



City of Palo Alto

City Council Staff Report

(ID # 10902)

Report Type: Rail Communications Update

Meeting Date: 12/9/2019

Council Priority: Grade Separations

Summary Title: Rail Update: RBRC, Community Engagement and XCAP

Title: Rail Grade Separation Updates: Report and Possible Direction on Communications and Community Engagement and Previously Proposed Rail Blue Ribbon Commission, and Verbal Update From the Expanded Community Advisory Panel (XCAP)

From: City Manager

Lead Department: City Manager

Recommendations

Staff recommends that the City Council:

- A. Receive staff report and potentially provide direction on planned communications and community engagement, as well as a previously proposed Rail Blue Ribbon Commission; and,
- B. Receive a verbal update from the Expanded Community Advisory Panel (XCAP).

Background

At its September 9, 2019 meeting, the City Council took the following action related to the community planning activities related to railroad grade separations:

- A. *Continue the XCAP and authorize the XCAP to appoint a Chair and Co-Chair, to help shape the agendas, take votes, make recommendations, and provide no less than bi-monthly updates to Council;*
- B. *Reiterate the April Motion and allow additional alternatives to be studied including:*
 - i. *Allow the XCAP to brainstorm some alternatives such as at Embarcadero, Meadow, and Charleston;*
 - ii. *Ensure the trench alternative minimizes construction impacts;*
 - iii. *Rank alternatives using established criteria;*
- C. *Have the XCAP present preferred alternatives by April 30, 2020;*
- D. *Direct Staff to refine scope, purpose and timeline for an RBRC to focus on community awareness and engagement, and surveys, regional cooperation and*

funding and bring it back to Council prior to December 1, 2019; and
E. *Staff and Council to continue to work with VTA, Caltrain, Stanford and others on potential funding sources.*

Following this City Council direction, on October 28, 2019 the council received an overview of a potential communications and community engagement strategy to support City Council decision-making on preferred alternatives for further development in Spring 2020. The City Council also received its first verbal update from the Chair of the XCAP.

A. Staff Update on the Rail Blue Ribbon Commission and Discussion of Rail Communications and Community Engagement

Rail Blue Ribbon Commission Update:

At the August 19, 2019 City Council meeting, staff presented a proposal to establish a Rail Blue Ribbon Commission (RBRC) following a model previously used by the City to successfully develop and obtain voter approval on the City's infrastructure plan. The item was initially continued, then on September 9, 2019, staff returned to the City Council with a revised RBRC proposal. The City Council took the action noted above, addressing both an expanded role for XCAP as well as the RBRC proposal.

Since the September 9, 2019 City Council action, staff has worked diligently with the Expanded Community Advisory Panel (XCAP) to implement the City Council direction related to the XCAP structure and scope. Because the XCAP is still actively working to organize itself and put a workplan in motion, establishing another advisory body at this time has the potential to add confusion for both the XCAP and the public without a clear role that supports City Council decision-making on preferred alternatives for further development. As such, staff does not recommend further City Council action related to the RBRC.

Given the increased role provided to the XCAP, the City Council may want to consider how best to stay engaged and guide the XCAP's work. This could include appointing one or more Councilmembers as liaisons to the XCAP or appointment of an ad hoc committee of City Council to coordinate with the XCAP chair and vice-chair. This could supplement regular XCAP updates to the Council and support its ability to achieve the tight timeframe established for an XCAP recommendation by April 30, 2020.

In addition to the work being done by the XCAP, staff continues to work with VTA and Caltrain related to funding and the grade separations. Notably, VTA staff is now actively evaluating cash flow scenarios for Measure B funding that could involve bond financing to accelerate grade separation completion. It should be noted, however, that funding decisions are largely dependent on the identification of preferred project concepts and associated cost estimates.

Independent of Palo Alto's specific interest in grade separations, significant efforts are currently underway regarding transportation funding across the Bay Area region. This includes discussion of a regional FASTER Bay Area sales tax measure, envisioned by its proponents to generate \$100 billion over 40 years. Caltrain is also continuing consideration of a three-county sales tax measure. The City will need to maintain engagement with these discussions, in coalition with other agencies where possible. When further updates about those efforts are available, staff will also bring those forward to the City Council.

Rail Communications and Community Engagement:

Staff presented a communications and engagement strategy to the City Council on October 28 which addressed community awareness, engagement, and surveys within this Community Conversations current phase of the project (<https://www.cityofpaloalto.org/civicax/filebank/blobdload.aspx?t=59288.75&BlobID=73855>). At that meeting, the City Council provided feedback on the recommended approach.

Since that time, the City hosted a Community Meeting on November 7 where approximately one third (1/3) of the participants said it was their first time attending a rail-related meeting. Staff will continue outreach efforts to increase awareness about this community-driven process.

Since the last update, staff refined the communications and engagement approaches, including setting tentative dates for upcoming town hall meetings and other ways for the community to provide input.

Details include: *** Tentative details, subject to change*

- Hosting several community conversations including:
 - Three Town Hall meetings all from 6:00-8:00 p.m. on the following tentative dates and locations:
 - February 20 at Mitchell Park Community Center,
 - February 27 at Greene Middle School and
 - March 12 at Palo Alto High School
 - Planning informal conversations with City staff about transportation issues, called the "Word on the Street" Series on the following tentative dates and locations:
 - January 30 at Palo Verde Elementary School from 6:00-8:00 p.m.
 - March 5 at JLS Middle School from 6:00-8:00 p.m., and
 - April 8 at Gunn High School from 3:00-5:00 p.m.
 - Exploring staff tables at community meetings

- Planning social media surveys in January 2020 and a more detailed online survey in early 2020 sometime after January

The planned communications approaches discussed with the City Council in October seek to build awareness about rail grade separations and bring the community at large up to speed. This work has already begun through the recent community meeting, the blog series (to inform), the launch of a new website (connectingpaloalto.com), new fact sheets (to share succinct information about what is being considered), and the launch of a recent online survey (to gain current input on this topic). Other strategies include updates in the City's weekly digital newsletter, the launch of a new transportation newsletter in December, and online, social media and print advertising.

Staff recommends that the town hall meetings be structured as informal community conversations where the City Council is not expected to deliberate, take any actions or convene as a formal City Council meeting. After each meeting, staff will report out on the community input gained at the town hall and other community engagement efforts that have taken place. Staff also plans to include a report out on all community engagement efforts to the City Council in the spring which will refer back to these meeting summaries and summarize efforts to date.

B. A Verbal Update from the Expanded Community Advisory Panel (XCAP)

As shown in the adopted language of the September 9, 2019 City Council meeting, the City Council approved an expanded role and responsibilities for the Expanded Community Advisory Panel (XCAP). The changes allowed the XCAP to elect a Chair and Vice Chair as well as to take votes on recommendations, among other things. In the City Council motion, the City Council also asked the XCAP to provide no less than every other month updates to the City Council.

City Council received the first update on October 28 (pages 12-25: <https://www.cityofpaloalto.org/civicax/filebank/blobdload.aspx?t=59288.75&BlobID=73855>). Of note since that time, the Palo Alto Unified School District determined that they will no longer participate through membership on the XCAP and will instead coordinate with staff and monitor XCAP activities as a community stakeholder.

The XCAP Chairperson will present another update on December 9, 2019 and will share a brief report at that meeting about their progress to date and planned activities over the next month.

The next XCAP update is planned for mid-January.