



Planning Division

Memorandum

Date: November 15, 2002

To: Planning and Transportation Commission

From: Virginia Warheit, Senior Planner

Subject: Study Session for the El Camino Real/ Caltrans Demonstration Project

At the Planning and Transportation Commission study session next Tuesday evening, November 19, the Commission will be reviewing concepts for improvements to El Camino Real, developed through the El Camino Real Demonstration Project which the city has undertaken in collaboration with Caltrans. The city is undertaking this project because it provides an opportunity to address current safety, operational and aesthetic problems on El Camino Real while positioning the street to better accommodate both current and future traffic needs. The demonstration project will allow the city to be proactive in taking advantage of state and federal funding as it becomes available to design and construct improvements.

The plans to be reviewed at the study session are refinements of earlier plans that have been revised in response to public comments at two community workshops, a study session with the City Council and extensive involvement of the project community Advisory Group and Technical Advisory Committee.

Two Alternatives to be Considered

Two alternative plans are currently being considered. One alternative retains the existing six travel lanes throughout the length of the corridor. Many important improvements to the street can be provided even while retaining all six travel lanes. These improvements include traffic signal synchronization, crosswalk improvements, somewhat wider sidewalks, improved bus stops, bicycle lanes, somewhat wider center medians, more street trees, and new street lighting and other furnishings. Curbside parking would continue to be provided in its current form or, in some locations, in parking pockets.

Some improvements provide multiple benefits. For example, wider medians serve as a safe refuge for people and bicycles crossing the street, allow more continuous planting of large street trees, and provide environmental benefits by replacing paved surface with landscaping. Bicycle lanes increase safety and comfort for bicyclists, for drivers in the adjacent lane, and for people

getting in and out of curbside parking spaces, as well as providing additional clearance for emergency vehicles.

A second alternative would retain six travel lanes along most of the street, but would reduce to four travel lanes in two carefully selected locations where traffic studies show that four lanes are adequate for current and projected future traffic volumes. These two sections of the road, centered around Stanford Avenue and around Los Robles Avenue, have been selected for considering a four-lane alternative because these areas include school crossing routes and other concentrations of commercial and pedestrian activity, and they are located far enough away from major regional intersections that traffic volumes in these areas can be accommodated with four travel lanes. Two configurations of the four lane alternative are being presented, the basic version called Configuration A, and a somewhat extended version called Configuration B.

The additional benefits of reducing to four travel lanes in these two areas include substantially shorter, and therefore safer, pedestrian and bicycle crossings; generously wide sidewalks for shoppers and other business activities; continuous curbside parking; and increased landscape area in sidewalks and center medians that reduces pavement, increases shading, and provides better growing environment for street trees.

In both alternatives, width of travel lanes would be reduced from the current 12 feet to 11 feet in order to provide space for the other improvements.

Summary of Attachments

The following is a brief summary of the materials that are attached to this memo for Commissioners' review prior to the study session.

Attachment A: Goals and Objectives Memorandum. The goals and objectives of the project were developed by the community Advisory Group representing many community interests, including eight neighborhoods along El Camino, the Palo Alto Bicycle Advisory Committee(PABAC), businesses on El Camino, the Trees for El Camino project , the PTA School Safety Committee, Stanford University and the Valley Transportation Authority.

Attachment B: Matrix: Comparison of Possible Futures for El Camino Real. The Goals and Objectives were used to guide various possible improvements and alternative concepts for the street. The Matrix compares how well each of the alternatives being considered addresses the project objectives, measured against projected conditions on the street in twenty years without any improvements. Generally, where traffic lanes can be reduced more of the project objectives are achieved and at a higher level.

Attachment C: Street Concept Diagrams. There are three Concept Diagrams: Six lanes throughout the Corridor; Six lane/Four lane combination – Configuration A; and Six lane/Four lane combination – Configuration B.

These diagrams show where lane reduction is being considered, and they show the characteristics that influenced the selection of these areas for the reduced-lane alternative. Sections to be avoided for lane reduction are those that are in the vicinity of the four regional intersections, shown in bold type (Alma, Embarcadero Road, Page Mill Road, and Arastradero-West Charleston). Areas that could benefit from a narrower roadway are those that include commercial activities, key school routes, and higher levels of other pedestrian and bicycle crossings.

On the diagrams, the number of lanes in each direction are shown by the width of the black line. The wider black line indicates three travel lanes in one direction, and the narrower black line indicates two travel lanes in one direction. Also, a symbol with plus or minus indicates where the number of lanes increases or decreases. For example, in Configuration A, a driver going south would have three travel lanes from Alma Street until just north of Park Boulevard, then two travel lanes until just after crossing California Avenue, where there would again be three lanes. At just north of Los Robles the southbound direction would again drop to two travel lanes until just past Maybell Avenue, where it would return to three lanes.

Attachment D: Street Cross Sections. There are three sets of street cross sections: Urban Street Cross Sections; Urban Street Cross Sections at Left Turn Lane; and Stanford Frontage Street Cross Sections. These cross sections compare how the street would be configured with six travel lanes or four travel lanes, compared to the existing situation which is shown at the bottom of the page. The “urban” cross sections would generally apply south of Stanford Avenue, and the “Stanford frontage” cross sections would generally apply north of Stanford Avenue along the Stanford University frontage.

Attachment E: Photo Simulations of Los Robles Avenue. The photo simulations show existing conditions at Los Robles Avenue, compared with how the street could look with six travel lanes and improvements, or with four travel lanes and additional improvements.

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment A: Goals and Objectives Memorandum, September 11, 2002

Attachment B: Matrix: Comparison of Possible Futures for El Camino Real

Attachment C: Street Concept Diagrams

C-1. Six lanes throughout the Corridor

C-2. Six lane/Four lane combination – Configuration A

C-3. Six lane/Four lane combination – Configuration B

Attachment D: Street Cross Sections

D-1. Urban Street Cross Sections

D-2. Urban Street Cross Sections at Left Turn Lane

D-3. Stanford Frontage Street Cross Sections

**Attachment E: Photo Simulations of Los Robles Avenue: Existing Condition;
Improvements with Six Travel Lanes; Improvements with Four
Lanes**