



# City of Palo Alto

## City Council Staff Report

(ID # 11377)

---

**Report Type: Study Session**

**Meeting Date: 6/8/2020**

**Summary Title: Connecting Palo Alto Rail Update**

**Title: Connecting Palo Alto Rail Grade Separation: Receive an Update From the Expanded Community Advisory Panel (XCAP)**

**From: City Manager**

**Lead Department: Transportation Department**

Staff is providing this cover memo as additional information for the City Council as part of the Rail Update for June 8, 2020.

The report from the Expanded Community Advisory Panel (XCAP) Chairperson is included as Attachment A.

**Attachments:**

- Attachment A: XCAP Update to City Council #5 amended 6-4-20

To: City Council

From: Nadia Naik, Chair of Expanded Community Advisory Panel (XCAP)

Date: June 4, 2020

Re: Update #5 to City Council

---

The last in-person update to City Council was on 1/21/20 and the update on 3/16/2020 was turned into a written informational report due to COVID19.

**Before COVID19:**

Prior to COVID19, XCAP had an aggressive schedule, meeting weekly for three hours at a time. XCAP had begun the process of deliberating on existing alternatives while awaiting the updated analysis for the three new alternatives (Churchill partial underpass, Meadow underpass and Charleston underpass). A significant development that was omitted in the last update is that on an interim basis, XCAP voted unanimously to eliminate from further consideration the two South Palo Alto tunnel options (with and without freight) from our internal deliberations. Between roughly 2/12/20 – 3/18/20, the XCAP received 40+ emails related to the alternatives, with many indicating they would be interested in attending XCAP’s meetings.

**AFTER COVID19:**

Unfortunately, due to COVID, seven meetings between March 4<sup>th</sup> and April 15<sup>th</sup> were cancelled due to shelter-in-place orders from Santa Clara County.

During the Shelter-In-Place order, however, the XCAP Technical Working Group (a subset of 4 XCAP members) met on 3/19/20 by virtual meeting to review work completed to date by AECOM on the Churchill partial underpass proposal.

The first Virtual XCAP meeting was held via Zoom on 4/22/20. Subsequent Zoom meetings have been May 6<sup>th</sup>, May 22<sup>nd</sup> and June 3<sup>rd</sup>.

The following tasks have been completed to date:

- Reviewed XCAP schedule (ongoing) – deciding on meetings every 2 weeks and shortening meetings to 2 hours instead of 3 to accommodate the difficulties of working from home for XCAP members.
- **XCAP agreed to a new deadline for Final Report: August 31, 2020.**
- Partial underpass at Churchill: AECOM presented draft drawings and animation of Churchill partial underpass
- Partial underpass at Meadow/Charleston: Received a presentation by AECOM of first draft of layout and typical sections for Meadow/Charleston Underpasses and 3D renderings.
- XCAP revised the outline for the Final Report to include “XCAP Observations” specific to each alternative regardless of final recommendation

- Received staff responses regarding measurable Criteria
- Received staff responses to outstanding XCAP Questions List
- Received two internal Staff emails with Caltrain (re:4-tracks and shoofly construction)
- Received updated responses to XCAP questions
- Received DRAFT Noise and Vibration Memo from AECOM

### **XCAP Team Update:**

XCAP member Megan Kanne will be relocating to the East Coast and unable to continue participating after 5/31/20. Pat Lau, who works at Webster House (senior living facility), announced she will also need to step down from XCAP due to her work schedule as a result of COVID19. She has agreed to participate as much as possible through June 30,2020, to the extent her schedule allows, in order to help as much as possible with the written report.

### **Proposed Schedule Changes and Community Engagement:**

The XCAP discussed having meetings every 2 weeks and trying to shorten meetings to two hours instead of the usual three. To maximize efficiency, Staff has agreed to work to post items as quickly as possible to allow XCAP members maximum time to be able to read materials ahead of meetings. There is concern that while Zoom meetings are useful during this crisis, they cannot replace the importance of in-person meetings, particularly when the goal is collaborative consensus building towards a final recommendation. However, the XCAP agreed to remain thoughtful and flexible and continue to try to use new mediums to achieve the goal.

XCAP members expressed concern about the ability to continue to both publicize and receive iterative feedback on the new alternatives given the pandemic. AECOM and Staff presented XCAP with some new virtual Town Hall tools that might be useful for achieving this goal. The potential of having an “extended online” Town Hall which can remain on the internet for several weeks rather than a one time in-person event offers an interesting opportunity, but it remains to be seen how much community engagement their might be on this issue given COVID19 and the difficulty of garnering attention for this topic given the current news cycle.

It should be noted that on average, in-person XCAP meetings usually have around 25 attendees, but the first virtual XCAP meeting had over 35 attendees, with several people in public comment acknowledging that this format allows them the flexibility to participate in a way they previously couldn't. Since the first Zoom meeting, the number of attendees has remained above 40+ attendees with a maximum of 55 at one point during our last meeting.

### **Workflow items:**

**Outstanding XCAP questions** – Staff has provided responses to a list of questions that was finalized by XCAP on 1/29/2020. (Completed)

**Measurable Criteria:** XCAP had asked Staff to provide any metrics or measurements from existing plans, such as the City's 2030 Comprehensive Plan, which could provide the basis for quantitative measurements directly related to the Council adopted criteria (eg.: noise decibels). Limited information was available in response to the request. Some of the data collected was for specific projects at a certain point in time. Other information was not applicable to the task of rail

grade separation. The limited information available will be included in the appendices of XCAP's Final Report. (Completed)

**Noise and Vibration Information:** XCAP reviewed a draft of the Noise and Vibration Memo from AECOM at their 06/03/20 Meeting. XCAP asked the consultants to amend their report with additional information that based on discussions are within the existing scope of work for the AECOM contract. The amendments include: analyzing the correct Caltrain equipment (fully electrified train, not just an electric locomotive), verify with Caltrain the average operating speed at grade separations, describe the relative benefit of a 6ft sound wall for any at-grade alternatives and include an explanation of what happens to data with 16 tph per direction instead of the 10 used in the report (no need to re-run the numbers). (Completed)

**New Alternatives additional information:**

The XCAP continues to receive information from AECOM for the new alternatives with the ultimate goal to have the same level of analysis for all alternatives so that XCAP can make their ultimate recommendation. Key updates from AECOM related specifically to bike/pedestrian movements are expected for the June 17<sup>th</sup> 2020 XCAP meeting.

**Business Community Outreach:**

Before COVID19, the XCAP member representing the Chamber of Commerce resigned. The Chair and Vice Chair were informed that Staff are working on other outreach to the business community. To date, XCAP has not received any feedback from the business community on either existing or new alternatives.

**PAUSD Outreach:**

The Staff is the point of contact for PAUSD since the departure of their representative from XCAP. On 2/26/20 XCAP received from PAUSD a letter from the Superintendent regarding impacts from existing alternatives (Churchill viaduct and closure). The district communicated concerns indicating that a closure of Churchill "may negatively impact student safety related to bicycle commuters." It is important to note that the Churchill Closure alternative developed by AECOM has two different bike/ped underpass alternatives that would allow for continued bike/ped crossing in the Churchill area.

XCAP assumes that Staff will continue to communicate with PAUSD to ensure it fully understands both the existing and new alternatives and encourage them to provide additional feedback before XCAP finalizes deliberations.

**Bike/Pedestrian Outreach:** XCAP chair was contacted by Palo Alto Bicycle Coalition (PABAC), at the recommendation of one of its members, to present at their June 2, 2020 meeting and provide a brief overview of the alternatives that would have significant changes to bike/pedestrian paths. Before June 2, 2020, PABAC had not discussed any of the grade separation alternatives with City Staff in any of their regular advisory meetings. They've been encouraged to send all of their feedback to City Staff so it can be incorporated into the design work, as well as sending it to XCAP to ensure they are aware of the suggestions.

XCAP Chair reiterated to PABAC that their feedback was critical, as several members of XCAP have repeatedly expressed concerns that the bike/pedestrian paths were not being considered with the same level of detail and concern as the automobile movements. PABAC, a highly technically experienced advisory group, said the drawings were “very unclear” and that bike/ped design considerations seemed to have been “shoe horned” into the work rather than being a focus from the beginning.

***Given the timing of the substantive feedback received from PABAC, and that information from the Business community and PAUSD is still outstanding, that the August 31<sup>st</sup> deadline may be pushed back further. XCAP Chair will work with staff to mitigate any impacts to the timeline as much as possible.***

**Website:**

The Staff have been able to update the website with the following information:

**Meeting Summaries** – Meeting summaries are now available for each XCAP meeting that include any official actions taken by XCAP.

**Transcription of key meetings** – Verbatim minutes of two key meetings (presentation by Sebastian Petty of Caltrain and Norm Matteoni (attorney) from Matteoni, O’Laughlin & Hechtman) have been produced for the website and for inclusion in the appendix of the XCAP Final Report

**Compilations of Public Comment** – An email address was developed for XCAP such that members of the public could email a single address with comments. Previously, emails received at this address were being made public in City Council packets. Now, public comments are collated and included in XCAP’s packet (similar to how City Council receives emails) such that XCAP members have a succinct record of emails received and that the public both easily see the emails they’ve sent to XCAP and read emails received by XCAP from other members of the public.

**Future Schedule and Work Plan:**

XCAP approved that the Chair would assign sections of XCAP’s Final Report to various group members to begin production of a final deliverable for the City Council. An outline of the report and the assigned sections can be viewed here: <https://connectingpaloalto.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Shared-at-Meeting-Item-4-Memo-re-XCAP-deliberation-Feb-2020.pdf>

The effects of COVID19 have impacted the group’s ability to work on these sections. Some sections have made progress, others have not. The Chair will continue to engage with XCAP members regarding their ability to work on these sections given their personal situations. It is important to note that 9 of the 12 current XCAP members were originally Community Advisory Panel members, and thus have been volunteering on this issue for almost 2 years. This level of

commitment reflects the incentive to see this final report to fruition, but we want to recognize the unprecedented burden that many are faced with throughout this crisis.

Caltrain Update: Staff has shared with XCAP a series of emails related to the grade separation alternatives under consideration that have led to significant questions relating to 4 tracks, encroachment and alternative construction methodologies that could avoid the need for shoo-fly tracks. Several XCAP members have asked to invite Caltrain back before deliberations begin to get a better understanding of the issues raised. XCAP Chair will work with Staff to ensure this happens soon.

### Summary

XCAP will continue to work towards the goal of deliberating over the Spring and into Summer while we continue to evaluate the schedule based on the ability of XCAP members and the community to participate in a meaningful way during this difficult time. Our estimated completion date is August 31 2020, but, as noted above, the timeline could be impacted as substantive feedback from key stakeholders is still outstanding.