



# City of Palo Alto

## City Council Staff Report

(ID # 7931)

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**Report Type: Consent Calendar**

**Meeting Date: 4/11/2017**

**Summary Title: Rail Committee Charter**

**Title: Adoption of an Updated Rail Committee Charter and Guiding Principles**

**From: City Manager**

**Lead Department: Planning and Community Environment**

### **Recommendation**

The Rail Committee recommends that the City Council review and adopt an updated Rail Committee charter and guiding principles (Attachment A) to guide the Committee's work in 2017 and 2018.

### **Executive Summary**

The City Council's Rail Committee was originally established to monitor the California High Speed Rail project and provide related policy recommendations to the full City Council. A set of "guiding principles" served as the committee's charter and were most recently revised in 2013 (Attachment B).

The Rail Committee was re-established in 2015 with the goal of advancing the City's objectives regarding grade separations. The Committee briefly discussed their goals for 2017 at a meeting on March 1, 2017, and committee members expressed an interest in developing a revised charter that does not pre-judge the outcome of a Context Sensitive Solutions (CSS) public engagement and decision making process. On March 22, 2017, the Committee unanimously adopted the draft in Attachment A with the expectation that it would be forwarded to the full City Council for adoption on their Consent agenda.

### **Background**

Notwithstanding the recent deferral of a federal funding decision, with the approval of Caltrain modernization, developing a preferred approach and design for grade separations in Palo Alto will be important whether or not High Speed Rail proceeds. This is because Caltrain electrification will enable increased train service, increasing the number of times gates come down to halt traffic each hour, thereby continuing at-grade rail safety concerns and increasing traffic congestion on local streets that cross and parallel the train corridor.

In addition, passage of Santa Clara County Measure B in November 2016 means there will be funding available for some pre-construction (environmental review and engineering) and construction expenses associated with grade separations. To obtain some of this funding, Palo Alto will need to identify a project or projects that it wishes to pursue.

Finally, Palo Alto has long advocated for a “context sensitive solution” process for High Speed Rail, and has contracted with a consultant team to undertake a similar context sensitive alternatives analysis for Palo Alto grade separations this year. The consultant team, led by the firm Mott McDonald has also been contracted to support the work of the Rail Committee and conduct a circulation study, as previously directed by the City Council.

The proposed update to the Committee charter in Attachment A would reflect anticipated work of the Committee in 2017 and 2018, including:

- Undertaking a context-sensitive alternatives analysis to engage the Palo Alto community in an evaluation of potential grade separation alternatives without pre-judging any one solution;
- Advocating for funding for Palo Alto grade separations;
- Monitoring activities of the California High Speed Rail Authority and Caltrain;
- Monitoring other relevant activities in the rail corridor, including Dumbarton rail; and
- Recommending specific comments/actions to the full Council.

### **Policy Implications**

The proposed charter is a concise statement of the City’s policy positions and objectives related to the Caltrain rail corridor.

### **Environmental Review**

The requested action is not a “project” requiring review under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA).

#### **Attachments:**

- Attachment A: Recommended Rail Committee Charter.pdf
- Attachment B: 2013 Rail Committee Charter

## **Preamble**

*The City of Palo Alto supports transportation and urban design solutions for the Caltrain corridor that are compatible with community values and that complement the goals and policies of the City's Comprehensive Plan.*

*The Caltrain corridor has long been a physical constraint to east-west movement in Palo Alto, and the current grade crossings create traffic congestion and pose safety and noise challenges that will get worse as the frequency of train service increases. As a result, the City actively participates in planning for the rail corridor, and supports changes that improve and do not exacerbate impacts to the Palo Alto community.*

## **Purpose of the Committee**

The City Council's Rail Committee was re-established in 2015 to analyze and advance grade separated crossings for all modes of travel (bicycles, motor vehicles, transit, and pedestrians). While the Committee in the past has focused on High Speed Rail, Caltrain grade separations and electrification will be the essential focus of the Committee for 2017-2018.

## **Guiding Principles**

1. Palo Alto seeks to improve east-west connectivity, traffic circulation, pedestrian and bicycle movements, safety, and the noise environment along the Caltrain corridor.
2. Palo Alto strongly supports Caltrain and the improved commuter rail service that will come as a result of modernization (including electrification).
3. Palo Alto will continue to work with Caltrain to ensure that all potential impacts of modernization are addressed and adopted mitigation measures are implemented.
4. Palo Alto supports Caltrain as the lead agency for all system improvements in the Caltrain corridor.
5. Palo Alto has long had concerns about the potential impacts of High Speed Rail and believes that the project should be terminated. If the project proceeds, CHSRA should provide funding for affected cities to analyze potential impacts.
6. Palo Alto believes that CAHSRA should fund grade separations and should not commence service until they are complete.

DRAFT Rail Committee Charter

[Not Yet Adopted]

7. Palo Alto will advocate strenuously for its fair share of County Measure B funding for grade separations and actively seek additional funding from Caltrain, CAHSRA, Santa Clara County, and other external funding sources.
8. Palo Alto supports the use of the Context Sensitive Solutions process for High Speed Rail and grade separations and will structure a CSS process to engage the community in selection of a preferred grade separation alternative for the corridor.
9. Palo Alto seeks modernization of freight operations in the corridor and will seek flexibility from the UPRR to pursue desired improvements in the Caltrain corridor.
10. Palo Alto will work cooperatively with neighboring communities with respect to HSR and Caltrain issues of mutual concern, including grade separations.

## PALO ALTO CITY COUNCIL RAIL COMMITTEE GUIDING PRINCIPLES

### Background (not shown in redline format, as Background section was completely revised)

In November 2008 California voters approved Proposition 1A, a \$9.95 billion bond measure, for High Speed Rail (HSR) service from Los Angeles to San Francisco. The San Jose to San Francisco segment of the selected route will take HSR rail service through Palo Alto. This segment is now proposed to be a “blended system”, primarily relying on existing Caltrain right-of-way and track. Caltrain is proposing to modernize this segment, including electrification of the trains, partially utilizing HSR funds. However, the costs and environmental impacts of this “blended system” continue to evolve, and have not yet been fully defined, studied or mitigated.

The most recent HSR business plan sets the initial cost of the overall HSR system at approximately \$68 billion. While this cost reflects a reduction compared to recent cost estimates, it still significantly exceeds the \$33 billion cost estimate advertised in Proposition 1A. In this revised business plan, the California High Speed Rail Authority (CHSRA) also continues to use the debatable and highly optimistic ridership forecast models, and does not address numerous inconsistencies that had been noted by experts in previous business plans. This analysis, therefore, creates an unreliable framework for accurate fiscal and environmental review of the HSR system.

Moving forward, the initial construction segment (ICS) for HSR will be in the Central Valley. In July 2012, legislation was enacted that allocated approximately \$8 billion of state and federal money for construction of the ICS, and for investments in Northern and Southern California commuter rail systems in anticipation of the future operation of HSR trains on these tracks as part of a Blended System. However, at least \$55 billion of unidentified funding remains necessary for completion of the Los Angeles to San Francisco system. Therefore, important funding and environmental issues remain undecided, and must be critically examined prior to final decisions being made. An ongoing, detailed analysis is even more critical for the complex, blended San Jose to San Francisco segment.

### Guiding Principles

The City Council adopts the following Principles to guide its decision making framework and the actions of the Committee:

**The City of Palo Alto believes that the HSR project should be terminated for the following reasons:**

1. The current project fundamentally contradicts the measure presented to the voters under Prop. 1A in 2008. The voters approved the measure based on grossly underestimated construction costs, overstated ridership numbers and underestimated fares. The voters also required that HSR could operate without a subsidy and that funding sources would be identified and environmental review would be complete prior to construction of an Initial Operating Segment.
2. Given that the revised HSR Business and Funding Plans do not meet the projected ridership, fare, job creation, and other significant requirements, the City believes that the voters were not given the accurate information during the 2008 election necessary to make an informed decision on a HSR project for the State of California.

The City realizes, however, that there is momentum at the Federal and State level to make HSR a reality, despite the conflicts with Prop 1A. There are many evolving aspects of HSR, however, that have not yet been studied or decided.

**Therefore, if the State should move forward with the HSR project, the following Guiding Principles shall apply to the City's positions on HSR:**

1. The City supports a non-elevated alignment of HSR/Caltrain in Palo Alto.
2. The City's preferred vertical alignment of fixed rail in Palo Alto is below grade.
3. When examining the potential impacts of vertical rail alignments equal attention shall be given to all Palo Alto neighborhoods. Adopted mitigation measures should be proportionate to the impacts identified in the studies.
4. The City believes that the Program Environmental Impact Report (EIR) for the Central Valley to San Francisco portion of HSR is fatally flawed and that the CHSRA should reopen and reconsider its decision to use the Pacheco Pass route.
5. The City supports the findings of the Legislative Analyst's Office, State Auditor, and the HSR Peer Review Committee regarding the viability and accuracy of the CHSRA's Business Plan on such matters as the ridership projections, the identification of sufficient and reliable funding sources, project management, and operation of HSR.
6. The City favors legislation which would enable implementation of the HSR Peer Review Committee authorized by AB 3034.
7. Palo Alto supports transit and urban design solutions that will be compatible with our economic development strategies, transportation goals, and rail corridor vision.

HSR/Caltrain needs to complement the goals and strategies of the City's Comprehensive Plan.

8. Palo Alto supports the use of the Context Sensitive Solutions process for HSR and Caltrain that is funded and implemented by the CHSRA.
9. The CHSRA should provide sufficient funding to affected cities to allow them to hire experts to study reports requiring feedback and sufficient outreach to the community to capture their concerns and suggestions.
10. Proposed changes to the Caltrain corridor by either the CHSRA or PCJPB should provide both realistic renderings of the various alternatives and simulations that would help provide an understanding of the system's sound and vibration impacts.
11. Palo Alto strongly supports Caltrain and the commuter rail service at the present or improved levels of service.
12. Palo Alto supports the modernization of Caltrain. However, whether the City supports electrification cannot be determined until all potential impacts are identified, studied and suitable mitigation measures are implemented.
13. Palo Alto supports Caltrain as the lead agency for all system improvements in the Caltrain corridor.
14. Palo Alto will work cooperatively with neighboring communities with respect to HSR and Caltrain issues of mutual concern through agencies such as the Peninsula Cities Consortium.
15. Palo Alto expects all current rail crossings to remain open to automobiles, bicycles and pedestrians. In the event that the modernization of Caltrain and/or HSR increases train service from current 2012 levels, Palo Alto will consider grade separation solutions for the Alma, Churchill, East Meadow, and East Charleston crossings. These improvements must be funded by Caltrain, HSR and/or other external funding sources.
16. A detailed and transparent environmental analysis of all proposed improvements must be completed. Therefore, the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) and the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) shall not be modified in any way that (1) exempts the HSR or Caltrain Modernization projects, either in whole or in part; or (2) reduces the obligation of the HSR or Caltrain Modernization project sponsors to conduct a full environmental review process that allows for a detailed analysis of all potential impacts and mitigation measures at a level that is not less than the level currently required by law.

17. The overall environmental review should be comprised of two separate Environmental Impact Reports. The first EIR should be for the Caltrain Modernization Project. The second EIR should address any subsequent improvements proposed or necessary for HSR operation in the corridor.
18. Palo Alto strongly supports revisions to the Peninsula Corridor Joint Powers Board (PCJPB) governance structure that more accurately reflect the distribution of Caltrain ridership. Additionally, such revisions should be made at or prior to a ballot measure seeking a dedicated funding source for Caltrain operations, should one occur.
19. The Guiding Principles of the Committee incorporates by reference Council adopted written comments to the CHSRA, PCJPB, and other relevant agencies. In case of any conflict in policies the most recent language prevails.

Last updated: June 24, 2013

Previously updated: December 19, 2011  
October 12, 2011  
May 17, 2010