



CITY OF
**PALO
ALTO**

OFFICE OF THE CITY MANAGER

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April 1, 2024

Dina El-Tawansy
District Director
Caltrans Bay Area
111 Grand Ave.
Oakland, CA 94612
dina.el-tawansy@dot.ca.gov

Subject: City of Palo Alto's Follow Up Regarding Notification and Outreach to Vehicle Dwellers Related to the Caltrans Proposed SR 82 / El Camino Real Bikeway Project

Dear Ms. El-Tawansy,

The City of Palo Alto is writing in response to recent meetings and questions from Caltrans staff regarding the outreach and notification plan from Caltrans related to the Caltrans Proposed SR 82 / El Camino Real Bikeway Project. A summary of the questions received is attached.

This project is important to our community to repave this vital corridor and provide a safer corridor for all users. As currently proposed, this project will lead to the displacement of many vehicle-dwelling neighbors. As a precursor to the responses below, we note that the impact of this could be minimized if Caltrans were to approach the work in phases (i.e., "no parking" for a portion of El Camino Real at a time while work is being done) and the parking removal is temporary and limited to the duration of actual construction activities.

Caltrans recently notified the City that it expects the City of Palo Alto and the County of Santa Clara's Continuum of Care to perform the outreach steps needed for Caltrans Proposed SR 82 / El Camino Real Bikeway Project. Both the City and the County have shared interest in helping vehicle-dwelling neighbors on El Camino Real but have raised several issues about the Caltrans characterization that it is the City's or County's responsibility to perform outreach as part of the Caltrans process. In the absence of any agreements on file related to these services, the responsibility for such outreach for this Caltrans project formally rests with Caltrans as the sponsoring agency, as opposed to the City of Palo Alto or the County of Santa Clara. We understand that there are specific steps which must be taken in terms of notification and informing vehicle-dwelling neighbors of other resources available to them. This should be a multi-step process done by Caltrans to give the families as much time as possible to try to take advantage of the services suggested. We request that Caltrans issue the initial notification to vehicle dwellers on the corridor of the pending Caltrans project and the need for the vehicles to relocate. The County can assist in outreach *after* the households have been notified by Caltrans of the need to relocate and the exact date by which they must relocate. This outreach may include assessment and connection to services but, given the scarcity of available beds and housing, this may not include the immediate offer of a bed or housing.



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It is also Caltrans responsibility to formally notify the vehicles with the tow-notice at the appropriate time and, if necessary, for Caltrans to actually tow the vehicles. There seemed to be some confusion on roles and responsibilities related to the City, County, and nonprofit partners in the outreach and formal notice and towing process. One particular interaction referenced was in a February 15th meeting between City staff and the Caltrans encampment team. The encampment team left that meeting and later reported that the City held the responsibility related to outreach to the vehicle-dwellers prior to any notification to the vehicle dwellers by Caltrans. However, at that meeting, both City and County staff noted that the outreach organizations in the area currently working with the vehicle-dwellers on El Camino Real are not under contract for outreach services with either the City nor the County. Staff did not make a commitment during that meeting to assume Caltrans' duties in this regard; City staff only offered to ask the voluntary outreach organizations to provide supplementary outreach to vehicle-dwellers. Given that only Caltrans knows the construction schedule, only Caltrans is in a position to make these first early notifications.

While the City is committed to continuing to creatively problem-solve with Caltrans about options for the vehicle-dwelling families along the El Camino Real corridor in Palo Alto, it is also important to be clear on roles. Caltrans referenced their responsibility to document outreach and services offerings as well as their responsibility to do notification steps and any enforcement action that may need to take place. Caltrans should also start the process by providing a specific notice about the project to the vehicle dwellers and businesses along the corridor with specific project timing.

City staff requested the detailed project schedule with more than a three-week outlook from Caltrans. This information would allow the City, County, and nonprofit partners to be more effective in coordinating viable additional resources to augment the work that Caltrans offers as outreach to this specific population. The City team looks forward to receiving the detailed project schedule and timeline as we continue this very important discussion. We also look forward to Caltrans providing the initial early notification specifically to vehicle dwellers and businesses along the corridor, identifying dates when parking will be impacted, to officially start the process before any additional County outreach work will occur. This notice would be more specific than the broader Project Fact Sheet previously issued.

Sincerely,



Ed Shikada
City Manager

cc: Nick Saleh, Project Management District Division Chief
Debra Nelson, Office Chief, External Operations and Engagement
Kathryn Kaminski, Deputy Director, Office of Supportive Housing, County of Santa Clara
Philip Kamhi, Chief Transportation Official, City of Palo Alto
Brad Eggleston, Public Works Director, City of Palo Alto
Meghan Horrigan-Taylor, Chief Communications Officer, City of Palo Alto
Chantal Cotton Gaines, Deputy City Manager, City of Palo Alto
Melissa McDonough, Assistant to the City Manager, City of Palo Alto
Sylvia Star-Lack, Transportation Planning Manager, City of Palo Alto

Attachment: Responses to Concerns and Questions Raised from Debra Nelson, March 27, 2024

Attachment:

Responses to Concerns and Questions Raised from Debra Nelson (email dated March 27, 2024)

Clarifications:

- The Caltrans staff email referenced the following: “[The] City, County and Caltrans agree anywhere from one to two years, this corridor has been an “unofficially City/County sanctioned” encampment within Palo Alto. There have been no removal attempts by the State, nor expressed concerns from the City and County to the State by virtue of explicit requests to remove.”
 - **City Response:** The City disagrees with this statement. The City requires vehicles to move every 72 hours per our code. Most vehicles comply with the requirement to move every 72 hours; there is no guarantee of where they will relocate after moving. The Palo Alto Police Department routinely issues warnings for 72-hour violations and issues citations and tows abandoned vehicles as appropriate.

Responses to Questions:

1. Is there still concern from City Manager/Deputy City Manager/County of Santa Clara regarding noticing that the role of providing outreach is not Department of Transportation? Caltrans does not provide outreach, and has no services/shelters, being that is not our funding purpose. Yes/No

City Response: This is addressed in the letter. This is a Caltrans project and Caltrans should do the initial notification. Such notification has not yet been done specifically to the businesses nor vehicle dwellers along El Camino Real.

2. Has any official outreach occurred since Caltrans requests made on 3/15 and 3/25? Yes/No

City Response: As noted related to #1 above, Caltrans has not performed the initial notification to the vehicle dwellers and thus the City and County are unable to formally note outreach done to be included in your Caltrans documentation process to support future decisions Caltrans will need to make regarding actions related to vehicles.

3. Does the City/County have any potential relocation offers for the persons experiencing homelessness who are sheltered with RVs along the corridor? Yes/No

City Response: After Caltrans provides the initial notification to vehicle dwellers on El Camino Real, the County will share any resource options available to vehicle dwellers. Note: the amount of available relocation options in Santa Clara County are very limited.

4. Do both the City/County know how many estimated persons (not individual RV count) are at this location?

City Response: No additional information available at this time.

5. Has any communication regarding noticing the persons that nearing June, Caltrans will need to begin the paving of Bike Lanes? Yes/No? For either reply- are there pending plans to do so?

City Response: The Caltrans project schedule is a repaving project starting later this year and subsequently the bike lanes, pending City Council action in April 2024 locally. To the specific question here, this initial communication is Caltrans responsibility given this is a Caltrans project and City action is pending. This type of initial notification about an upcoming project and the need for the site to be clear for the project is always the responsibility of the entity performing the project. In this case, that is Caltrans. We look forward to details about when this notification will occur, and the County can do some outreach thereafter.

6. Has the City/County communicated any of these needs for outreach to your “grassroots” organizations/persons of familiarity who are working with the persons living in RVs? Yes/No? If no, I note- it was suggested to leverage their ongoing relationship, albeit the “grassroots” is not obligated contractually or otherwise.

City Response: Informally, the City and County have activated partners to help vehicle dwelling residents along the corridor. These partners are not under contract with the City for outreach services, thus any work they perform would not be used as part of the Caltrans documentation for future vehicle removal. Even with these efforts, Caltrans is still responsible for the official notification to start the process.

7. How many children do you estimate are living in the RV’s? If you don’t know exactly, I recall it was mentioned on 3/15 “families with children”- thus, an estimate is helpful.

City Response: We do not have this information at this time.

8. Is the City/County exploring emergency funding/housing solutions to offer? Yes/No?

City Response: We do not understand this question.

9. Are there currently plans to enact parking ordinances once the project has been completed? Yes/No/Unknown

City Response: There is a 72-hour restriction already in place.