



City of Palo Alto

City Council Staff Report

(ID # 10164)

Report Type: Action Items

Meeting Date: 3/18/2019

Council Priority: Grade Separations

Summary Title: Connecting Palo Alto Project Update: Schedule, Timeline, and Contract Amendment

Title: Connecting Palo Alto Grade Separations Recommendations: Adjust Schedule, Update Selection Criteria, and Review Terms for Upcoming Contract Amendment with AECOM to Increase Funds and Timeline for Additional Engineering and Outreach Services

From: City Manager

Lead Department: City Manager

Recommendation

Staff recommends that the Rail Committee of the Whole receive information and make recommendations to the City Council to:

1. Accept updates to the timeline for the Connecting Palo Alto Rail Grade Separation planning effort;
2. Review and consider recommendations to the City Council-adopted criteria for Rail Grade Separation; and
3. Approve an upcoming contract amendment to contract C18171057 with AECOM funded in the Grade Separation capital project (PL-17001) to continue work to assist the City with the selection of a preferred solution for environmental review.

Executive Summary

On January 22, 2019 the City Council approved a set of actions relating to grade separation alternatives under consideration as part of the Connecting Palo Alto Rail Grade Separation planning effort and directed staff to prepare a schedule update. The schedule currently reflects potential City Council action in April 2019, with options for the Rail Committee of the Whole to consider and provide feedback to staff.

Background

Staff brought an update on the Connecting Palo Alto Rail Grade Separation planning effort to the City Council on January 22. At that meeting, the City Council adopted the following motion:

- A. Direct Staff to separate from study all alternatives for the Palo Alto Avenue crossing (closure and hybrid) and include Palo Alto Avenue in a separate comprehensive planning effort with a priority on transportation;
- B. Direct Staff to separate from study the bicycle and pedestrian crossing of the Caltrain corridor in the vicinity of Loma Verde Avenue and incorporate this into the North Ventura Coordinated Area Plan process;
- C. Direct Staff to present the tunnel alternative at the Community Advisory Panel (CAP) and March Community meeting, and outline assumptions and alternatives for a citywide tunnel and further explore (the Scope and Budget) for an alternative with freight trains on the surface and passenger trains underground (for the Meadow and Charleston crossings);
- D. Adopt a modified list of grade separation alternatives:
 1. South Palo Alto | Rail Tunnel;
 2. Churchill Avenue | Full or Partial Closure and add Improvements (CAX);
 3. Meadow Drive and Charleston Road | Hybrid (MCL);
 4. Meadow Drive and Charleston Road | Rail Trench (MCT);
 5. Meadow Drive and Charleston Road | Viaduct (MCV);
 6. Citywide Tunnel (WBP);
- E. Direct Staff to return to Council with a strategy for Valley Transportation Authority (VTA) and Stanford University, especially around funding;
- F. Direct Staff to study multi-modal mitigations for existing grade separations, taking into consideration both current conditions and future impacts;
- G. Direct Staff to restore “maintain or improve local access” evaluation criteria; and
- H. Direct Staff to return to Council soon to review evaluation criteria and timeline with a funding and polling strategy.

Discussion

Since the Council direction in January, staff and the consultant team have continued the engineering analysis of alternatives and held a February meeting with the Community Advisory Panel (CAP).

Much of the ongoing work and an upcoming March 13th CAP meeting are preparing for a key community meeting on March 27th. This community meeting will focus on the following key topics:

- Overall update for the general public on the progress and schedule for the evaluation of citywide grade separation alternatives;
- Visual representation and construction phasing of Meadow/Charleston Hybrid, Trench, and Viaduct alternatives (as previously shown at the November community meeting);
- Visual representation and construction phasing of the Citywide Tunnel alternative;

- Traffic analysis of the potential closure of Churchill Avenue at the Caltrain right-of-way, and potential circulation improvements; and,
- Status of financial options.

After the March 27th community meeting, staff and the consultant team will evaluate community feedback as well as other comments received. This information will be prepared for presentation to the Rail Committee of the Whole and the City Council as the City Council continues to consider possible action on narrowing the alternatives for further study.

Schedule / Timeline Update:

At the January 22 Council meeting, Council asked staff to bring back a timeline for the rail grade separation process, which would include the frequency that items returned to the City Council, the coordinated area plan for Palo Alto Avenue, and the overall approach for the City Council to make a decision with involvement of the community more broadly (such as conducting more community outreach and polling). The timeline below attempts to address each of those issues and also includes the more macro timeline for the steps to be taken after a City Council decision on a grade separation preferred solution up through construction.

In thinking about the timeline, Council should keep a few things in mind:

1. Community involvement: The Connecting Palo Alto Community Advisory Panel (CAP), that has been very influential with sharing information about this planning effort to the public as well as with contributing to materials brought forward to the public, Rail Committee, and City Council, committed to meeting through January 2019. They have already had one (1) additional meeting and will have another additional meeting on March 13. As of the print time of this report, no other meetings are planned for this group after the March 13 meeting.
2. Cost: This staff report (below) includes an overview of an anticipated contract amendment with AECOM, the City's grade separation consultants, to add over \$500,000 in funding for additional engineering and outreach services. The average spending on this contract for community discussion and engineering work is approximately \$120,000 per month. If additional time is added beyond April for a Council decision, the proposed amendment will not suffice to cover costs, especially if more meetings are added to the scope.
3. Length of the Environmental Impact Report (EIR): After a preferred solution is chosen for any or all of the crossings, the City can proceed with environmental review for the preferred solution. The EIR, which will cost approximately \$3.0 million to \$6.0 million for studying the preferred solution in depth along with project alternatives, will likely take 18-30 months to complete. Completion of environmental review is a critical milestone in order to compete for construction funds from state or federal sources.

The EIR should include all grade separations together instead of doing each crossing as a separate standalone proposed project (e.g., the proposed Churchill solution should be identified as part of the “project” for environmental review instead of making Meadow/Charleston be a standalone “project” for the purposes of an EIR. Council must make a decision on what is included in the proposed project prior to initiating environmental review.

The overall question for the City Council to consider is: What is needed to come to a decision on preferred alternatives for environmental review? Staff recommends that the Council still aim to decide a preferred solution in April 2019. The drafted timeline below reflects this recommendation. The City will have limited firm financial information within this timeline.

Timeline/Schedule – Next 30 Months and Through Construction:

Date	Action / Milestone
2019	
13-Mar-19	Last Scheduled Community Advisory Panel (CAP) Meeting
18-Mar-19	Council Rail Committee of the Whole Discussion of grade separation timeline and criteria
27-Mar-19	Connecting Palo Alto Community Meeting – Mitchell Park – discussions of Churchill Closure, Traffic Analysis, and Citywide Tunnel Alternative
1-Apr-19	Approve amendment to AECOM contract
24-Apr-19	Select preferred solution (one chosen alternative per grade crossing)
After Adoption of Preferred Solution	
May-Aug 2019	Consultant to write the Project Summary Report which will be used in the EIR
Oct 2019	Begin Draft EIR (six months after adoption of preferred solution)
2022	
Spring and Summer 2022	Certify EIR & Approve the Project
	Approve agency agreements for managing construction
	Begin preliminary design
Note:	All dates below are estimates depending on EIR timing
Spring 2023	Begin final design
Feb 2024	Acquire any necessary property, including permanent or temporary construction easements (if applicable)
Feb 2025	Obtain agency permits/ approvals
Spring and Summer 2025	Award and construct project(s)
	Start construction
Dec 2031	Finish construction (depending on which alternatives are chosen)

It should be noted that at this point, the time required for EIR and subsequent steps is highly speculative.

Evaluation Criteria Background:

The Planning and Transportation Commission (PTC) discussed the Community Engagement Plan, as well as the suggested Problem Statement, Objectives, and Evaluation Criteria, at their meeting on August 9, 2017.

The City Council Rail Committee discussed the Community Engagement Plan, as well as the suggested Problem Statement, Objectives, and Evaluation Criteria, at their meeting on August 16, 2017. A video of the City Council Rail Committee discussion is available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A_kbx3QqniI. The Full City Council discussed the criteria on September 5 and 11, 2017 and the staff report is available online at: <https://www.cityofpaloalto.org/civicax/filebank/documents/61108>.

As a result of the Council discussion on September 5 and 11, 2017, the City Council adopted the following as the problem statement and the criteria for rail grade separation. The redlined version of the criteria as shared at the September 5 and 11 meetings is available in **Attachment A**.

Adopted Problem Statement (from September 11, 2017 Meeting):

“While enhanced rail transit service is important to the City of Palo Alto, the Caltrain corridor creates a physical and visual barrier to east/west connectivity within the City, and is also the source of safety concerns for pedestrians, bicyclists and motorists, especially at existing at-grade crossings. The rail corridor also creates issues in surrounding neighborhoods, such as noise, vibration, traffic, and visual impacts. While the City of Palo Alto benefits from Caltrain service, and supports Caltrain modernization (including electrification), some of the issues experienced along the rail corridor will continue to get worse with future increases in Caltrain service, increases in regional traffic, and the probable addition of high speed rail.”

Adopted Evaluation Criteria (from September 11, 2017 Meeting):

Based on feedback from a questionnaire, the adopted criteria are:

Tier 1 Criteria –

- East-West Connectivity: facilitate movement across the corridor for all modes of transportation
- Traffic Congestion: reduce delay and congestion for automobile traffic at rail crossings
- Ped/Bike circulation: provide clear and safe routes for pedestrians and bicyclists seeking to cross the rail corridor, separate from automobile traffic

- Rail Operations: support continued rail operations and Caltrain service improvements
- Cost: finance with feasible funding sources

Tier 2 Criteria –

- Environmental impacts: reduce rail noise and vibration along the corridor
- Environmental impacts: minimize visual changes along the corridor
- Local access: maintain or improve access to neighborhoods, parks, schools, and other destinations along the corridor while reducing regional traffic on neighborhood streets
- Cost: minimize right-of-way acquisition by eminent domain
- Construction: minimize disruption and the duration of construction

As adopted, the criteria are not weighted in terms of level of importance within each tier. Furthermore, the categorization of tiers has not affected the analysis or narrowing of options to date. At the same time, other suggestions for criteria have emerged by various parties.

At the January 22 Council meeting, Council requested staff to bring back the “Local access” criterion. That criterion is still on the adopted list of criteria as shown above. The request to include this criterion back on the list relates to a broader request to review the criteria and determine if other criteria or a subset of criteria is needed. The list below contains other ideas that staff has heard as interests for additional criteria:

- More heavily weight noise and community aesthetics than other criteria
- Include creek and drainage impacts as an environmental impact
- Include the long-term maintenance of the alternatives as an engineering impact
- Include utility relocations as a factor
- Include a new criterion about minimizing disruption and duration of construction (factoring in the length of construction)

Staff does not have a recommendation about updated criteria that Council should adopt; but will note that the adopted criteria are regularly used as context for discussion and qualitative comparison by staff and the consultant team when bringing forward recommendations about the alternatives under consideration by Council (such as in the evaluation matrix shown in **Attachment B** that has been used at many community meetings). If the Rail Committee of the Whole directs that updates be made to the criteria, staff would bring the revised criteria to Council for approval on the Consent agenda.

Anticipated AECOM Contract Amendment:

City Council first approved the contract with AECOM on April 16, 2018. The approved contract, for \$1,278,660, is shown with the staff report online at: <https://www.cityofpaloalto.org/civicax/filebank/documents/64464>.

As shown in the Background section on this report, the City Council asked staff to bring back a report for Council discussion on the existing criteria as well as a timeline for the planning effort going forward. In bringing this information forward, staff also wanted to include information about a proposed amendment to the AECOM contract. The changes to the scope and schedule for the City's grade separation planning effort resulted in scope, schedule, and cost changes for the AECOM consultant team, and thus a contract amendment. The amendment is currently being drafted to bring forward to City Council on April 1, 2019. While staff is working to finalize the amendment, the high-level summary of the contract changes is included below.

- Task 1: Project Management – the Time extension of six (6) months to the project schedule will extend general project management tasks required for managing all aspects of the planning effort.
- Task 2: Data Collection and Investigations – Scope increase of the traffic analysis task to gather more detailed information for the Churchill Avenue area. This includes, new peak period turning movement counts (vehicular, pedestrian and bicycles) at all study intersections and a collision analysis which will be included in the Final Existing Conditions Report.
- Task 3: Technical Advisory Committee Meetings – reduced number of meetings for the Technical Advisory Committee. The reduction is to reflect the realistic number of meetings needed total.
- Task 4: Community Engagement – Continued website maintenance, the addition of CAP meetings (which were not part of the original scope), and the additional renderings required as part of the community engagement.
- Task 5: Identify Alternatives for Analysis – no change to this task.
- Task 6: Identify Recommended Alternatives – clarification in the number of alternatives being examined and to what degree. Also accounts for changes in the traffic analysis scope and preparation of the final Traffic Impact Analysis Report.
- Task 7: Assist City with CAHSR Environmental Analysis Phase – no change to this task.
- Task 8: Financing Plan – City requested changes in the depth of the financial analysis to investigate additional funding sources and strategies. Additional number of meetings attended resulted in the scope of work changes for this task.
- Task 9: South Palo Alto Tunnel Option – Council direction to further explore a southern tunnel alternative that does not impact the station platforms at California Avenue and the San Antonio Stations. Additional renderings and 3-D animations will be prepared for this alternative.

Timeline, Resource Impact, Policy Implications

Based on the anticipated amount of the contract amendment of over \$500,000, sufficient funding for the AECOM contract amendment is expected to be available in the

Railroad Grade Separation capital project, PL-17001. The total contract amount for the original contract is \$1,278,660, and to date \$984,521 has been billed and paid. The Railroad Grade Separation capital project has \$2,004,237 appropriated in Fiscal Year 2019, which allows capacity to fund the proposed contract amendment for work done through the end of Fiscal Year 2019. If work continues into Fiscal Year 2020, appropriation and availability of funding would be subject to the City Council's adoption of the Fiscal Year 2020 Budget. Council only adopts the budget for the first year of the five-year Capital Improvement Plan (CIP); however, as part of the 2019-2023 CIP, \$1 million was planned to be appropriated in PL-17001 in Fiscal Year 2020.

Environmental Review

The recommendation in this report does not constitute a project in accordance with the California Environmental Quality Act and is therefore not subject to environmental review.