



City of Palo Alto

City Council Rail Committee Staff Report

(ID # 7292)

Report Type: Action Items

Meeting Date: 9/21/2016

Summary Title: Caltrain Electrification Update

Title: Caltrain Electrification Status Update

From: City Manager

Lead Department: Public Works

Recommendation

This is an informational report and no Rail Committee action is required.

Background

The Peninsula Corridor Electrification Project (the "PCEP" or "Project") consists of converting Caltrain from diesel-fueled to electrically-powered trains for service between the 4th and King Street Station in San Francisco and the Tamien Station in San Jose.

The project will install facility improvements, including overhead catenary wires, support poles, traction power facilities, and other appurtenances necessary for converting the diesel-locomotive driven trains to Electric Multiple Units (EMUs). EMUs are self-propelled trains that do not have a separate locomotive. EMUs can accelerate and decelerate at faster rates than diesel-powered trains, even with longer trains.

On February 11, 2016, and on an ongoing basis since that time, staff has held meetings with the Peninsula Joint Powers Board ("JPB" or "Caltrain") project teams to discuss the PCEP and next steps, including technical aspects, design and construction of the electrification system, what is required in Palo Alto, as well as the agreements and safety standards necessary to implement the Project.

Caltrain issued a Request for Proposals for a design/build contractor to complete the design and construct the PCEP, which was awarded to a contractor on July 15, 2016. Caltrain has issued a limited notice to proceed to its contractor for design work, and anticipates with construction will start in Spring 2017 with 'revenue service' beginning in 2020. The PCEP is funded by a combination of state funds, commitments from local member agencies and

federal grant funding from the Federal Railroad Administration (“FRA”). Caltrain’s deadline for obtaining FRA grant funds is the end of calendar year 2016.

Specific to the City of Palo Alto, Caltrain’s preliminary design includes potential construction and use of the following elements within the City:

1. Overhead Contact System (OCS) poles;
2. Stringing wire for OCS, requires temporary at-grade crossing street closures;
3. Construction of a Traction Power Facility (TPF); and
4. Staging areas.

In order to facilitate PCEP’s progress through Palo Alto, City staff is in the process of working closely with JPB on the following two items:

1. A Comprehensive Agreement between the Peninsula Corridor Joint Powers Board and City of Palo Alto Relating to the Peninsula Corridor Electrification Project, which will establish a framework for cooperation and cost recovery during the construction and design phase of the PCEP (the “Comprehensive Agreement”); and
2. The Caltrain Electrification Operating Requirements (“Safety Requirements”), which require approval from the California Public Utilities Commission (“CPUC”) and will establish uniform safety requirements governing the design, construction, installation and maintenance of electrification facilities, and impacted utility facilities in the peninsula corridor.

According to JPB, its federal grant funding from the FRA is dependent on JPB completing a variety of tasks in furtherance of the PCEP, including execution of comprehensive agreements with the agencies along the Peninsula Corridor that the PCEP will impact and approval of the Safety Requirements by the CPUC. JPB has a number of agreements already completed and is now working to complete agreements with the remaining entities. Palo Alto is among the agencies currently negotiating the Comprehensive Agreement. The City has also been working actively and cooperatively with Caltrain, Santa Clara and PG&E on draft Safety Requirements as Caltrain seeks CPUC approval.

Discussion

The Comprehensive Agreement

On May 12, 2016, the City received an initial draft of the Comprehensive Agreement. The purpose of the Comprehensive Agreement is to memorialize the parties' consultation and cooperation, designate respective rights and obligations, and ensure cooperation between JPB and the City in connection with the design and construction of the PCEP.

Once negotiations have concluded, staff will bring the agreement to Council for discussion and approval. The anticipated date to execute this agreement is early Fall 2016. The expedited timeline for Council consideration is driven by Caltrain's deadlines for FRA grant funding.

A cross-departmental team of City staff, including representatives from public works, planning, the development center and utilities met with the Caltrain Project team in June to review the draft, provide feedback, and discuss comments before review would be undertaken by the respective attorneys from each agency.

During departmental staff discussions with Caltrain, City staff raised a number of issues for discussion in connection with the Comprehensive Agreement. Caltrain has taken the position that its enabling legislation preempts some aspects of the City's existing regulatory authority over work occurring exclusively within the JPB ROW, and as a result, they have proposed some alternative approaches to the City's standard processes, particularly in the areas of design review and building permits. A non-exhaustive list of current key issues and related discussions is included below:

1. Preserving El Palo Alto and its Surrounding Area.

El Palo Alto is located near the Caltrain Right-of-Way ("JPB ROW"). The PCEP work will approach El Palo Alto's location; and staff is negotiating to prohibit any pruning of El Palo Alto and encroachment within 100 feet of its trunk.

2. Design Review Process for OCS Poles.

Caltrain takes the position that its enabling legislation precludes certain local regulatory authority in this area and as such Caltrain has proposed an alternative process for design review. Caltrain's proposal involves following the City's design review process with respect to the OCS poles near each train station. Only the OCS poles within 200 feet in either direction of each station will fall under the design review process through the Architectural Review Board review, these poles may be different than the poles along the majority of the track lengths between stations.

3. Cost Recovery for City costs, including Staff Time.

Staff is negotiating a plan to require JPB to initiate a cost recovery deposit account for the recovery of City staff time and other costs associated with the PCEP incurred by the City.

4. Hours of Construction and Noise Impacts.

Caltrain has proposed hours of construction at night; and associated noise and light impacts may be a concern, which the City must work with Caltrain to resolve.

5. Building Permit Requirements and Inspections for the Traction Power Facility The traction power facility ("TPF") is currently proposed to be within the JPB ROW, located directly behind the recent development at 2865 Park Blvd. Caltrain takes the position that its enabling legislation precludes certain local regulatory authority in this area as well. City staff is working with Caltrain to better understand the scope of the TPF structure and its contents, and plans to work with Caltrain through this agreement to determine how best to inspect and sign off on the facility to ensure it is safe.

6. Roadway Geometry Changes at Alma/El Camino Intersection.

The PCEP has identified the intersection of Alma/El Camino Real as a crossing with "feasible mitigation" for roadway geometry improvements. The City believes that these improvements are not feasible and has requested clarification as such or for feasibility to be evaluated at a later date.

7. Overlap between the Comprehensive Agreement and Safety Requirements.

Unlike other agencies along the corridor (other than Santa Clara) Palo Alto's operation of its own utilities means that Palo Alto is impact by both the Comprehensive Agreement, and potentially by the Safety Requirements the CPUC adopts, which will also guide publicly-owned utility operations. As discussed in more detail later in this staff report, the City is concurrently in the process of working with Caltrain to develop Safety Requirements, which must be approved by the CPUC. The CPUC approved Safety Requirements will set standards governing issues such as overhead clearance of utility lines and some aspects of underground infrastructure construction and operations. City staff intend to work with Caltrain to ensure the Comprehensive Agreement and the guidelines the CPUC adopts do not include conflicting provisions.

8. Minimizing Impact on Utility Operations, Particularly During Construction. The City intends to work with Caltrain through the Comprehensive Agreement to minimize and clarify boundaries associated with any disruption of electric and/or utility infrastructure operations during construction activities. For instance, it is important to City staff that power not be shut down or re-routed at key times or multiple times.

9. Cost Recovery for Underground Utility Relocation.

City staff is reviewing the Comprehensive Agreement and hopes to clarify JPB's commitment to cover the costs for underground utilities or infrastructure relocation;

including whether such cost recovery will be for water, gas, wastewater, fiber optic, storm drain, and electric lines.

In addition to the issues highlighted above, Council may wish to consider raising other issues, such as landscape screening, fencing, and trails/trail extensions in the context of the Comprehensive Agreement.

The Safety Requirements

As noted above, the City has been working closely with Caltrain, and a joint utility group that includes PG&E and Santa Clara to provide feedback on Safety Requirements that will apply to Caltrain Electrification, which require CPUC approval. The bulk of the Safety Requirement is focused on establishing uniform safety requirements applicable to the design, construction, installation and maintenance of Caltrain's electrification system facilities. However, key elements of the Safety Requirements are important to Palo Alto and Santa Clara as publicly owned utilities and are also of significance to PG&E.

In addition to offering comments that would minimize conflicts and clarify the Safety Requirements document in general, the City has specifically focused its feedback on sections of the draft Safety Requirements to: (1) expressly capture the CPUC's existing jurisdiction over publicly owned utilities; (2) confirm that the Safety Requirements reflect the fact that the City has existing electric and fiber crossings over the JPB ROW; (3) ensure that the Safety Requirements track existing standards for overhead line construction and clearances to the maximum extent possible, including General Order 95, which would allow for the City to continue to economically and safely cross the JPB ROW overhead, rather than underground or by attachment to some additional structure; and (3) confirm that the processes and procedures in the draft Safety Requirements are consistent with the City's existing operations and processes for working with Caltrain and don't impose additional or unnecessary new or unworkable requirements without justification.

Environmental Review

The provision of this update concerning the Caltrain electrification Project is informational only, and it is not a project under the California Environmental Quality Act. Therefore, no environmental review is required.