

City of Palo Alto

Office of the Mayor and City Council

January 27, 2020

The Honorable Jerry Hill
California State Senate
State Capitol, Room 5035
Sacramento, CA 95814

The Honorable Marc Berman
California State Assembly
State Capitol, Room 6011
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: Support for the City of Palo Alto's 2020 State Budget Request for grade separation funding

Dear Senator Hill and Assemblymember Berman:

On behalf of the City of Palo Alto, I want to thank the two of you for your leadership and ongoing support of our city and the region. Through this letter, I respectfully request your support and partnership to help secure much needed funding from the State budget to start the environmental studies for our grade separation project. We intend to upgrade and modify the design of our rail corridor to meet future needs and enhance safety, and an environmental study is a critical component of our efforts.

Background

For over 150 years, Palo Alto has enjoyed regional connections to San Francisco and San Jose via rail. Now known as the Caltrain corridor, it is used by thousands of daily commuters from Gilroy to San Francisco. In fact, our Palo Alto station was the second busiest Caltrain station in 2019. And a recent federal accident prediction report lists 3 Palo Alto rail intersections as among the most worrisome in the County.¹

Of the six streets where people can cross tracks in Palo Alto, four are currently at-grade crossings. These crossings create traffic congestion and pose safety and noise challenges that will worsen as Caltrain begins to use longer and more frequent electrified trains. As a result, the City is actively engaging in long-term planning for the rail corridor to improve east-west connectivity for generations to come.

Caltrain electrification will be complete by 2022; by 2025 there could be up to 20 trains per hour during peak times. This would mean that gates at rail intersections would be down 25% of the time during daily peak periods with traffic congestion doubling by 2030. We seek to eliminate the conflict between trains, vehicles, bicycles and pedestrians, while reducing congestion and supporting public transit to job centers such as San Francisco.

Status

We are in the midst of a robust community-based process to address long-standing challenges associated with at-grade crossings. Community feedback and collaboration is a vital part of the decision-making process now and in the future. In April of 2018, our Council approved a contract with AECOM to serve as

¹ "Public Highway-Rail Crossings Ranked by Predicted Accidents Per Year as of 12/31/18." Report generated January 14, 2020 from the Federal Railroad Administration Office of Safety Analysis, Web Accident Prediction System. Available at <https://safetydata.fra.dot.gov/webaps/>

the lead consultant. After spending much of 2017 soliciting ideas, Palo Alto ended up with a master list of 40 ideas, winnowed down to nine options.

Our Council anticipates choosing preferred alternatives this year, at which point, our City will begin the required environmental study. Given this timeline and the pressing need, we respectfully request your support to help secure a state budget appropriation in the amount of one million dollars for the necessary project development and environmental studies.

I look forward to partnering with the State of California on this endeavor.

Sincerely,

DocuSigned by:

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Adrian Fine
Mayor, City of Palo Alto

Cc:
Palo Alto City Council
Ed Shikada, Palo Alto City Manager