Palo Alto City Council:

As you consider the options for railroad grade separations for southern Palo Alto (Meadow and Charleston), I ask you to remove the two raised / elevated options from considerations.

Here are my reasons:

1. Raised / elevated options (the viaduct and the hybrid) will have the trains operating ABOVE the roofs of all the homes in the large single-story overlay neighborhoods of Greenmeadows and Charleston-Meadows, and of course higher than all single-story houses in the entire City.

2. The newly-installed electrification poles are already creating an ugly, visibly-divisive wall. These poles will be placed ON TOP of the viaduct or hybrid berm making this ugly, divisive wall even higher and more overwhelming

Both of these raised / elevated solutions would create a huge visual barrier stretching through the middle of a huge section of our City.

3. Raised structures push their noise much wider / farther than below-grade or at-grade options so the train noise will affect many more people than the current train does. Building a raised train guarantees that noise for the next 100 years.

4. Over time, as Palo Alto builds more housing, the train noise will operate in a direct line to the windows of the 2-4 story apartment buildings that will be built adjacent to the train tracks. Would you personally want to live in these apartments? Would you want your child to live in such an apartment?

5. Viaducts all over the world, over time, become dirty and ugly and poorly-maintained. The land beneath them becomes a litter-strewn, barren wasteland which is incredibly depressing and ugly. It will be no different in Palo Alto. Why build something that you know will become ugly and dirty?

6. Cities around the world who have built raised / elevated solutions come to hate them many years before the structures reach their end of life. Many cities have even torn them down.

7. Twenty years from now (even ten !) noone is going to remember what the grade separation cost us / them! They will only know whether the solution has degraded or improved their City. Why build something that will degrade our City by making it uglier, noisier, more littered, and more visually divided.

Please choose a solution that IMPROVES Palo Alto.
Remove the viaduct and the hybrid options from consideration.

Carlin Otto
231 Whitclem Court
Palo Alto

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You received this message because you are subscribed to the "Charleston Meadows Neighborhood" Google group.

You received this message because you are subscribed to the Google Groups "Charleston Meadows Neighborhood" group.

To unsubscribe from this group and stop receiving emails from it, send an email to cma_neighborhood+unsubscribe@googlegroups.com.

To view this discussion on the web visit

https://groups.google.com/d/msgid/cma_neighborhood/CAKip2Rc7xd4fo7M-T1FuAqpkH%3DVCBtMsZ%2B-86H3-1WCDGmuetg%40mail.gmail.com.

Baumb, Nelly

From: carlin otto <carlinotto@gmail.com>
Sent: Monday, April 26, 2021 10:42 AM
To: Council, City
Cc: cma group
Subject: No Elevated Train !

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Please choose a solution that IMPROVES Palo Alto.
Remove the viaduct and the hybrid options from consideration.

Carlin Otto
231 Whitley Court
Palo Alto

Baumb, Nelly

From: David Herzl <davherzl@sbcglobal.net>
Sent: Monday, April 26, 2021 8:57 AM
To: Council, City
Cc: davherzl@sbcglobal.net
Subject: Grade Separation Alternatives - No Raised Options - It is what the community wants

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Dear council,

Thanks for reading my email. I am David Herzl, I am a long time resident of Palo Alto and I currently live with the rail tracks behind my back yard. My house is 4135 Park Blvd. , between East Meadow and Charleston.

I have been attending meetings all the way back in 2010 when there were alternatives for high speed rail. I have attended several Palo Alto council meetings and provided my opinions.

I all my encounters with residents, we want:

1. No raised options
2. No eminent domain

There was a petition signed by about 500 residents that stated that the residents do not want raised options or eminent domain.

From the following Alternatives:

The remaining grade-separation alternatives for Meadow/Charleston are:

1. Trench where the tracks are lowered under Meadow/Charleston
2. Viaduct where the tracks are raised on a 20-foot structure
3. Hybrid where the tracks are raised on a 15-foot berm and Meadow/Charleston are lowered 5 feet
4. Underpass where Charleston/Meadow are lowered to run under the tracks and Alma

That would eliminate #2 Viaduct and #3 Hybrid. There are many reasons to eliminate these two options: Visual – up high can be seen, Separation of the City, Noise would travel further, and the residents do not want these options.

I personally believe **option #1 Trench is the best and hope that you would choose this one**, but with some modifications in the design: do not use anchors but use struts in the middle section.

#4 seems like an ok alternative.

I would hope that you listen to all of the comments made in the past. I am include some of my past messages:

Wednesday March 4th 4-6pm

I live between Charleston and East Meadow with my back yard on the tracks.

I strongly feel the trench option is the best option and is what a majority of the community wants.

I want to remind that there is a petition that was signed by about 500 residents that they do not want any eminent domain and no raised options. Trench is the only non-raised option.

I believe the Trench option is the best for the criteria of visible appearance, viaduct is the worst.

I stated to the council in the past:

The trench may be a hard option but I believe the best option and the City should put forth the effort to make it the true option.

I still hold to this.

The City should work to overcome two issue brought up before:

1. A design exception of 2% grade
2. Engineering the creeks

AECOM consultants presented some videos of the alternatives, I thank them for doing this, but I felt the trench option was bias. They put the trench in a bad light and the other options such as Arial as a better option. The Trench option had anchors that would eliminate trees in the back yards.

I still feel strong about the trench even if I have to lose a large tree in my back yard, but feel that the design could be worked on to avoid this. Two options that would help is to:

1. Struts on the top in middle section
2. Move trench more towards Alma

I am going to repeat what I said before:

The trench may be a hard option but I believe the best option and the City should put forth the effort to make it the true option.

Thanks

David Herzl

4135 Park Blvd

03/04/2020

02/24/2019

Dear Councilmember Tanaka,

Thanks for taking your time to listen to me.

Grade separation options for East Meadow and Charleston.

I have been to several community meetings and council meetings and have continued to express my opinion that the

Trench is the best option.

Early on I met with varies people in the community and it was obvious that most all wanted an option that was not raised. About 500 residents signed a petition in stating that they do not want any eminent domain and no raised options.

The community was sold on the Trench or Tunnel option. At an early meeting the community found out that there were two big issues. 1. A design exception of 2% grade. 2. Engineering of the creeks. I remember at one meeting the response by the Water District "This is a no starter". The City at this time did no action for the 2% grade. So, this option was sold to the community as a great option but is was realistic.

I sent an email to Cory Wolbach concluding "**The trench may be a hard option but I believe the best option and City should put forth effort making it a true option**"

I am happy that the consulting firm AECOM, provided additional analysis of the options and put together some good videos. I felt that they were bias. They put the trench in a bad light, and the other options such as the Arial as a better option. The Trench had all of the trees removed in the yards of residents, and the Arial option had these big green trees blocking the view. I was disappointed that the Trench was not presented in its best ability. I still believe the Trench is the best option, even though a tree will be removed from my yard and all my neighbor's yard.

Can the consulting company take a good look at the design and make it a better option? Ideas for improvement:

1. **Use the existing tracks as the shoefly and build the trench between the shoefly and Alma. This way the ground anchors will not cause neighbors to lose their trees in the yard. Or even make the shoefly on the side closer to the resident. Bottom line is design the trench closer to Alma.**
2. Instead of using ground anchors secure the walls with struts on the top (bars that go on the top)

Make the trench a true option.

2% grade - What is the progress with the 2% grade exception? Has the City had further conversations with Caltrain on how they can meet their needs with the 2% grade exception?

Creeks – Have there been engineering designs that would be acceptable to the Santa Clara County Water District? This project is a major project that the community of Palo Alto will have to live with. It is important to get the right option, the option that meets what the community wants and the requirements. I have seen the community want no raised options and they have spoken out with a petition.

The Trench may be a hard option but I believe the best option and City should put forth effort making it a true option.

Thanks.

David Herzl

Palo Alto Resident – up to 50 years.

I love Palo Alto

12/17/2018

Committee, thank you listening to me and the community.

I have been following the decision of grade separation, and have been to several rail committee meetings, and attended the recent community meeting on November 28th.

I urge the committee **to eliminate all raised options and add an underground Deep Bore Tunnel as an option.**

I have reviewed all the alternatives with an open mind and come to this question “What is best for the community” and I strongly feel from the three options presented the **Trench alternative is the best.**

I felt the trench option was presented with bias at the community meeting and even rated poorly in the evaluation matrix. Viaduct was dressed up with big trees and the Trench was down played with the removal of trees and only bushes. The trench has issues, 2% grade, the creek crossing, delay in construction, highest cost and only bushes. In the evaluation matrix it did not score so well. I took that evaluation matrix and scored myself and got the following scores. Trench scored 43, Hybrid 36, and Viaduct scored 44. The problem with making the decision solely based on scores from an evaluation is that it is not waited and it is not taking in consideration what the community wants.

An important criteria is “What does the community want”

I personally am ok with a delayed construction, removal of trees, and a higher cost if the end product is better and meets the more important criteria of visual and noise reduction. Again I feel the Trench is the best option and note this option would include the removal of a tree in my back yard.

What does the community want?

From what I hear they do not want raised options. About 500 neighbors signed a petition to this effect and all of the neighbors I talk to strongly feel that they do not want the raised options.

I urge the committee to eliminate all raised options and add an underground Deep Bore Tunnel as an option.

Thanks You

Baumb, Nelly

From: Minor, Beth
Sent: Monday, April 26, 2021 8:52 AM
To: Cybele LoVuolo-Bhushan; Council, City
Subject: RE: Caltrain Grade Separations

Hi Cybele,

As this meeting is tonight, 4/26 there are no minutes or video on this item, they will come later this week. Here is the link to the agenda

<https://www.cityofpaloalto.org/files/assets/public/agendas-minutes-reports/agendas-minutes/city-council-agendas-minutes/2021/04-26-21-ccm-agenda.pdf> you should be able to open this and the report.

Thanks and stay healthy.



BETH MINOR

City Clerk

(650)329-2379 | Beth.Minor@cityofpaloalto.org

www.cityofpaloalto.org

**CITY OF
PALO
ALTO**



From: Cybele LoVuolo-Bhushan <cybele88lb@gmail.com>

Sent: Friday, April 23, 2021 6:38 PM

To: Council, City <city.council@cityofpaloalto.org>

Subject: Caltrain Grade Separations

CAUTION: This email originated from outside of the organization. Be cautious of opening attachments and clicking on links.

Dear City Clerk, City Council and City Manager,

Your website doesn't allow me to click through for the most recent Rail Committee agenda, minutes or video.

Today's Daily Post, April 23, 2021, page 43 has the announcement for the April 26, 2021 zoom. I noted the published ACTION ITEM regarding discussion of the Final Report which states:

Removal of two Rail Grade Separation Alternatives from Further Consideration. I would very much like to know what are the two Rail Grade Separations that are being considered for removal? And if there
Thank you for your assistance in this matter.

Sincerely,

Cybele LoVuolo-Bhushan

3838 Mumford Pl, Palo Alto, CA 94306

Baumb, Nelly

From: Marty Douglas <martydoug3@gmail.com>
Sent: Monday, April 26, 2021 1:33 AM
To: Council, City
Subject: City Council Meeting (April 26) RAIL discussion

CAUTION: This email originated from outside of the organization. Be cautious of opening attachments and clicking on links.

Dear city council members,

Regarding your Rail discussion tonight, my preferences for the alternatives for the Charleston-Meadow grade separations are as follows:

1st choice: (#4 alternative) UNDERPASS

2nd choice: (#1 alternative) TRENCH

Thank you for your continued discussion of this topic. But it would be good if we could finally make a decision.

Marilyn Douglas (40 year resident of P.A.)
360 Maclane St. (1 1/2 blocks from Park Blvd)
Palo Alto, CA 94306

Baumb, Nelly

From: Email <seanodaddy@comcast.net>
Sent: Sunday, April 25, 2021 9:26 PM
To: Council, City
Subject: Input for Rail Grade Separation

CAUTION: This email originated from outside of the organization. Be cautious of opening attachments and clicking on links.

Dear Council,

My preferred selection would be the trench alternative. In the long run it maintains the strongest sense of community. All of the others create an east - west separation.

My second preference is the underpass alternative.

I appreciate your time and efforts as you work to make this difficult decision.

Sincerely,

Sean McDaniel

4060 Wilkie Way

Resident at this address 50 years.

Palo Alto resident for 58 years.

Baumb, Nelly

From: Sprintmail <smiri@sprintmail.com>
Sent: Sunday, April 25, 2021 9:12 PM
To: Council, City
Cc: Reckdahl, Keith
Subject: Re: Meadow-Charlestone grade seperation

CAUTION: This email originated from outside of the organization. Be cautious of opening attachments and clicking on links.

Dear City Council,

I am a resident on west meadow drive and I have been following this topic for a while now. I think there is one option that is not being presented and discussed on this topic:

—> Make meadow same as California ave, only bike and pedestrian underpass, and no car crossing Alma. All car crossing can be diverted via Charleston, Oregon or San Antonio.

Reasons/benefits :

A-traffic on W Meadow will not improve with any of the proposed options, since it is basically a "dead-end" with 2 stop sign between park ave and el camino way.

B-cost of the project will definitely reduce. With inflation on the horizon and higher cost of goods and labor, you budget calculation will very highly get impacted by as much as 20% , if not more, in the next 2-5 years.

C-Create a very safe path for children and bikers, especially with all the schools on both side Alma. When schools are open, there are 100s of bikers on this section in the morning and afternoon. This is very dangerous traffic area during school year, and imagining traffic flow increase (which is in your presentation) will be negative impact and raise danger, not making it safer. If someone checks your old data, these 100s of bikers take 1 to 1.5 car lane traffic in the morning. (You cannot see it now, due to pandemic and no school attendance)

D-traffic flow on the E Meadow side will be very simple : left or right turn on Alma, one with a "merging lane" and one with "traffic light".

E-Charlestone can have a new solution : car overpass the railroad, like San Antonio road. This way no need to touch railroad, utilities, etc...Instead spend the money to make a sound wall barrier for the existing rail, which will also increase safety.

I hope this can be considered, proposed and reviewed.

Regards
Sam

Baumb, Nelly

From: Maija McDonald <maija.mcdonald@gmail.com>
Sent: Sunday, April 25, 2021 8:06 PM
To: Council, City
Subject: Connecting Palo Alto Rail Grade Separation, April 26 City Council Special meeting

CAUTION: This email originated from outside of the organization. Be cautious of opening attachments and clicking on links.

Honorable Members of the Palo Alto City Council,

In regards to the Meadow/Charleston grade-separations alternatives:

I would prefer you keep the rail line at or below its present level, either the underpass or the trench.

Thank you for giving this matter your careful consideration.

Maija McDonald
4231 Park Blvd.

Baumb, Nelly

From: Joe Garofalo (jgarofalo) <jgarofalo@micron.com>
Sent: Sunday, April 25, 2021 7:30 PM
To: Council, City
Cc: Joe Garofalo
Subject: XCAP grade-crossing feedback.

CAUTION: This email originated from outside of the organization. Be cautious of opening attachments and clicking on links.

Micron Confidential

Hi,

We have been residents of Palo Alto and Charleston Meadows for 7 years. We purchased in this area to raise our family in a residential environment. Over the past years, we have seen increasing congestion due to sub-divisions of previous single-family homes. Some of the rail options would move this area even further away from the residential environment that brought us here. Prior to moving back to the US, we lived in Shanghai China for some years. One of the least appealing aspects of that highest density city were the prevalence of viaducts for roadways and railways. They are an intrusion of privacy and unsightly. In fact, in Asian countries, viaducts are being torn down in the interests of aesthetics and to improve the quality of lives of the residents. While living in Shanghai for several years, we witnessed the train expansion for 4 lines to 18. Nearly all the new racks were underground.

I understand the tunnel option has been removed from consideration. Have we checked on the more advanced tunneling options – for example, from Boring Company? If tunneling is not an option, the trench would be the next least obtrusive for the majority of the affected residents. Even an underpass solution, as we have in the other Palo Alto separated grade-crossings, would be preferable to any of the raised track scenarios.

Thanks,

Joe Garofalo & Family
366 George Hood Ln
Palo Alto, Ca 94306

Micron Confidential

Baumb, Nelly

From: Alex Ross <alexr@stanford.edu>
Sent: Sunday, April 25, 2021 12:09 PM
To: Council, City
Subject: Charleston Road grade crossing

CAUTION: This email originated from outside of the organization. Be cautious of opening attachments and clicking on links.

Dear City Council,

My name is Alex Ross. I live at 4175 Wilkie Way, corner of Carolina, in the Charleston Meadows neighborhood. My house is approximately 500 feet from the Charleston Caltrain crossing.

My preference for handling the grade separation at Charleston is the underpass option, with the trench option also acceptable.

I am very much opposed to either the viaduct or berm schemes because I think they would create an eyesore, as well as increased noise pollution, and would result in a significantly lower quality of life, as well as sharply reduced property values, in our neighborhood.

Thanks for reading my message.

Sincerely,
Alex Ross
4175 Wilkie Way
Palo Alto, CA 94306

alexr@stanford.edu

Baumb, Nelly

From: Eddie Gornish <gornish@gmail.com>
Sent: Sunday, April 25, 2021 10:04 AM
To: Council, City
Cc: gornish
Subject: grade-separation alternatives for Meadow/Charleston

CAUTION: This email originated from outside of the organization. Be cautious of opening attachments and clicking on links.

Please do not vote to raise the railroad tracks at Meadow or Charleston.
Doing so will destroy South Palo Alto.

Thanks
Eddie Gornish
Palo Alto

Baumb, Nelly

From: Maureen Kennedy <maureenekennedy@gmail.com>
Sent: Friday, April 23, 2021 10:01 PM
To: Council, City
Cc: Expanded Community Advisory Panel
Subject: Railroad Crossings - Need for Further Evaluations

CAUTION: This email originated from outside of the organization. Be cautious of opening attachments and clicking on links.

Dear Honorable Councilmembers

I noticed that the Council will continue its consideration of the very significant matter of railroad crossings and potential grade separations of crossings at its April 26, 2021 meeting. The path forward re these crossings and the railroad facilities within the City of Palo Alto will impact the City and its citizens for many years and generations. I will note that the University Ave and Embarcadero Road underpasses have been serving us for approximately 80 years and the Oregon Expressway underpass has been serving us for approximately 60 years - these are very long lived facilities. **I believe there are more basic and simpler alternatives that need to be considered and evaluated.**

I have been a resident of Palo Alto for many years and have observed development and changes over these years - some good and some not so good. Traffic, transportation and mobility have been among some of the most difficult changes (and challenges) faced by the community. With this perspective and some knowledge of infrastructure planning, design and construction processes I would like to offer some observations and opinions as I have been following the XCAP process for some time, although unfortunately I was not aware of the process prior to the Fall of 2019. Because of my delayed connection with the process I acknowledge a limited understanding of the early considerations.

The XCAP has been faced with a very challenging and complex situation. The XCAP members have worked deliberately and diligently for many months and during many meetings. The difficulty of its assignment is evident in the outcomes of its work - a number of ideas and findings but no recommendations for the Meadow and Charleston crossings and a split decision for the Churchill crossing.

Some of the factors affecting the work of XCAP, in my opinion and in no particular order, are:

Complex needs and potentially very impactful and expensive solutions

An XCAP that worked hard and tried to respond to a very broad range of community input and residents' interests

It's Palo Alto, and we have concerned, active and outspoken citizens

COVID

Significant input and influence of bicyclists, and too a lesser degree, pedestrians

Personal interests of many of the process participants

Multiple and in some cases unclear and/or unprioritized criteria previously provided by the Council

An example of the effect of unprioritized criteria in my opinion was XCAP's determination to drop further consideration of any alternative that would require property acquisition, although eventually a few quite modest partial property acquisitions may be associated with some alternatives that were considered in detail. It appeared this determination by XCAP was based on an "avoid property acquisition" criteria from the Council. This, and some apparently very conservative preliminary designs by a previous consultant that would have required significant property acquisitions essentially caused early elimination by XCAP of basic underpasses alternatives at all three crossings.

I believe that as the City goes forward with these railroad crossing separations the City needs to add back into its consideration that of constructing basic underpasses at all three crossings. These might require some local raising of the tracks and traffic signal controls with full turning functions for vehicles, bikes and pedestrians rather than complete separation for all modes from all other modes. Limited acquisition of a few parcels would likely be necessary but the costs might be modest compared to additional construction costs, and it would certainly be a better result for the overall community. Some alternatives that were considered in detail by XCAP were clever and innovative so as to fit within the assumed criteria but would be very confusing to first time users, and in most cases would have limited turning functionality. It may be time to apply the KISS principle (keep it simple, stupid) when planning for these projects continues.

Regarding the split recommendation of XCAP to close and eliminate the vehicle crossing at Churchill Ave., it ignores criteria from the Council and the Comprehensive Plan to maintain and enhance east-west mobility and it defies common sense. The substantial and in some cases critical vehicle traffic that currently utilizes the Churchill crossing will have to reroute to either Oregon or Embarcadero, both of which are already very busy. In the case of Oregon, it would push more traffic to the El Camino/Page Mill intersection, one of the busiest in Santa Clara County. In the case of Embarcadero, it would push more traffic into a substandard and deficient underpass and onto a section of roadway passing Paly and Town and Country that is among the worst in Palo Alto. I ask the Council to reconsider and improve the Churchill Ave. crossing for vehicles, bicycles and

pedestrians, whether through a partial, or “T”, underpass or a basic full function underpass, even though a few parcels would likely have to be acquired.

Again, I urge the Council to allow consideration of limited property acquisition if such would result in better solutions for the benefit of the greater community of Palo Alto. Proceeding with these railroad crossing separations will be very challenging, particularly in a built-up community. However, I believe it is the right thing to do, primarily for safety and also for convenience.

David Kennedy

A resident of Professorville

Baumb, Nelly

From: Cybele LoVuolo-Bhushan <cybele88lb@gmail.com>
Sent: Friday, April 23, 2021 6:38 PM
To: Council, City
Subject: Caltrain Grade Separations

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Dear City Clerk, City Council and City Manager,

Your website doesn't allow me to click through for the most recent Rail Committee agenda, minutes or video.

Today's Daily Post, April 23, 2021, page 43 has the announcement for the April 26, 2021 zoom. I noted the published ACTION ITEM regarding discussion of the Final Report which states:

Removal of two Rail Grade Separation Alternatives from Further Consideration. I would very much like to know what are the two Rail Grade Separations that are being considered for removal? And if there
Thank you for your assistance in this matter.

Sincerely,
Cybele LoVuolo-Bhushan
3838 Mumford Pl, Palo Alto, CA 94306

Baumb, Nelly

From: Richard Lee <richlee.pa@gmail.com>
Sent: Friday, April 23, 2021 10:28 AM
To: Council, City
Cc: Reckdahl, Keith
Subject: Meadow/Charleston grade-separation

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Dear Palo Alto City Council:

As 16 years residents of Palo Alto on Park Blvd., the decision for the Meadow/Charleston grade-separation will significantly impact our property and our quality of life. We are raising our young children here, and we are heavily invested in this community. The above grade alternatives in 2)Viaduct and 3)Hybrid will increase the noise level and privacy concerns. They will also damage the look and feel of the entire city. Therefore, we are **strongly against** those two above grade alternatives.

Please only consider the 4)Underpass and 1)Trench alternatives with a preference for the 4)Underpass option.

Sincerely,
Richard and Tracy Lee

Resident at:
4115 Park Blvd.
Palo Alto, CA. 94306

Baumb, Nelly

From: Pradeep Solanki <pradeepsolanki@hotmail.com>
Sent: Thursday, April 22, 2021 7:19 PM
To: Council, City
Subject: Charleston/ Meadows grade separation options

CAUTION: This email originated from outside of the organization. Be cautious of opening attachments and clicking on links.

Dear City Council,

We sincerely thank you for your efforts to identify the best grade separation option for Palo Alto crossings.

We would like to bring to your attention that we along with more than 500 residents in S Palo Alto are strongly opposed to both raised rail options - viaduct and hybrid for Charleston and Meadow intersections, that are on the agenda for Monday's Council meeting.

We are strongly opposed to eminent domain.

We strongly oppose all raised options

We support lowered rail options like a tunnel or a trench.

We support increased safety for cyclists and pedestrians.

Regards,

Pradeep and Swati

Baumb, Nelly

From: Marilyn Gillespie <mgilles12@gmail.com>
Sent: Thursday, April 22, 2021 1:17 PM
To: Council, City
Subject: Meadow/Charleston Grade Separation
Attachments: City Council Letter April 2021.doc

CAUTION: This email originated from outside of the organization. Be cautious of opening attachments and clicking on links.

Dear City Council Members,

Please see attached our comments regarding the Meadow/Charleston grade-separation alternatives for your meeting on April 26th.

Thank You.

Marilyn and Robert Gillespie
384 Whitclem Drive
Palo Alto, CA 94306

April 22, 2021

Dear Palo Alto City Council Members,

Re: Charleston Meadows Grade Separation Alternatives

I am writing to express the deep concern that both my husband and I share regarding the options under review for the Palo Alto Grade Separation Program as it pertains to the Meadow/Charleston crossings.

We strongly favor the Trench Option where the tracks are lowered under Meadow/Charleston. This is the least visually offensive of the options offered. In addition, the elevated methods would raise the neighborhood noise level as well as being an incredibly unattractive eyesore for current residents/visitors and future generations.

As longtime residents of the Charleston-Meadows neighborhood (over 50 years) and as former career employees of the City of Palo Alto (Fire Department and Library), both my husband and I have seen the many changes that the city has undergone over the years. We have seen how the City Council members have methodically and carefully looked at how their decisions might impact not only the current generation but those that follow. We appreciate the dedication that the community and many of its leaders have made to ensure that the values of this town and its residents as well as its users benefit from these careful decisions.

One of the values that we presumably all hold dear is that the residents of Palo Alto are able to live in a safe, green environment filled with cultural and education enhancements and one where people can enjoy a sensory pleasing environment as well.

Your charge now is to determine how you might best provide not only for today but for the future. And, this decision must be one that looks at continuing to do whatever you can to ensure that the residents and users of this city might benefit from the values we all share.

So, when you consider the options for the Meadow/Charleston crossing, please focus on the values we share today and the benefits for the future. An aesthetically pleasing environment and one where the noise level is manageable for a neighborhood must be strongly considered as the highest priority. So, therefore, we ask you to choose the option that puts the train tracks in a trench where the tracks are lowered under Meadow/Charleston.

Thank you.

Marilyn and Robert Gillespie 384 Whitclem Drive Palo Alto, CA 94306

Baumb, Nelly

From: Ronald Pyszka <ron.pyszka@gmail.com>
Sent: Thursday, April 22, 2021 10:00 AM
To: Council, City
Subject: Charleston Grade Separation Options
Attachments: Palo Alto City Council April 2021.docx

CAUTION: This email originated from outside of the organization. Be cautious of opening attachments and clicking on links.

Relative to the City Council meeting of April 26, 2021, I am attaching some comments regarding the Charleston grade separation options.

Thank you very much for your consideration.

April 22, 2021

Charleston Grade Separation Options

To: Members of the Palo Alto City Council

I am writing with regard to the Charleston grade separation options. As a long-time resident of East Charleston Road and as someone who has closely followed the XCAP deliberations over the past year, I would like to share a few thoughts with the City Council as it reviews the XCAP final report. I would also like to express my thanks to XCAP for its thoughtful analysis of alternatives.

Let me begin by addressing the Underpass option. At first glance, the Underpass option appears to be an appealing concept. However, as it turns out, its implementation is highly problematic. As the saying goes, the devil is in the details. The disadvantages of the Underpass option far outweigh its advantages.

- The Underpass option would require the acquisition/seizure of two or more private residences, something the City Council has previously said that it wishes to avoid.
- The impact on private property is not limited to the acquisition/seizure of these residences. It would also require the seizure of parts of several back yards. Moreover, homes bordering on the traffic circle, as well as those in the general vicinity, would suffer noise, pollution, and decreased property values. This promises to be a very congested traffic circle.
- Traffic on Charleston between Alma and the proposed traffic circle would increase dramatically because cars making left turns to and from Alma would be added to those going straight through on Charleston. Charleston, this section included, has been designated a residential/school corridor. Residents have worked for more than a decade to calm traffic on Charleston, not increase it by adding cars making convoluted left turns.
- The increase in traffic stemming from convoluted left turns also makes the Underpass option the most environmentally unfriendly option.
- To the east of the proposed traffic circle, residents would find it extremely difficult to back out of their driveways since there would no longer be traffic lights to provide an occasional break in traffic.
- With its twists, turns, and ramps, the Underpass option is very unfriendly to seniors, mobility-impaired pedestrians, people pushing strollers, etc. The Underpass option favors one population (physically-fit bicyclists) at the expense of others.
- Mode separation is the primary selling point for the Underpass option. As someone who commuted to work across the Charleston crossing for more than 25 years, I am keenly sensitive to bicycle and pedestrian safety.

However, I do not believe that the Underpass option offers a significant advantage over the Trench, Hybrid, and Viaduct options. As a bicyclist, I would be happy with any of them. In fact, as an older bicyclist, I would prefer them.

- Lastly, with only one lane in each direction beneath the railroad tracks and with a traffic circle that promises to be congested from the outset, the Charleston Underpass option is the one that is most prone to becoming obsolete if automobile traffic continues to increase in coming decades. We all hope that traffic growth can be constrained, but we also need to be realistic, particularly since a large portion of the automobile traffic on Charleston originates outside of Palo Alto and is unlikely to be influenced by Palo Alto's traffic initiatives. A certain amount of foresight and prudence is called for when making infrastructure investments of this magnitude.

There is no possible configuration of the Underpass option that can overcome the above issues. As such, it seems appropriate for the City Council to eliminate the Underpass option from further consideration and to instead focus on the remaining three options.

The Trench option has much to be said in its favor. It is the most esthetically pleasing and unobtrusive of all the options. Additionally, with the railroad tracks underground, pedestrian and bicycle lanes could be widened and separated by bowing them out.

There are cost and engineering obstacles to be overcome. However, as the XCAP discussions showed, other cities have built railroad trenches for substantially less money than the amount that has been projected for Palo Alto. The Trench option is worthy of further study. If it can be made to work, it would be a wonderful investment in Palo Alto's future.

If after further study the Trench option turns out to be unworkable, the Hybrid option is the most compelling choice. It represents a reasonable compromise at a relatively affordable cost.

The projected cost of the Hybrid option for the Charleston/Meadow crossings is \$190-230 million, whereas the projected cost of the Underpass option is \$340-420 million. This is a substantial difference. And the Churchill and Palo Alto Avenue crossings need to be funded as well.

The Viaduct option would be the fastest and least disruptive to build. Nevertheless, it is substantially more obtrusive than the Hybrid option without the cost advantage of that option. The Hybrid option is a much better choice.

The above comments represent my personal opinions. However, all of the Walnut Grove neighbors with whom I have spoken are in agreement with the points that I have made in this letter.

Thank you very much for your consideration as you face the difficult task of sorting through the various options.

Ronald H. Pyszka, Ph.D.
284 East Charleston Road

Baumb, Nelly

From: John Hofer <johnkhofer@gmail.com>
Sent: Wednesday, April 21, 2021 7:58 PM
To: Council, City
Subject: Meadow/Charleston Grade Separation

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Although we were travelling and not able to join the zoom meeting, Renee and I would like to indicate that our preference for the Meadow/Charleston grade separation is the trench.

John and Renee Hofer
4111 Park Blvd.

Sent from [Mail](#) for Windows 10

Baumb, Nelly

From: William C. Moss <wcmoss@pacbell.net>
Sent: Wednesday, April 21, 2021 5:39 PM
To: Council, City
Subject: April 26, meeting re: grade separation.

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Dear Sir/Ma'am,

I have lived in the Ventura neighborhood for 38 years. I would like to add my voice to the Charleston/Meadow grade separation, saying any option that raises the tracks I am against. If you take a trip to San Carlos the raised tracks there make excessive noise when trains are passing through. I think lowering either the road or the tracks is the best option for keeping the noise pollution down. Thank you for your time, William Moss

Baumb, Nelly

From: Jonathan L <jonathan.luk@gmail.com>
Sent: Wednesday, April 21, 2021 12:46 PM
To: Council, City
Cc: Lilly Luk
Subject: Charleston/Meadow rail grade separation alternatives

CAUTION: This email originated from outside of the organization. Be cautious of opening attachments and clicking on links.

Dear Palo Alto City Council,

Among the grade-separation alternatives for Charleston/Meadow:

We are strongly in favor of:

- * Trench where the tracks are lowered under Meadow/Charleston

Secondarily:

- * Underpass where Charleston/Meadow are lowered to run under the tracks and Alma

And we are strongly OPPOSED to:

- * Viaduct where the tracks are raised on a 20-foot structure

- * Hybrid where the tracks are raised on a 15-foot berm and Meadow/Charleston are lowered 5 feet

Thank you for your consideration and efforts in maintaining and improving Palo Alto.

Jonathan Luk
Lilly Luk
114 Monroe Drive
Palo Alto, CA 94306

(17 year residents)

Baumb, Nelly

From: Mohamed T. Hadidi <mthadidi@alumni.stanford.edu>
Sent: Monday, April 26, 2021 9:50 AM
To: Council, City
Cc: Expanded Community Advisory Panel; youngjoh; Omar Hadidi; Mona Hadidi; Mohamed Hadidi
Subject: April 26, 2021 City Council Meeting - Churchill Closure

CAUTION: This email originated from outside of the organization. Be cautious of opening attachments and clicking on links.

Honorable Members of the City Council,

I would like once more to voice my strong support for the XCAP recommendation to close Churchill. While 3 out of the nine XCAP members voted against closure, all three made negative remarks about the current version of the Partial Underpass Alternative when they casted their votes. Even the originator of the Partial Underpass Concept, Michael Price, claimed during the last City Council meeting on this topic on March 23rd that AECOM engineers tried in effect to sabotage his idea by fleshing it out to look more like a freeway, increasing its footprint and setting it up for rejection. The implication is that even he is unhappy with his own concept after it had been worked out to meet safety and other requirements.

The hope of some opponents of Churchill closure is that further refinement will make the Underpass Alternative less objectionable. This is hoping against hope. At the XCAP suggestion, the City Council had approved additional funds for the further study of the Partial Underpass and the resulting design turned out to be unpalatable even to its supporters.

At the very least, we all should recognize the PLAINLY OBVIOUS, namely that the Partial Underpass in its current form is unacceptable, even to its originator and many of its proponents, and may not even be feasible if the Caltrain Right-of-Way issue cannot be resolved.

I would also like to point out that the criterion of maintaining connectivity was always meant to be a soft, not a hard constraint. Otherwise, the City Council logically would not have included Churchill Closure as a serious alternative for XCAP to consider. Furthermore, Closure will improve connectivity for the bike and pedestrian modes of transportation. We should also remember that Palo Alto currently has 7 railroad crossings, more than any other city in the Caltrain corridor, even when normalized by population.

Another objection cited by opponents of the closure is that it exports traffic to other intersections and is therefore not equitable. This mischaracterizes the situation. The **stark choice** here is between 2 alternatives:

1. inflicting a concrete monstrosity on the neighborhood that will forever change its character for a nightmarish worse, and construct a concrete wall in the middle of Alma at the intersection that will extend for some distance on both sides and constitute a physical barrier that impedes connectivity on the one hand, and
2. a possible slight increase in the traffic at some intersections, and a slight inconvenience for some Southgate residents that can be largely mitigated by opening Park Ave or some similarly closed street.

At the previous City Council meeting on March 23rd, some Southgate residents presented the results of a survey showing that 77 out of 136 households opposed closure, while 49 favored it. This is 56 vs 36%. Not an overwhelming majority by any means. These 77 households should be contrasted with the more than 500 Palo Alto residents who signed a petition that was submitted to the preceding City Council and supported Churchill closure. A fair assessment is that Palo Alto is divided when it comes to the question of Churchill Closure.

Thank you for your consideration.

Best regards,

Mohamed

Mohamed Hadidi, Ph.D.

Baumb, Nelly

From: kxr@netzero.net
Sent: Sunday, April 25, 2021 6:01 PM
To: Council, City
Cc: kxr@netzero.net
Subject: rail opinions

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city.council@cityofpaloalto.org

I like the simplicity of the trench.

I don't like either rail raised option,
so the underpass is my second choice.

The pumps for the creeks should be
electric rather than diesel. I mean
like with tesla batteries and direct
electrification power.

Keith Rich (resident)
4225 Park Blvd
Palo Alto

Baumb, Nelly

From: Han Chen <hchenqi@gmail.com>
Sent: Thursday, April 22, 2021 10:21 PM
To: Council, City
Subject: Rail opinions for Meadow/Charleston: prefer Trench (rail under charles/meadow)

CAUTION: This email originated from outside of the organization. Be cautious of opening attachments and clicking on links.

Dear Sir/Madam:

I am a Meadow/Charleston resident. I prefer Trench (rail under charles/meadow).

thanks, Han Chen

Baumb, Nelly

From: Nadia Naik <nadianaik@gmail.com>
Sent: Monday, April 26, 2021 3:02 PM
To: Minor, Beth; Shikada, Ed; Council, City; Kamhi, Philip; Bhatia, Ripon
Subject: FOR TONIGHT: Updated XCAP Presentation for this evening

CAUTION: This email originated from outside of the organization. Be cautious of opening attachments and clicking on links.

Hi Beth,

Attached please find an updated presentation for this evening. It is essentially the same.

The most significant change is the addition of a few reference images (slides 4-7) for the various alternatives (images that were previously presented) and the addition of a slide regarding Noise (slide 19).

The rest is minor typos and changes to make it slightly more readable on screen.



[Final XCAP Presentation Part 2 for 4-26-21 Cit...](#)



Thanks,
Nadia