



**City Council  
RAIL COMMITTEE**

**SUMMARY MINUTES**

Special Meeting  
April 20, 2022

The Rail Committee of the City of Palo Alto met on this date at the Community Meeting Room and via virtual teleconference at 1:00 p.m.

Present: Vice Mayor and Chair Lydia Kou, Mayor Pat Burt, and Council Member Alison Cormack

Absent: None

Oral Communications

Public comments were received from:

Martin Summer requested the pole color at the University Avenue station be repainted to match the other poles in the City of Palo Alto and added to the City Council's negotiation list with Caltrain, noted an omission of a 600-foot public notification, and relayed the impact to property value and quality of life for surrounding residents.

Sandra Weiss requested a quiet zone at the Alma El Camino train crossing by June 1, 2023 and noted the impact to the quality of life for those residents in the Downtown North and Lynnfield Oaks communities in Palo Alto and Menlo Park.

Josh shared the effects to nearby residents of the train horn at the Alma El Camino train crossing and a petition for a quiet zone and requested immediate funding and action by the next fiscal year's budget.

Deborah Stinchfield supported a quiet zone as soon as possible at the Alma El Camino train crossing and shared research and evidence on the impact of interrupted sleep.

Adina Levin, Friends of Caltrain representative, noted a quiet zone study by the City Council of Menlo Park with a combined effort with Palo Alto staff, welcomed additional support from the City of Palo Alto, and indicated the completion of the Caltrain electrification project by 2024, additional funding required to complete the project, advocacy support from Assemblymember Mullin to appeal to the State surplus funds for capital improvement funds, and City and community opportunities to advocate to legislatures for funding.

Adrian Brandt supported the request for a quiet zone at the Alma El Camino train crossing, noted fully protected modern urban crossings with automated equipment, and relayed optional and for cause horn uses.

Ashwin Rao shared challenges with the quality of sleep, work, and academics for him and his family related to the Caltrain horn.

Jim Orenberg strongly supported the quiet zone at the Alme El Camino train crossing and noted the horn noise range.

Tony Carrasco reflected on the strengths and deficiencies of XCAP and noted little consideration for bikes and pedestrians, sidewalks, an increased focus on the pedestrian experience, and hidden costs like externalities, congestion, and construction time for alternatives.

**MOTION** by Council Member Cormack, seconded by Vice Mayor Kou to reorder the agenda to take first Item No. 2 Reports from VTA, Caltrain, and City staff.

**MOTION PASSED:** 3-0

Action Items

Item No. 2 Reports from Valley Transportation Authority (VTA), Caltrain, and City staff

VTA General Manager and CEO Carolyn Gonot provided a brief overview of the substantial sales tax to the Caltrain grade separations in North Santa Clara County and utilized a presentation to review the 2016 Measure B program categories, grade separation program category, 2016 Measure B project readiness criteria for need/capacity city-based programs, Measure B grade crossing locations, and project schedules.

In response to Mayor Burt's question, Ms. Gonot shared an upcoming meeting with the VTA Measure B grant allocation staff to confirm the City's eligibility for discretionary expenditure uses for final engineering studies and continued use of bike and pedestrian crossings during construction at the vehicular crossing site and indicated she would return to the RAIL Committee with more information. Furthermore, Ms. Gonot noted opportunities to secure Federal and State budgeted Active Transportation Funds and VTA's support. Mayor Burt expressed appreciation for collaborative efforts with VTA.

Caltrain Acting Executive Director Michelle Bouchard noted the importance and history of grade separation, 41 remaining grade separations, Caltrain's willingness to partner, 10 Memorandum of Understanding (MOUs) along the corridors to advance projects, electrification for revenue service in 2024 with an increase to six trains per hour, grade crossing safety enhancements, the 2040 service plan vision, partnerships with VTA and Palo Alto for design, review, and analysis of grade crossing alternatives and the MOU process, and the grade separation study to firm up standards and identify alternatives and offered to entertain questions and provide support.

In response to City Manager Ed Shikada's inquiry for partnering opportunities for Federal funding, Ms. Gonot indicated work being done by VTA lobbyists on grade separation, earmarks, potential programs, and approaches and noted an increased funding likelihood with early planning activities and design work, and project alignment goals.

Public comments were received from:

Elizabeth Alexis endorsed Federal and State funding for a program rather than individual grade separations.

Phil Burton noted the Caltrain engineering standards and construction costs and techniques.

Adrian Brandt expressed the opinion that Caltrain has the power to revise its engineering standards and noted grade climbing, lower train speed limit impacts, ramping distances and alternatives, and cost savings.

Nadia Naik expressed the opinion that Palo Alto is being held up by the Caltrain engineering standards and noted many crossings in a tight space, alternative and related benefits, and cost savings, and supported a subset technical advisory/support group and partnering with VTA to seek Federal funding.

Mayor Burt indicated a misconception in the criteria for Federal funding as it relates to requests during the planning and construction phases and submission process through MTC and emphasized the need to accelerate the final selection of preferred alternatives, provided clarity of vertical curve and vertical grade, noted requirement reducing construction methods, and updates to Caltrain's clearance standards, referenced freight train speed impact, and indicated a need to understand negotiation opportunities with freight carriers.

In response to Mayor Burt's query, Ms. Bouchard concurred with vertical curves and streamlined construction and noted a technical review with a focus on constructability of a larger corridor wide grade separation study, electrical clearance, retooling of Caltrain's development and engineering team, an imminent kick off of clearance work and upcoming scoping technical work to address constructability issues, onboarding a project manager, and an interest in understanding the concept of the community technical review. Furthermore, Ms. Bouchard indicated that funding is available to complete the standards and technical constructability work and issues related to prioritizing, project manager onboarding, and separation program focus.

Mayor Burt relayed that Palo Alto is the most constrained corridor in the system which creates design challenges and Ms. Bouchard concurred.

Ms. Gonot explained the relationship between grade separation projects and roadway stop projects as a focus area.

In response to Council Member Cormack's request, Ms. Bouchard indicated that construction coordination efforts will be brought back to the RAIL Committee from the corridor-wide study and noted advanced planning opportunities for grade, standard updates, and construction approaches.

In response to Chair Kou's question, Ms. Bouchard disclosed that the corridor-wide study will begin once the project manager is in place and will involve the Local Policy Maker Group (LPMG).

Chief Transportation Official Philip Kamhi reported on the quiet zone study by the Office of Transportation and the City of Menlo Park, a request for proposal (RFP) to perform an initial quiet zone study, grant fundings applications prior to the MTCBIL process, projects being evaluated for readiness and competitiveness, and a consultant hired by the City to support the grant process. Furthermore, Chief Transportation Official Kamhi discussed an application submitted to VTA for the Major Project Advancement Policy (MAP) for the implementation of the plan bay area 2050 that included Caltrain

grade separations as a candidate project on the Metropolitan Transportation Commission (MTC) request letter and noted while being separate from the BIL strategy, it may feed into future prioritizations for Federal funding sources.

**ACTION: NO ACTION WAS TAKEN**

Item No. 1      Discuss City Council referred item related to prioritizing, sequencing, and adjusting the scope of work for additional studies.

Senior Engineer Ripon Bhatia utilized a presentation to review the rail grade separation project, discussion outline, purpose, four additional studies directed by Council consideration, the bicycle and pedestrian plan review, a design refinement of underpass alternatives, preliminary geotechnical investigations, additional outreach, a second opinion cost estimate and peer review, track review and coordination with Caltrain, and Rail Committee action.

Public comments were received from:

Adina Levin discussed regional transit coordination opportunities, questioned the appropriate body for further discussion, and offered to furnish the City with supportive resources.

Nadia Naik questioned if Caltrain is planning to straighten the track from the San Francisquito Creek Bridge to the University Avenue Station and the status of the four tracks/high speed rail and suggested inviting Senator Josh Becker to a RAIL Committee meeting.

Adrian Brandt expressed the opinion that the current design for the Churchill underpass is not a fit in Palo Alto, noted pedestrians and bicycle detouring, and suggested investing more thought in the plan for Churchill.

Staff provided an update since the February meeting, relayed that staff is ready to green light and move forward, and clarified the study prioritization request coming from the referral direction. Chair Kou noted some projects that need more information before moving forward and others that can move forward now, proposed a combined effort with other Cities, mentioned cost estimate reviews from a third party, and suggested outreach effort updates. Chief Transportation Official Kamhi relayed the ongoing design refinement process with original alternative creators' meetings included, preliminary geotechnical investigations, potential yet unlikely cost savings opportunities with construction techniques, and challenges and higher costs related to a secondary RFP for the trench alternatives.

Council Member Cormack gained confirmation from staff that AECOM has not completed any items listed in the contract since February and questioned the reasonableness of shifting Exhibit B: Schedule Performance and Time Schedule by three months. Furthermore, she directed staff to inform the RAIL Committee of seasonal considerations that could affect the geotechnical studies, received clarification by staff that the task order cost to complete the four-track analysis at the high level is included in the contract agreement and requires City Council direction for the City Manager to authorize, and supported the task.

Chair Kou indicated that the City is losing money while Caltrain delays development.

The RAIL Committee deliberated at length on the cost and time savings and disruption related to jack boxing, information received from geotechnical studies, feasibility considerations for structure, geotechnical conditions, the right of way elements, and construction at Churchill.

Mayor Burt requested a letter be composed by staff and addressed to Caltrain to argue why a four track is not feasible at the Churchill location so the RAIL Committee can consider two-track alternatives. He concurred with City Manager Shikada who suggested the letter request the four-track option no longer be considered at Churchill.

Council Member Cormack suggested including Alma, East Meadow, and Charleston in the request along with talking with the City of Mountain View and the RAIL Committee deliberated on how to move forward engaging with Caltrain and the public.

The RAIL Committee deliberated on items delaying next steps, the AECOM contract authorization signing and City Council approval, study results to determine sequencing, ongoing design refinements, cost estimates, additional outreach, conceptual problem solving, input from the original designers and stakeholder groups, updated exhibits, and collaboration with AECOM for an iterative roll out and work phases.

In response to Mayor Burt's question, Chief Transportation Officer Kamhi confirmed the AECOM project Measure B funding source and, pending consent from VTA, the use of Measure B Grading Separation funds or discretionary Measure B Local Streets and Roads funds. Furthermore, he indicated that contract signing can proceed under the assumption that if VTA does not approve the additional funding, the Measure B Local Streets and Roads will be used, questioned if Council approval would be required for policy changes and fund allocation, and clarified a reimbursement process for used funds.

**MOTION:** Motion by RAIL Committee Member Cormack and seconded by Mayor Burt to recommend to Council approval of amendment number four of the contract and authorize the City Manager to execute the optional task related to four track analysis, after consulting with the Rail Committee.

**MOTION PASSED:** 3-0

Item No. 3 Discuss Rail Committee Work Plan

The RAIL Committee discussed focus areas for 2022 including public comments on the design refinement, challenges requiring discussion, Caltrain standards and prioritization requests, funding issues, project readiness, meetings with MTC and VTA, collaboration with VTA on the MAP, bicycle and pedestrian crossings, seamless transportation, quiet zones, and invitations for XCAP members to attend Rail Committee meetings.

Public comment was received from:

Nadia Naik supported a monthly Rail Committee meeting and suggested a formal process for communication between PAUSD and the Rail Committee, a municipal services agreement for a future agenda item, a list of guiding principles for the RAIL Committee, and a MOU with Caltrain and VTA.

**ACTION: NO ACTION WAS TAKEN**

Next Steps and Future Agenda

The next Rail Committee will meet on May 18, 2022 and future meetings are to be determined.

Adjournment: The meeting was adjourned at 4:15 p.m.