



City of Palo Alto

City Council Staff Report

(ID # 11757)

Report Type: Action Items

Meeting Date: 1/25/2021

Summary Title: VERBS Grant Project and Community Engagement Plan

Title: Status Report on the South Palo Alto Bikeways Project Funded by the VERBS Grant; Approval of the Community Engagement Plan; and Approval of Budget Amendments in the Capital Improvement Fund Projects Safe Routes to School PL-00026 and El Camino Real Pedestrian Safety and Streetscape Project PL-18000

From: City Manager

Lead Department: Transportation Department

Recommendation

Staff recommends that the Palo Alto City Council:

1. Receive a status report on the South Palo Alto Bikeways Project funded by the One Bay Area Grant 2 (OBAG 2) for Vehicle Emissions Reductions Based at Schools (VERBS) program; and
2. Approve the Draft Community Engagement Plan (CEP), including specific public outreach strategies for the South Palo Alto Bikeways Project; and
3. Direct staff to return after the first phase of public outreach to present the final concept plan for the project; and
4. Approve Amendment of the Fiscal Year 2021 Budget Appropriation Ordinance by a 2/3 vote for the Capital Improvement Fund by:
 - a. Increasing the Safe Routes to School Project (PL-00026) expense appropriation by \$110,000; and
 - b. Decreasing the El Camino Real Pedestrian Safety and Streetscape Project (PL-18000) by \$110,000.

Background

In 2017, the City submitted a project application to the Vehicle Emissions Reductions Based at Schools (VERBS) program, a subprogram of the One Bay Area Grant 2 (OBAG 2) program for the Waverley Multi-Use Path Improvements and East Meadow Drive and Fabian Way Enhanced Bikeways Project (South Palo Alto Bikeways Project) PL-00026. The proposed project was

awarded federal funds for construction in the amount of \$919,000 with a local match of \$480,000. Due to challenges with staffing resources, planning for this project has been delayed.

The project has an imminent construction obligation deadline of January 2023. Staff is preparing to initiate the South Palo Alto Bikeways Project in anticipation of construction by January 2023.

South Palo Alto Bikeways Project

The South Palo Alto Bikeways Project is proposed for Fabian Way, East Meadow Drive, and the Waverley Path on Palo Alto Unified School District (PAUSD) land between East Meadow Drive and East Charleston Road. Proposed changes to enhance bicyclist visibility along Fabian Way from East Meadow Drive to East Charleston Road include reconfiguring Fabian Way with a travel lane reduction to accommodate a protected bicycle facility in each direction. Proposed changes to improve bicyclist visibility along East Meadow Drive from Alma to Fabian Way include installing a protected bicycle facility that may require some parking reconfiguration or limited removal. Proposed changes to the third corridor, the Waverley Multi-Use Path between East Meadow Drive and East Charleston Road, include widening the Waverley Bike Path by at least two feet where feasible to accommodate the high flows and varying speeds of cyclists and pedestrians. Repaving and grading will help to mitigate uneven surfaces caused by root damage.

The following local planning efforts support creating an enhanced network of low-stress school corridor routes to provide more families with the opportunity to leave their cars at home for their daily school and work trips, improving mobility options for all road users. By upgrading the bicycle facilities in the South Palo Alto Bikeways project, the City will improve the bicycle network and strengthen its investment in the Adobe Bridge Highway overcrossing and the Charleston-Arastradero Road Corridor project, both of which link to it.

2010 VERBS Grant

The City was awarded a 2010 Vehicle Emissions Reductions Based at School (VERBS) grant to develop Walk and Roll Maps that included infrastructure recommended for each PAUSD elementary, middle, and high school. The initiative heightened the visibility of the Safe Routes to School (SRTS) program among the individual school communities and greatly increased the demand for City SRTS resources in both infrastructure and non-infrastructure programming. The Waverley Multi-Use Path was identified for upgrades and widening in the 2012-2016 Walk and Roll Recommendations Maps for the adjacent schools.

City of Palo Alto Bicycle & Pedestrian Transportation Plan 2012

The 2012 City of Palo Alto Bicycle & Pedestrian Transportation Plan (BPTP) guides public and private investment in non-motorized transportation facilities and related programs in the city. The Fabian Way Enhanced Bikeway and the Meadow St./El Camino Way/Los Robles Enhanced

Bikeway are identified as key BPTP projects for the City. In November 2015, the Palo Alto City Council directed staff to develop a Class 4 separated bikeway on East Meadow to increase design safety. The project will link to other BPTP projects currently in progress, the Charleston-Arastradero Corridor Project, the Adobe Bridge Highway 101 Overcrossing.

PAUSD Bike Counts, Parent Surveys, and Related Data

Annual bike counts are taken by PTA Parent Transportation Safety Representatives Volunteers within a four-week period during the peak month of September. An average of multiple counts is encouraged. Data from 2016 show that between 8% and 54% of PAUSD elementary, middle, and school students bike to school. The 2019 JLS bike count revealed 54% of students biking, or 651 students. Gunn students biked at a rate of 44%, or 838 students. JLS Middle School reached the highest rate of student bike trips among PAUSD public middle and high schools in 2016. On an average day, 651 students, or more than 54% of JLS students biked to school. An average of 44% of Gunn High School students, or over 800, biked to school. These numbers have continued increasing since 2016. Recent data from 2019 show that between 7% and 70% of PAUSD elementary, middle, and school students bike to school. The 2019 JLS bike count revealed 70% of students biking, or 760 students. Gunn students biked at a rate of 50%, or 982 students.

The 2014 District-Wide Safe Routes to School Parent Survey Report was conducted in Fall 2014 by the Palo Alto Safe Routes to School (SRTS) Program. Overall, 1,970 surveys were filled out, providing results for 3,124 students. The surveys found that parents preferred enhanced bicycle lanes that go beyond striping for their child's route.

Additionally, 2016-2017 estimates from JLS Middle School administrators indicated eight students reported bike-related injuries along the Waverley Path, including a broken wrist from a student that fell off the Path due to the variability of the surface.

Discussion

This item is intended to reengage the Council on this project, share details about community engagement planned and lessons learned from other projects, request funding to move forward with the engagement and share a timeline and next steps to move the project forward as grant funds have timing restrictions for use.

In addition to potential changes in travel patterns, a significant amount of time has passed since letters of support for the VERBS grant were submitted by the Jewish Community Center (JCC), Gideon Hausner Jewish Day School, Kehillah Jewish High School, PAUSD, and the local PTAs of each school along the corridor. It will be beneficial to re-engage neighbors, schools, the major employment (i.e. office, industrial, medical) districts along E. Meadow Drive and Fabian Way, as well as the JCC to gather suggestions, preferences, and considerations related to signage, striping, curb, buffers, extensions, and signalization changes.

While community engagement efforts are limited by the ongoing pandemic due to in-person events and meetings are currently prohibited by the County Public Health Department, there are several options to engage the community on this project. Options below are listed to engage the Council and staff will incorporate Council input into the final community engagement plans working with the City Manager's Office and other Departments, as needed. Staff will also engage both PTC and PAUSD to incorporate feedback on the community engagement plan to make certain that we maximize reach to interested parties.

As an example of how staff would apply the process and tools developed in the Draft Transportation CEP, a Draft Community Engagement Plan tailored for the South Palo Alto Bikeways Project is explained in this section. Amidst the unpredictable circumstances of the pandemic, staff aims to conduct as much community engagement as possible, and as safely as possible, using available resources.

One of the goals of the Draft Community Engagement Plan is to determine if protected bikeways on either Fabian Way or East Meadow Drive would be acceptable to the South Palo Alto community. Because the grant specifies protected bikeway installation, the grant funds would need to be returned to VTA if the installation of protected bikeways cannot be accommodated on either Fabian Way or East Meadow Drive.

Recent Community Engagement Led by the Office of Transportation

Community engagement for Office of Transportation (OOT) projects adapt to the ongoing pandemic and take into account the City's recent experience with roadway projects. Prior to social media and online engagement opportunities, the City's Transportation staff used several techniques to engage the public, including but not limited to in-person meetings, usually held in the evenings, mailings to residents near a project, email blasts, and tabling near a project or at a Farmers' Market. Each technique has its benefits and drawbacks and reaching diverse segments of the community requires multiple methods, potentially increasing project timelines and costs.

Community concerns raised about the Neighborhood Transportation Safety and Bicycle Boulevards (NTSBB) Project implementation, for which public outreach had been done years before construction, caused the temporary suspension and adjustment of the project. It also created tension in relationships staff built with the public and expended additional limited resources to remediate the situation.

The Draft Community Engagement Plan (CEP) in this section reflects on lessons learned from the NTSBB Project, the Charleston-Arastradero Project, and the Connecting Palo Alto Grade Separation planning process as well as nationwide best practices. The South Palo Alto Bikeways Project will allow OOT to pilot the new framework and adjust it for future transportation projects.

Community Engagement Options for the South Palo Alto Bikeways Project

The pandemic has highlighted digital methods for engaging large numbers of people, the pandemic has also underscored the need for cities to reach out to and support those who are on the other side of the digital divide or have limited computer literacy, who may not speak or read English, or whose essential jobs make it difficult for them to participate in meetings or events. Traditional methods like phone-calling and posting flyers in multiple languages at essential businesses (groceries, pharmacies, banks, etc.) may help reach these segments of the community. If allowed by Public Health, tabling at essential business is also a key strategy to reaching a diverse group. In addition, OOT staff can work with local non-profits that serve specific populations to help get the word out about the project.

Based on several elements including the IAP2 model¹, pandemic restrictions, and budget realities, OOT staff propose the following Draft Community Engagement Plan for the South Palo Alto Bikeways Project. Staff seeks feedback on the depth and breadth of the plan. Because the project is on a tight budget and timeline, activities that can provide the broadest reach within limited time and budget were selected.

Purpose:

- Provide accessible information on the South Palo Alto Bikeways project alternatives and to provide opportunities and platforms to enhance and encourage community engagement and participation.
- Identify, engage, and work with key stakeholders to inform the community about the project, urgency of timely decisions, and the need to participate to assist Council to adopt a preferred solution.

The outreach effort will be successful if:

- The public understands and agrees to the problem that the ultimate solutions would solve.
- Participants feel they had early and ongoing opportunities for meaningful input.
- Stakeholders and interested parties can access timely and meaningful information.
- The trade-offs were understood and that all parties were acknowledged and considered.
- The public understood the funding constraints and opportunities related to the preferred solution and other ideas.
- Decision-makers are afforded the opportunity to consider public input prior to key decisions.
- The public understands how decisions were made.

Bottom Line Question:

To what level of protection should the bike lanes on Fabian Way and East Meadow Drive be upgraded, especially considering these routes are used by children biking to school and that East

¹ IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation:
https://cdn.ymaws.com/www.iap2.org/resource/resmgr/pillars/Spectrum_8.5x11_Print.pdf

Meadow Drive and Fabian Way connect to the new Adobe Bridge via the Reach Trail? If no installation of protected bikeways can be accommodated on either Fabian Way or East Meadow Drive, the grant funds must revert back to VTA.

Key Stakeholders:

- Nearby residents
- Property owners
- Business owners
- Business tenants
- Nearby schools
- Council, PTC, PRC, PABAC, CSTSC
- Various Palo Alto City Departments
- Bicyclists – Silicon Valley Bicycle Coalition (Palo Alto Chapter), etc.
- Students who bike here (Gunn, JLS, Fairmeadow, Hoover, GMS, Kehillah HS)
- People who walk here
- People who drive here
- Transit Providers
- Mitchell Park Field Users
- Mitchell Park Library and Community Center Users

Timeline:

PHASE 1: Document Existing Conditions & Introduce Options

Timeframe: April – May 2021

Tentative Events:

- Host one webinar to describe the purpose of the project and the public engagement effort and post link to webinar recording on project website
- Host Route Audit webinar to engage road users to provide feedback
- Presentations to PTC, PABAC, and CSTSC

Recommended Outreach and Communications Tools:

- Project Information Meetings/Webinars
- Online survey
- Share details through City Communications channels
- Interviews of Key Partners
- Attendance of Standing Meetings of relevant local groups and various Boards and Commissions
- Virtual Tour – Video of the segments to be considered
- Self-Tour/Route Audit – With worksheet/google form that can be filled out by bicyclists/pedestrians/drivers touring the route
- Self-Tour/Route Audit Webinar – Host webinar for those who have toured the route

and want to ask questions or provide additional feedback and ideas

- Project Website - project description, status updates, calendar of events, survey link, map, virtual tour link, and FAQ
- Flyers/Posters - shopping centers (Charleston Center, Midtown), JCC, schools, Mitchell Park Library and Community Center, Stevenson House
- Signage along the routes
- Newspaper Ads
- Project Email Distribution List
- Digital Mapping, if resources allow
- Tabling at Farmers Market and other locations if allowed by Public Health
- Temporary Treatments on Roadways
- Letters mailed to addresses within 1000 feet of the routes
- Translations
- Presentations to neighborhoods directly affected and other community groups upon request, pending capacity

PHASE 2: Develop Design Alternatives

Timeframe: September 2021

Tentative Events:

- Host webinar to obtain feedback on schematic designs (30%)
- Presentations to PTC, PABAC, and CSTSC
- Tabling at Farmers Market and Shopping Centers if allowed by Public Health
- Presentations to neighborhoods directly affected and other community groups upon request, pending capacity

Recommended Outreach and Communication Tools:

- Online survey
- Attend Standing Meetings of relevant business and neighborhood groups
- Share details through City Communications channels
- Project Website - project description, status updates, calendar of events, survey link, map, virtual tour link, and FAQ
- Flyers/Posters - shopping centers (Charleston Center, Midtown), JCC, schools, Mitchell Park Library and Community Center, Stevenson House
- Signage along the routes
- Newspaper Ads
- Project Email Distribution List
- Tabling at Farmers Market and other locations if allowed by Public Health
- Letters mailed to addresses within 1000 feet of the routes
- Translations

PHASE 3: Outreach for Preliminary Engineering

Timeframe: April 2022

Tentative Events:

- Host webinar to obtain feedback on Preliminary Engineering plans (60%)
- Presentations to PTC, PABAC, and CSTSC
- Tabling at Farmers Market and Shopping Centers if allowed by Public Health
- Presentations to neighborhoods directly affected and other community groups upon request, pending capacity

Recommended Outreach and Communications Tools:

- Share details through City Communications channels
- Project Website - project description, status updates, calendar of events, survey link, map, virtual tour link, and FAQ
- Online survey
- Flyers/Posters - shopping centers (Charleston Center, Midtown), JCC, schools, Mitchell Park Library and Community Center, Stevenson House
- Signage along the routes
- Newspaper Ads
- Project Email Distribution List
- Tabling at Farmers Market and other locations if allowed by Public Health
- Translations

PHASE 4: Informative Community Outreach

Timeframe: August – October 2022

Tentative Events:

- Host webinar and open house (if allowed) to obtain feedback on final design plans (100%)
- Tabling at Farmers Market and Shopping Centers if allowed by Public Health
- Presentations to neighborhoods directly affected and other community groups upon request, pending capacity
- Presentations to PTC, PABAC, and CSTSC for recommendations to Council
- Presentation to Council for project design approval.

Recommended Outreach and Communications Tools:

- PTC and City Council Study Session to review elements of the plan
- Present plan to the public in an open house format and a webinar
- Online survey
- Submit final plan to City Council for adoption, allowing for public comment and sharing

public comment received so far

- Share details through City Communications channels
- Project Website - project description, status updates, calendar of events, survey link, map, virtual tour link, and FAQ
- Flyers/Posters - shopping centers (Charleston Center, Midtown), JCC, schools, Mitchell Park Library and Community Center, Stevenson House
- Signage along the routes
- Newspaper Ads
- Project Email Distribution List
- Letters mailed to addresses within 1000 feet of the routes
- Translations

PHASE 5: Informative Community Outreach

Timeframe: From January 2023 Onward

Tentative Event:

- Pop-up Construction Event

Recommended Outreach and Communications Tools:

- Signage along route
- Share details through City Communications channels
- Notice mailed to properties along the route
- Door Hangers
- Project Website - project description, status updates, calendar of events, survey link, map, virtual tour link, and FAQ
- Translations

The first phase of outreach is expected to be completed via OOT's potential on-call consultant contract. The first phase is estimated to cost approximately \$110,000 based on average consultant rates of similar consulting services. This would cover the cost of project initiation, project drawings, outreach materials, and outreach support. Due to challenges with the initial project concept for PL-18000, El Camino Real Streetscape Project, and time constraints to execute before the obligation deadline of January 2023, it is staff's recommendation to return the El Camino Real project grant funds to VTA. Funds from PL-18000, which would be adjusted during mid-year budget to support PL-00026, Safe Routes to School, which is funding the South Palo Alto Bikeways Project.

Policy Implications

The South Palo Alto Bikeways Project is consistent with the following goals, policies, and programs in the *Comprehensive Plan 2030 Transportation Element*:

Goal T-1: Create a sustainable transportation system, complimented by a mix of land uses, that emphasizes walking, bicycling, use of public transportation and other methods to reduce GHG emissions and the use of single occupancy motor vehicles.

Policy T-1.1: Take a comprehensive approach to reducing single-occupant vehicle trips by involving those who live, work and shop in Palo Alto in developing strategies that make it easier and more convenient not to drive.

Policy T-1.3: Reduce GHG and pollutant emissions associated with transportation by reducing VMT and per-mile emissions through increasing transit options, supporting biking and walking, and through the use of zero-emission vehicle technologies to meet City and State goals for GHG reductions by 2030.

Goal T-2: Decrease delay, congestion, and VMT with a priority on our worst intersections and our peak commute times, including school traffic.

Goal T-3: Maintain an efficient roadway network for all users.

Policy T-3.5: When constructing or modifying roadways, plan for use of the roadway by all users.

Program T3.5.1: Continue to use best practices in roadway design that are consistent with complete streets principles and the Urban Forest Master Plan, focusing on bicycle and pedestrian safety and multi-modal uses. Consider opportunities to incorporate best practices from the National Association of City Transportation Officials guidelines for urban streets and bikeways tailored to the Palo Alto context.

Policy T-3.14: Continue to prioritize the safety of school children in street modification projects that affect school travel routes, including during construction.

Goal T-6: Provide a safe environment for motorists, pedestrians, and bicyclists on Palo Alto streets.

Policy T-6.1: Continue to make safety the first priority of citywide transportation planning. Prioritize pedestrian, bicycle, and automobile safety over motor vehicle level of service at intersections and motor vehicle parking.

Policy T-6.4: Continue the Safe Routes to School partnership with PAUSD and the Palo Alto Council of PTAs.

Policy T-6.6: Use engineering, enforcement and educational tools to improve safety for all users on City roadways.

Additionally, the South Palo Alto Bikeways Project is consistent with the following top recommended projects in the *Bicycle & Pedestrian Transportation Plan 2012*:

BB-3 Bryant Street Bicycle Boulevard: Wayfinding signs and pavement markings south of Bryant Street. Spot improvements for additional safety and comfort, including Churchill/Coleridge Avenue spot improvement and arterial crossing enhancements at University Avenue, Meadow Drive (consider beacon or signal), Charleston Road, and San Antonio Road at Nita Drive into Mountain View.

BK-7 Meadow St / El Camino Way / Los Robles Enhanced Bikeway: Potential cycletrack redesign or enhanced striping and signage of existing bike lanes between La Donna and Meadow Street along Los Robles/El Camino Way; Enhanced striping and signage, including intersection through-markings, for existing Meadow Street bike lanes from El Camino Way to Fabian Way.

BK-9 Fabian Way Enhanced Bikeway: Potential cycletrack or enhanced striping and signage of existing substandard (time restricted) bike lanes to improve safety and access to Adobe Creek Highway 101 crossing, Charleston bike lanes to San Antonio Road

TR-2 Adobe Creek Reach Trail: Upgrade the existing Santa Clara Valley Water District (SCVWD) maintenance road to a Class I trail facility from W. Bayshore Road at Adobe Creek to E. Meadow Drive. This trail would help connect the existing Benjamin Lefkowitz underpass and future potential overcrossing.

Resource Impact

Approval for the Community Engagement Plan requires a budget amendment in the Capital Improvement Fund to increase the Safe Routes to School Project (PL-00026) expenses by \$110,000 and offset with a decrease to the El Camino Real Pedestrian Safety and Streetscape Project (PL-18000) expenses by \$110,000; thus, it will be cost neutral. Staff anticipates potential savings from closing the El Camino Real Pedestrian Safety and Streetscape Project (PL-18000), which will be brought forward as part of the recommendations for FY 2021 Midyear Adjustments. Funding for the Safe Routes to School Project (PL-00026) is contingent upon Council approval through the annual budget process.

The Waverley Multi-Use Path Improvements and East Meadow Drive and Fabian Way Enhanced Bikeways Project (South Palo Alto Bikeways Project) is funded through the FY 2021 Capital Improvement Project (CIP) Safe Routes to School (PL-00026). The City was awarded a grant by the Vehicle Emissions Reductions Based at Schools (VERBS) program, a subprogram of the One Bay Area Grant 2 (OBAG 2) program. As stated earlier in the staff report, the award is \$919,000 with a local match of \$480,000 to cover the \$1.4M project cost. The awarded VERBS funds are for construction costs only, not for community engagement (outreach) or design.

It must be noted that the \$1.4M project budget was calculated in 2016, and accounting for inflation, the project budget has increased to \$1.7M. This increases our local match obligation to \$781,000 in 2020.

Timeline

Staff is implementing the first round of community engagement for the South Palo Alto Bikeways project. Subsequently, staff will return to Council with findings from the first round of public outreach, including the final concept plan.

The timeframe of major milestones for the South Palo Alto Bikeways Project is presented in Table 2 below:

Table 2: South Palo Alto Bikeways Project Milestones

Fiscal Year	Months	Milestones
2021	Q3: Jan – Mar 2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Project status report to Council
2021	Q4: Apr – Jun 2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Stage 1 community engagement on application’s initial concept plan Council approval on the final concept plan Request for proposal
2022	Q1: Jul to Sep 2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Request for proposal (cont.) Notice of award Develop schematic design 30% Stage 2 community engagement on schematic design 30% CEQA and NEPA submission
2022	Q2: Oct – Dec 2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> CEQA and NEPA submission (cont.)
2022	Q3: Jan – Mar 2022	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> PAUSD Encroachment Permit Develop preliminary engineering design 60%
2022	Q4: Apr – Jun 2022	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop preliminary engineering design 60% (cont.) Stage 3 community engagement on preliminary engineering design 60% Final engineering design 100%
2023	Q1: Jul – Sep 2022	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Final engineering design 100% (cont.) Stage 4 informative community engagement
2023	Q2: Oct – Dec 2022	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Stage 4 informative community engagement (cont.)

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Initiate construction
2023	Q3: Jan – Mar 2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stage 5 informative community engagement

Stakeholder Engagement

As described in this report, stakeholders have been involved throughout the development of the recommended project concept, as reflected in letters of support for the VERBS grant application. This includes PAUSD, whose staff have been involved in assessing the need for the project. The Draft Community Engagement Plan (CEP) could serve as a guide for implementing appropriate levels of public outreach for this project. As an example of how staff would apply the process and tools developed in the CEP, including identifying a range of stakeholders and public outreach strategies, a Draft Community Engagement Plan tailored for the South Palo Alto Bikeways Project is explained in the discussion section.

Environmental Review

No environmental review is necessary at this time for approval of the Draft Community Engagement Plan and direction to staff to return with a final concept plan following public outreach.

Once Council approves the final concept plan for the South Palo Alto Bikeways project, staff will release a request for proposals for design and conduct environmental review of the project. Pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), the South Palo Alto Bikeways project is subject to evaluation. As this project includes federal funding for construction, it will require a separate assessment under the federal National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA).