



City Council Staff Report

From: City Manager
Report Type: ACTION ITEMS
Lead Department: Transportation

Meeting Date: June 10, 2024

Report #:2402-2597

TITLE

Selection of Rail Grade Separation Alternatives and Bicycle-Pedestrian Crossing Near the Churchill Avenue Crossing for the Advancement of the Alternatives into the Preliminary Engineering and Environmental Documentation phase; CEQA status – statutorily exempt under CEQA section 15262 (feasibility and planning study).

RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends that the Council discuss and review the grade separation alternatives considering Rail Committee recommendations and other work completed to date for the selection of preferred alternative(s) and select which alternative(s) to advance into the Preliminary Engineering and Environmental Documentation Phase.

Staff is seeking the Council action on the following key decisions:

1. The Bicycle and Pedestrian crossing location at Kellogg Avenue versus Seale Avenue for the Partial Underpass Alternative at Churchill Avenue Crossing. The Rail Committee recommended the Seale Avenue as preferred alternative unanimously.
2. The selection of Preferred Alternative(s) at Meadow Drive and Charleston Road for advancing grade separation alternatives into the Preliminary Engineering and Environmental Documentation Phase. The Rail Committee voted, with two in favor and one opposed, to recommend the Underpass Alternative and Hybrid Alternative at Meadow Drive and Charleston Road as the preferred options to the City Council for advancement into the Preliminary Engineering review.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The grade separation projects at Churchill Avenue, Meadow Drive, and Charleston Road involves construction impacting railroad facilities with active commuter and freight lines. This item seeks the Council direction on the selection of alternatives as the project moves forward into the preliminary engineering and environmental phase.

Staff is seeking the Council action on the following key decisions:

1. The Bicycle and Pedestrian crossing location at Kellogg Avenue versus Seale Avenue for the Partial Underpass Alternative at Churchill Avenue Crossing. The Rail Committee recommended the Seale Avenue as preferred alternative unanimously.
2. The selection of Preferred Alternative(s) at Meadow Drive and Charleston Road for

advancing grade separation alternatives into the Preliminary Engineering and Environmental Documentation Phase. The Rail Committee voted, with two in favor and one opposed, to recommend the Underpass Alternative and Hybrid Alternative at Meadow Drive and Charleston Road as the preferred options to the City Council for advancement into the Preliminary Engineering review.

Since the selection of the Partial Underpass as the preferred alternative for Churchill Avenue and the narrowing of the alternatives to Hybrid, Trench, and Underpass for Meadow Drive and Charleston Road crossings by the City Council in 2021, the City has conducted various studies and refinements to underpass alternatives. In addition, the Council-adopted Evaluation Criteria was updated following Rail Committee recommendation in June 2023.

Caltrain engagement has also increased significantly through the alternatives analysis. In June 2022, the City requested evaluation of four tracking segment needs and concerns with the design criteria. As a result, Caltrain embarked upon the Caltrain Corridor Strategy Project to review the concerns of various local agencies with projects along the corridor including an analysis of 4 tracking needs. In June 2023, a service agreement was executed for Caltrain review of the project including impacts on the Caltrain Right of Way (ROW), and for technical input on conceptual plans. The City received comments from Caltrain in November 2023 and these comments, affecting various elements, discussed by the Rail Committee in January 2024.

Subsequently, City and Caltrain staff convened to understand the comments concerning Caltrain policies, updated standards, constructability, and the four tracking needs impacting the conceptual design for various alternatives. Impacts requiring high-level material changes to these concepts were discussed by the Rail Committee on March 19 and April 16, 2024. At this meeting the Rail Committee recommended the Seale Avenue as preferred alternative unanimously and voted, with two in favor and one opposed, to recommend the Underpass Alternative and Hybrid Alternative at Meadow Drive and Charleston Road as the preferred options to the City Council for advancement into the Preliminary Engineering review. In addition, a study session with the City Council was held on April 29, 2024. Following the study session, the Rail Committee held another meeting on May 23, 2024, to provide the community with an additional opportunity for feedback. The discussion at this meeting reinforced the previous recommendation to the Council.

Staff is therefore seeking Council action on the preferred bicycle and pedestrian crossing location for Churchill Underpass Alternative and the selection of the preferred alternative for grade separations at Meadow Drive and Charleston Road crossing to advance the crossings into Preliminary Engineering and Environmental documentation phase.

Additionally, staff in the separate item will seek Council approval at a future date for a funding agreement with the Federal Railroad Administration securing the grant funding contributions of \$6.0 Million towards completing the Preliminary Engineering and Environmental Documentation for the three crossings at Churchill Avenue, Meadow Drive, and Charleston Road.

BACKGROUND & ANALYSIS

After receiving the final report from the Expanded Community Advisory Panel (XCAP) on March 23, 2021 (Staff Report 11797¹), Staff presented a detailed review of Meadow Drive and Charleston Road crossing alternatives on August 23, 2021 (Staff Report 13435²) and presented details on Churchill Avenue crossing alternatives for grade separation on November 1 & 29, 2021 (Staff Report 13543³) & (Staff Report 13787⁴).

City Council Selection of Alternatives

At these meetings in November 2021, the Council eliminated the Viaduct Alternative and selected the Partial Underpass Alternative as a preferred alternative for Churchill Avenue with the Closure Alternative as backup.

For Meadow Drive and Charleston Road crossing, the Council in August 2021 narrowed the alternatives in consideration to three alternatives, namely Hybrid, Trench, and Underpass. The City Council also directed staff to perform additional studies. These studies included work to refine Underpass alternatives with input from PAUSD, PABAC, and Stanford to address current shortcomings and to conduct additional outreach to these stakeholders. On May 23, 2022 (Staff Report 14341⁵) the City Council authorized an amendment with the consultant to perform these additional tasks.

Refinements to Underpass Alternatives

Following the City Council and Rail Committee direction, City Staff and the consultant reached out to the Pedestrian and Bike Advisory Committee (PABAC), Palo Alto Unified School District (PAUSD), Stanford, City School Transportation Safety Committee (CSTSC), and members from the community who were involved in developing the conceptual design of these partial underpass alternatives for their feedback and comments for refinement to the conceptual plans. Staff compiled all the comments received from these stakeholders and developed a master list of all comments. These comments were then categorized into four elements: Bicycle and Pedestrian, Roadway, Structures, and Rail. The following list of comments was reviewed and addressed in the refinements.

- Bicycle and Pedestrian Facilities:
 - Width and Pathway configurations
 - Grade/slope
 - Maneuvering and additional crossings

¹ City Council, March 23, 2021; Item 1, Study Session, SR# 11797

<https://portal.laserfiche.com/Portal/DocView.aspx?id=55803&repo=r-704298fc>

² City Council, August 23, 2021; Item 6, Action Items, SR# 13435

<https://portal.laserfiche.com/Portal/DocView.aspx?id=61831&repo=r-704298fc>

³ City Council, November 1, 2021; Item 15, Action Item, SR# 13543

<https://portal.laserfiche.com/Portal/DocView.aspx?id=61747&repo=r-704298fc>

⁴ City Council, November 29, 2021; Item 11, Action Items, SR # 13787

<https://portal.laserfiche.com/Portal/DocView.aspx?id=61795&repo=r-704298fc>

⁵ City Council, May 23, 2022, Consent Items, SR# 14341

<https://portal.laserfiche.com/Portal/DocView.aspx?id=59504&repo=r-704298fc>

- Design speed, design bicycle, turning radius and sight distance
- Construction impacts
- Bicycle and Pedestrian pathway on each side (Meadow and Charleston Underpass alternative)
- Kellogg Avenue vs Seale Avenue and Bike Lane configurations on the pathway for Churchill Avenue Partial Underpass alternative
- Roadways:
 - Shoulder and lane widths
 - Vehicular lane reductions
 - Intersection, turning radius, school bus turning radius
 - Roadway Grade/Slope
 - Signage
 - Loss of landscaping strip on Alma Street
 - Roundabout for Charleston Underpass Alternative only
 - Bike boulevard continuity at intersections
- Structures
 - Bridge Depth thickness
 - Vertical clearance
 - Aesthetics
- Rail
 - Raise the rail

The various elements related to these facilities were discussed during Rail Committee study sessions on October 19, 2022 (Staff Report 14813⁶) and November 18, 2022 (Staff Report 14904⁷). Based on the study session review and feedback, the Conceptual Plans of the Partial Underpass at Churchill Avenue and Underpass Alternatives at Meadow Drive and Charleston Road were refined and approved by the Rail Committee on May 23, 2023 (Staff Report 2302- 0973⁸). Following major elements were revised to prepare the refined plans.

- Added Buffer Zones between vehicular and bicycle/pedestrian facilities
- Reduced Vehicular lane widths
- Improved bicycle and pedestrian facilities
- Improved maneuverability and turning radii
- Reduced bridge span width at Churchill Avenue

Re-evaluation of Viaduct Alternative in-lieu of Trench alternative at Meadow Drive and Charleston Road crossing for review by Caltrain

During the Rail Committee study sessions reviewing the refinements of underpass alternatives in

⁶ Rail Committee, October 19, 2022; Item 2, Study Session, SR # 14813
<https://portal.laserfiche.com/Portal/DocView.aspx?id=56013&repo=r-704298fc>

⁷ Rail Committee, November 18, 2022; Item 2, Study Session, SR # 14904
<https://portal.laserfiche.com/Portal/DocView.aspx?id=56014&repo=r-704298fc>

⁸ Rail Committee, May 23, 2023; Item 2, Action Items, SR # 2302-0973
<https://portal.laserfiche.com/Portal/DocView.aspx?id=66337&repo=r-704298fc>

October and November of 2022, the members of the community, PABAC, and PAUSD expressed concerns about bicycle and pedestrian connectivity and requested to reconsider Viaduct Alternative for Rail Committee's review, evaluation, and recommendation to Council. In addition, during the same time; Caltrain staff provided information regarding the four tracking needs in Palo Alto. Therefore, the Rail Committee paused further analysis of the trench alternative, mainly due to its high cost and feasibility challenges concerning accommodating and addressing the four tracking needs of Caltrain.

Furthermore, the Service Agreement between the City of Palo Alto and the Peninsula Corridor Joint Powers Board (Caltrain) for the Connecting Palo Alto Grade Separation Projects at these crossings was in the development process during this time. The draft service agreement was reviewed by the Rail Committee at its April 26, 2023, meeting (Staff Report 2303-1199⁹). The Service Agreement was intended to provide early coordination, technical review, input, and expertise to inform the capital project development process for the selection of Preferred Alternative(s). Therefore, the Rail Committee considered this an opportunity to further review the Viaduct Alternative instead of the Trench Alternative for Meadow Drive and Charleston Road crossing at the June 20, 2023, Rail Committee meeting (Staff Report 2305-1546¹⁰) to accommodate community concerns.

Based on Caltrain's review of the proposed viaduct alignment to keep the structure away from residential properties west of the railroad track while keeping existing tracks as shoefly track, addressing technical comments, and the four tracking needs; this alternative would cause significant encroachment on Alma Street potentially reducing the street into one lane in each direction. The Rail Committee meetings in March and April 2024 discussed a possible iteration to the viaduct alternative with the proposed viaduct alignment to shift westward towards the residential properties and to construct the shoefly tracks on the east side of the tracks. This alternative was not evaluated by Caltrain as the intent was to remain consistent with the previously envisioned concept that was developed through community input by the City. In addition, there were time and scope constraints in the Caltrain Service Agreement.

Following an in-depth review and discussion, the Committee voted, with two in favor and one opposed, to recommend the Underpass Alternative and Hybrid Alternative at Meadow Drive and Charleston Road as the preferred options to the City Council for advancement into the Preliminary Engineering review. Therefore, the Viaduct alternative was eliminated from further consideration by the Rail Committee.

City Council Adopted Evaluation Criteria & Additional Studies

The Rail Committee on March 29, 2023 (Staff Report 2302-1010¹¹), and April 26, 2023 (Staff Report

⁹ Rail Committee, April 26, 2023, Item 2, Action Items, Staff Report 2305-1546
<https://portal.laserfiche.com/Portal/DocView.aspx?id=66336&repo=r-704298fc>

¹⁰ Rail Committee, June 20, 2023, Item 1, Action Items, Staff Report 2305-1546
<https://portal.laserfiche.com/Portal/DocView.aspx?id=66338&repo=r-704298fc>

¹¹ Rail Committee, March 29, 2023; Item 1, Action Items, SR # 2303-1010
<https://portal.laserfiche.com/Portal/DocView.aspx?id=66345&repo=r-704298fc>

2304-1269¹²), reviewed the Council Adopted Evaluation criteria, which led to a recommendation from the Rail Committee the additional measures to be included in the Council Adopted Evaluation Criteria. The revised evaluation criteria were unanimously approved by the Rail Committee and recommended to the City Council for approval. The City Council approved the updated evaluation criteria at its June 12, 2023, meeting (Staff Report# 2305-1426¹³).

The additional measures in the evaluation criteria include reviewing impacts such as connectivity, corridor travel times, pedestrian and bicycle circulation, sustainability, sea-level rise, and visual and privacy considerations. These additional elements for the alternatives in consideration were further evaluated. The Rail Committee reviewed the update to the Summary of Evaluation of Council Adopted Criteria at its February 20, 2024, meeting (Staff Report # 2401-2503¹⁴).

The City's engineering consultant (AECOM) also conducted the subsurface exploration and performed data collection for the project. A study report was prepared by the Consultant which included findings addressing subsurface conditions and the feasibility of alternative construction methods with respect to soil conditions and recommendations for additional studies in future phases. The study was presented to the Rail Committee on August 23, 2023, Rail Committee Meeting (Staff Report 2307-1747¹⁵)

In addition, at the Rail Committee's request the Noise and Vibration Comparative Analysis Report prepared by AECOM Engineers in July 2020 for the evaluation of the Grade Separation Alternatives was reviewed to discuss the technical insights in a study session on September 19, 2023 (Staff Report 2308-1943¹⁶)

Caltrain Review (Four Tracking and Technical Review of Alternatives)

The Caltrain 2040 Business plan's inclusion of a possible passing track segment in either Palo Alto or Mountain View presented challenges for grade separation planning in Palo Alto. At each of these crossings, Caltrain required that grade separation designs not preclude four-tracking. These requirements indicated a significant impediment to the timely and cost-effective project development. Caltrain staff had previously indicated that Caltrain was taking the most conservative approach in considering the potential for a four-track segment between the San Francisquito Creek Bridge in Palo Alto and just through the Mountain View Station. Therefore, in June 2022, City staff sent formal requests to consider narrowing the extent of the four-track

¹² Rail Committee, April 26, 2023; Item 1, Action Items, SR 2304-1269

<https://portal.laserfiche.com/Portal/DocView.aspx?id=66336&repo=r-704298fc>

¹³ City Council, June 12, 2023; Item 6, Consent Items, SR# 2305-1426

<https://portal.laserfiche.com/Portal/DocView.aspx?id=66112&repo=r-704298fc>

¹⁴ Rail Committee, February 20, 2024; Item 1, Action Items, SR 2401-2503

<https://portal.laserfiche.com/Portal/DocView.aspx?id=70469&repo=r-704298fc>

¹⁵ Rail Committee, August 23, 2023; Item 2, Action Items, SR# 2307-1747

<https://portal.laserfiche.com/Portal/DocView.aspx?id=67605&repo=r-704298fc>

¹⁶ Rail Committee, September 19, 2023; Item 2, Study Session, SR# 2308-1943

<https://portal.laserfiche.com/Portal/DocView.aspx?id=67755&repo=r-704298fc>

segment and review technical issues and concerns that surfaced related to their design criteria.

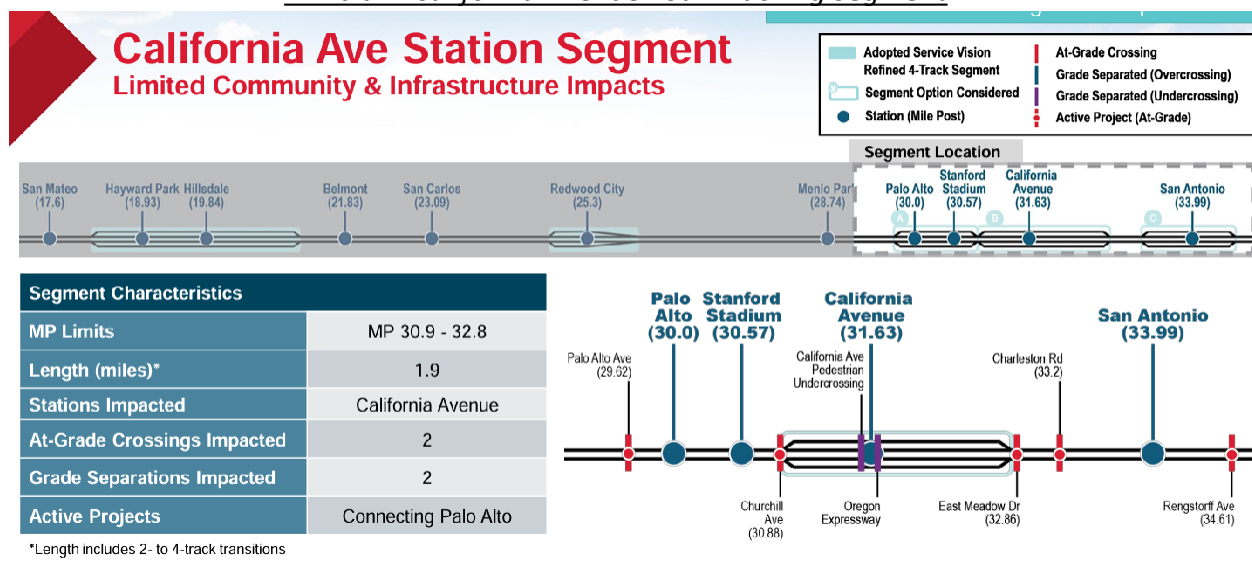
To address the City's concerns, Caltrain initiated a Caltrain Corridor Strategy Project to review the grade separation projects along the corridors and to provide a more thought-out and comprehensive review. Also, the City and Caltrain entered into a Service Agreement on June 8, 2023. The agreement would provide railroad expertise and technical input for the review of alternatives in consideration for advancement of the alternatives to select the preferred alternative for the three crossings at Churchill Avenue, Meadow Drive, and Charleston Road.

As part of the Caltrain Crossings Strategy, Caltrain also reviewed the need for four tracking segments along the corridor. A study session regarding the Caltrain review and proposal for a four-track segment in Palo Alto was conducted at the November 21, 2023, Rail Committee (Study Session, Presentation¹⁷). Caltrain staff reviewed various alternatives including four tracking segments at the following three locations:

- Palo Alto Avenue Station (Four tracking between Palo Alto Avenue and Churchill Avenue)
- California Avenue Station (Four tracking between Churchill Avenue and Meadow Drive)
- San Antonio Station (Four tracking between Rengstroff to Charleston Road)

The analysis indicated that the proposed segment at California Station requiring four tracks between Churchill Avenue and Meadow Drive crossing has the highest likelihood to address Caltrain needs while minimizing the community and infrastructure impacts and therefore the highest desirability to address passing needs in Palo Alto. Caltrain thus asked the City to ensure that designs for the grade separation at Meadow Drive and Churchill accommodate this four-tracking segment. The following exhibit from the Caltrain presentation depicts the proposed four tracking segment in Palo Alto.

Exhibit A: California Avenue Four Tracking Segment



¹⁷ Rail Committee, November 21, 2023; Item 1, Study Session, Presentation
<https://cityofpaloalto.primegov.com/Portal/Meeting?meetingTemplateId=13219>

On November 8, 2023, Caltrain staff conducted their first technical review and provided comments to City Staff. Staff presented the major elements affecting various alternatives and identified the initial impacts on alternatives for adherence to updated Caltrain Standards at the January 23, 2024 (Staff Report 2311-2303¹⁸) Rail Committee meeting. At this meeting, the Rail Committee directed staff to coordinate with Caltrain staff and to determine the material changes to the alternatives' concepts to address updated standards guiding the substantiate changes in the alternative's concepts. These comments are related to the following major elements.

- a. Vertical Alignment
 - Roadway vertical clearance
 - Bridge structure depth
 - Railroad grade and profile
 - Pedestrian and Bicycle path clearance
- b. Horizontal Alignment
 - Roadway Encroachment into Caltrain right-of-way
 - Pedestrian facilities encroachment into Caltrain right-of-way
 - Railroad encroachment into Caltrain right-of-way
 - Width of Bridges
 - Retaining wall offsets/clearance from structure and roadways
 - Maintenance and access requirements along railroad tracks
 - Clearance for MSE Wall construction between shoofly and new walls and maximize the right-of-way use
- c. Four (4) tracking segments
 - Four (4) tracking segments and roadway encroachment into Caltrain right-of-way
 - Four track alignment
- d. Roadway Design
 - Road profile/sag curve/grades
 - Acceleration/deceleration lane, lane drops and weaving
 - Roundabout design
 - Curved bridges
- e. Miscellaneous/Other
 - Construction technology
 - Culverts

Subsequently, City and Caltrain staff met to understand how addressing Caltrain comments and adhering to Caltrain Standards will impact the conceptual design alternatives and understand the high-level material changes that may be required to the concepts. A follow-up study session

¹⁸ Rail committee, January 23, 2024; Item 1, Action Items, SR# 2311-2303
<https://portal.laserfiche.com/Portal/DocView.aspx?id=70179&repo=r-704298fc>

with the Rail Committee was conducted on March 19, 2024 (Staff Report 2402-2675¹⁹) presented key findings on the impacts to various alternatives and discussed the material changes required for various alternatives.

The Rail Committee discussion regarding Caltrain's comments continued to the April 16, 2024 meeting. City and Caltrain Staff provided the details of major elements affecting various alternatives identifying impacts on alternatives for adherence to updated Caltrain Standards. Following an in-depth review and discussion, the Committee voted, with two in favor and one opposed, to recommend the Underpass Alternative and Hybrid Alternative at Meadow Drive and Charleston Road as the preferred options to the City Council for advancement into the Preliminary Engineering review.

Additionally, the Rail Committee unanimously reconfirmed the preference for the Partial Underpass for the Churchill Avenue crossing. The Committee also recommended to consider the following elements for Underpass Alternatives at all crossings during the Preliminary Engineering phase.

- Seek ways to reduce property impacts
- Optimize bike/pedestrian crossings
- Where feasible, improve connections to bike infrastructure beyond the study area to improve the network
 - Improve connection to Park Blvd
 - Explore modifications/refinements to the Bike Blvd, along Park Blvd to improve overall bike network
 - Further refine the traffic circle on Charleston Road to reduce the property impacts
 - Refine construction impacts to better understand possible mutations needed during the lengthy construction process.

Bicycle and Pedestrian Crossing - Kellogg Avenue vs. Seale Ave

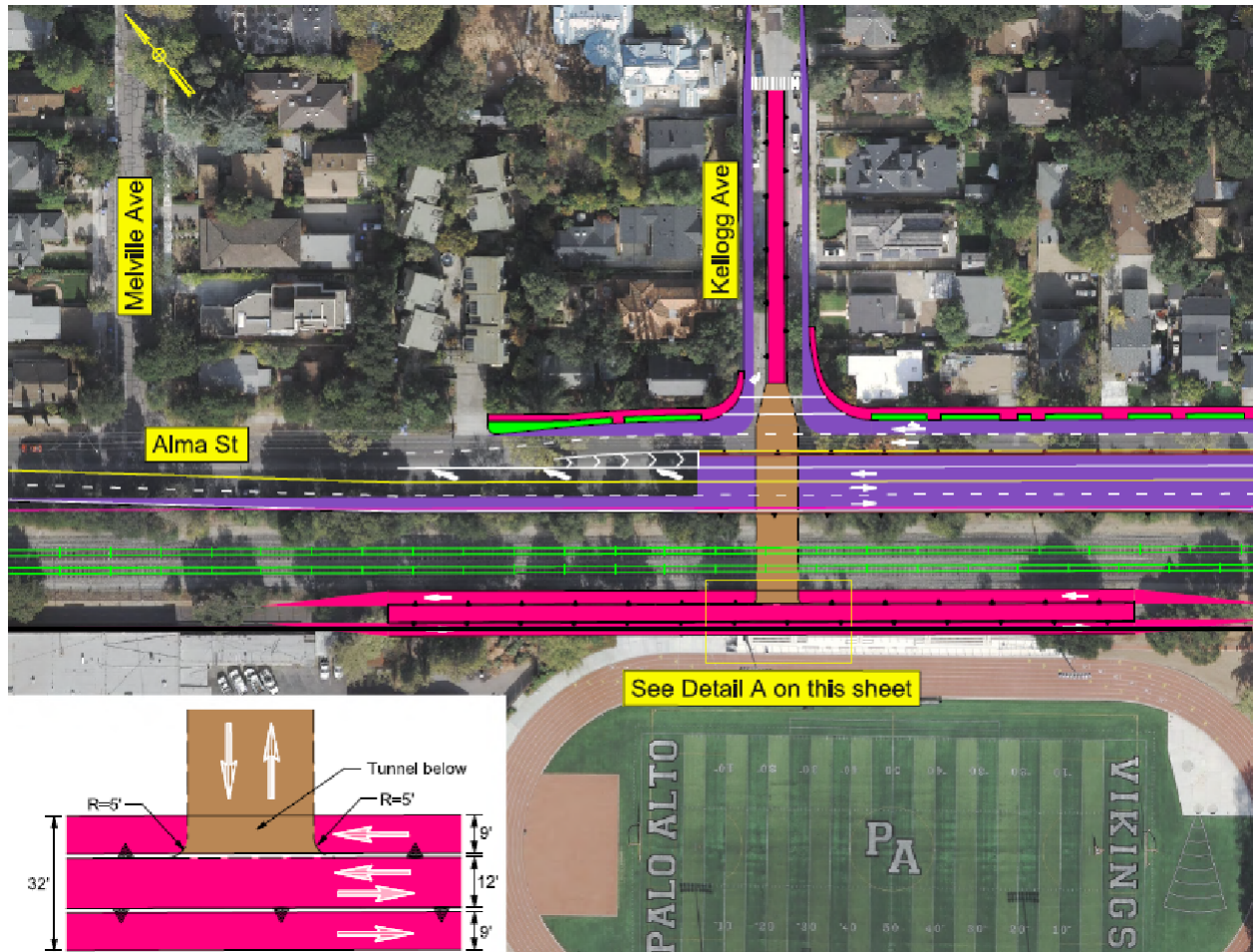
At the November 29, 2021 City Council meeting, the Council directed staff to ensure that the Bicycle and Pedestrian Transportation Plan included an evaluation of the bicycle and pedestrian crossing for the Churchill Avenue Partial Underpass at the locations of Kellogg Avenue and Seale Avenue. The Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan completed the evaluation of this and prepared a technical memorandum summarizing their assessment (Attachment J: Technical Memorandum Seale vs Kellogg Grade Separated Rail Crossing Assessment)

The assessment included a review of the prior analysis and plans, proximity to alternative routes, landing locations, network connectivity, and community input. Based on this analysis, it is recommended that bicycle and pedestrian crossing at Seale Avenue would fill a longer gap between alternative locations and would increase connectivity. In addition, due to right-of-way constraints on the west side of the railroad tracks at the Kellogg Avenue location, there is potential for additional impact on the Palo Alto Unified School District property. The Kellogg

¹⁹ Rail Committee, March 19, 2024; Item 1, Action Items, SR 2402-2675
<https://portal.laserfiche.com/Portal/DocView.aspx?id=70816&repo=r-704298fc>

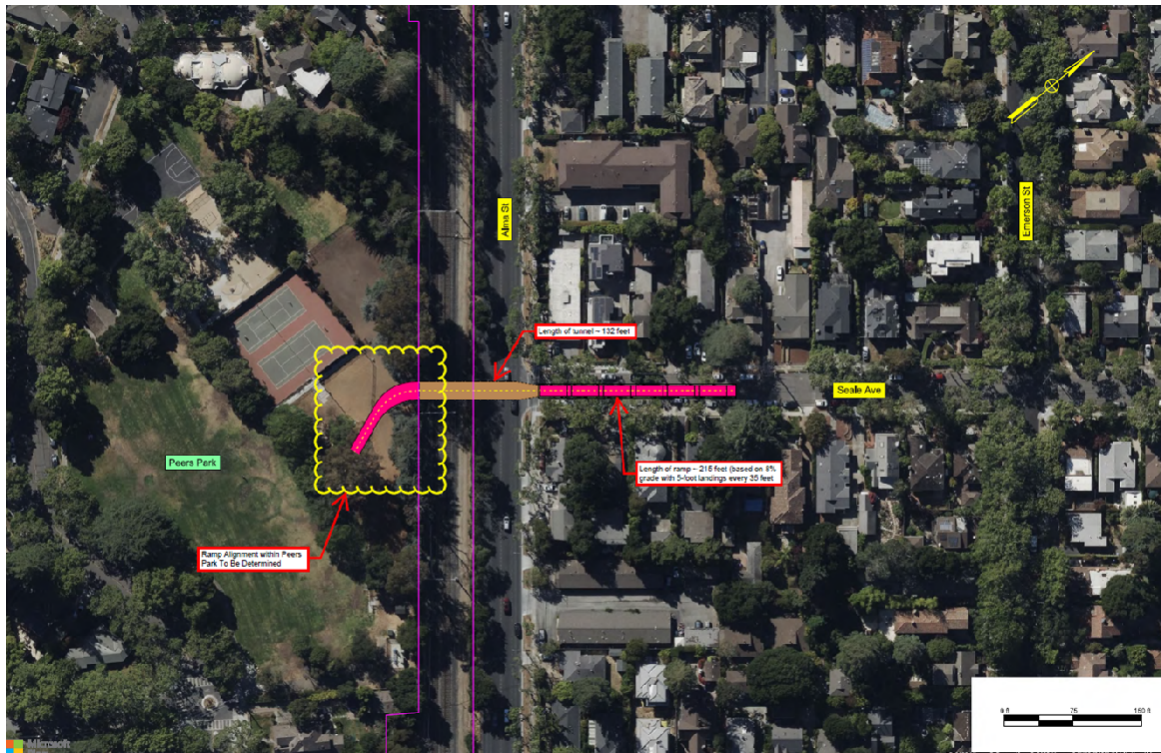
location also requires additional turns on the west side of the tracks to connect to the Embarcadero Bike path which is currently within the easement on the Caltrain property.

Exhibit B: Kellogg Avenue Pedestrian and Bicycle Crossing



In addition to the above factors, the Seale Avenue crossing ends in Peers Park (as is currently conceptualized). Significant construction involving Peers Park requires compliance with the City's park improvement ordinance process, which generally includes review by the City's Park and Recreation Commission and final approval by the City Council.

Exhibit C: Seale Avenue Pedestrian and Bicycle Crossing



Finalizing the location of a Bicycle and Pedestrian crossing presents complexities when considered with the planned partial underpass at Churchill including but not limited to land use and right of way. Staff is considering additional outreach to incorporate input from stakeholders including but not limited to Palo Alto Unified School District, residents around the crossings, and bike and pedestrian users including students at key locations such as Palo Alto High School and affected neighborhood streets. In addition, this will allow staff to review the crossing layout and the integration of a potential underpass with parkland uses at Peers Park before the Rail Committee makes its final recommendation to the City Council.

Staff presented a review of the merits of Kellogg vs Seale to the Rail Committee on April 16, 2024 (Staff Report 2403-2802²⁰) The Rail Committee reviewed and unanimously selected Seale Avenue as the preferred bicycle and pedestrian crossing location. Staff sent the mailers to the property owners adjacent to the project to conduct additional outreach to stakeholders and inform the community about the bicycle and pedestrian crossing location. The mailer provided information to attend the City Council Study Session on April 29 and future Rail Committee meeting on May 23 and a planned Council Meeting on June 10. In addition, a Rail Blog Series was added to provide the information for the larger community outreach

²⁰ Rail Committee, April 16, 2024; Item 2, Action items, SR# 2403-2802

<https://portal.laserfiche.com/Portal/DocView.aspx?id=71988&repo=r-704298fc&searchid=820dc4f3-5f4a-4078-b004-9d06eeb26b40>

providing information about the upcoming meetings and discussions leading to action by the City Council.

The City Council Study session on April 29, 2024 (Staff Report 2402-259321) provided review of the additional studies, refinements, and updates that were performed to date on the grade separation projects and the rail committee actions. Following the study session, the Rail Committee held another meeting on May 23, 2024, to provide the community with an additional opportunity for feedback. The discussion at this meeting reinforced the previous recommendation to the Council.

Next Steps: Preliminary Engineering and Environmental Phase

The project's next phase involves advancing into the Preliminary Engineering and Environmental Phase. In October 2022, the Office of Transportation Staff submitted an application requesting a \$6.0 million Federal Grant from the Rail Crossing Elimination Program to contribute towards preliminary engineering and environmental documentation preparation. The remaining \$14.0 million is anticipated from the Santa Clara County Measure B Grade Separation Fund. This phase is scheduled to be completed within three years, ending in June 2027. City staff are actively working on executing the agreement to secure this \$6.0 million grant funding from the Federal Railroad Administration.

The grant application was based on the selected partial underpass alternative at Churchill Avenue. Additionally, the application assumed the selection of the preferred alternative prior to preliminary engineering for the Meadow Drive and Charleston Road crossings. In discussions with FRA Staff, the City and Caltrain staff proposed that the FRA allows the City to move forward with two alternatives into the earlier preliminary engineering activities. This first step in the earlier Preliminary Engineering and Environmental documentation phase will allow the project to focus on refining conceptual plans to a 15% level of design. The design will provide greater detail and will take the opportunity to refine the plans to minimize property impacts and optimize improvements while ensuring compliance with regulatory requirements. These updated plans at the 15% design level will provide additional information for the City to allow the selection of the preferred alternative at the Meadow Drive and Charleston Road crossings. Therefore, seeking additional time to then advance the selected preferred alternative into the second step for developing 35% plans and commencing necessary environmental studies required environmental approvals under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) and National Environmental Protection Act (NEPA).

²¹ City Council, April 29, 2024, Item 2, Study Sessions, SR# 2402-2593
<https://portal.laserfiche.com/Portal/DocView.aspx?id=71985&repo=r-704298fc&searchid=bf0359c1-b812-4150-bc39-b36b40598095>

The Funding Agreement with FRA was also scheduled for review by Rail Committee at its May 23, 2024 meeting(Staff Report 2404-2024²²). The Rail Committee unanimously recommended the approval of funding agreement with FRA. FRA is performing the final review of the draft agreement and staff plans to bring this funding agreement for the City Council approval at its June 17 meeting.

The railroad right of way is maintained and operated by the Peninsula Corridor Joints Power Board (PCJPB) and has operating and agreements with other existing and planned service operators. Therefore, PCJPB will serve as the lead implementing agency and will play a major role in the design and construction of this grade separation project. Staff is also working with the three agencies' agreement between VTA, PCJPB, and the City of Palo Alto. This agreement will formalize the roles of each agency for the preparation of Preliminary Engineering and Environmental documentation and funding from the Measure B Grade Separation funding. The funding for the Preliminary Engineering and Environmental Documentation Phase is programmed for allocation in the VTA budget from the Measure B Grade Separation funding for the City of Palo Alto Grade Separation Projects. However, City will need to enter into a separate agreement for award of this Measure B grade separation funding through three party cooperative funding agreement. Staff will bring forth this agreement(s) for the rail committee review and City Council Approval in near future.

FISCAL/RESOURCE IMPACT

Funding for these projects is programmed in the 2024-2028 Capital Improvement Plan in the Meadow Drive and Charleston Road (PL-24000) and Churchill Avenue (PL-24001) Rail Grade Separation and Safety Improvements projects. The total anticipated cost for the Preliminary Engineering and Environmental Documentation Phase is estimated at \$20 million. The Federal Railroad Administration grant if the agreement is approved by the City Council will fund 30% of the cost up to \$6.0 million and the remaining \$14 million is expected to be funded through Santa Clara County Measure B Grade Separation funding through a separate agreement with Santa Clara Valley Transportation Agency. Funding for possible amendments to the agreement and/or future agreements will be requested through budget amendments as needed or appropriated through the annual budget process.

STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

The Rail Committee and the City Council meetings are open to the public, offering community members opportunities to provide comments and feedback. The Rail Committee meetings are regularly conducted, and their information is posted on the City Calendar. Residents who have subscribed to City Meetings notifications receive notifications about the Rail Committee meetings. Additionally, notifications about the Rail Committee and the City Council meetings are disseminated through the City's YouTube Channel. The Transportation Department also provides

²² Rail Committee, May 23, 2024; Action item 1, SR# 2402-2024
<https://portal.laserfiche.com/Portal/DocView.aspx?id=72104&repo=r-704298fc>

updates on City projects, including Rail Grade Separation projects, in the Transportation Connect Newsletter and, on the project's, [ConnectingPaloAlto.com](https://www.connectingpaloalto.com) website. As part of the next steps, staff sent out mailers to the residents affected by and are located adjacent to the project area, informing them about the Rail Committee meeting of May 23, 2024 and this June 10, 2024 City Council meeting. In addition, as part of the rail blog series, a blog was issued providing information about the project and upcoming reviews by the Rail Committee and the City Council meeting providing greater details about the project.

ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW

The proposed action is part of a planning study for a possible future action, which has not been approved, adopted, or funded and is therefore exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) in accordance with CEQA Guidelines Section 15262. The future decision to approve the construction of any one of the identified potential alternatives would be subject to CEQA and require the preparation of an environmental analysis. The project plans to enter the Preliminary Engineering and Environmental Documentation Phase and will conduct an environmental review pursuant to CEQA and NEPA requirements.

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment A: Churchill Avenue Partial Underpass; Plan, Profile, Sections, and Renderings (Updated May 2024)

Attachment B: Churchill Avenue Closure Plan and Profile (August 2020)

Attachment C: Meadow Drive & Charleston Road Hybrid; Plan, Profiles, and Renderings (Updated May 2024)

Attachment D: Meadow Drive & Charleston Road Trench; Plan and Profile (August 2020)

Attachment E: Meadow Drive Underpass; Plan, Profile, Sections, and Renderings (Updated May 2024)

Attachment F: Charleston Road Underpass Plan, Profile, Sections, and Renderings (Updated May 2024)

Attachment G: Meadow Drive & Charleston Road Viaduct Plan and Profile (August 2020)

Attachment H: Technical Memorandum Seale vs Kellogg Grade Separated Rail Crossing Assessment (February 2024)

Attachment I: Caltrain 4 Tracking Analysis Presentation at Rail Committee (November 2023)

Attachment J: Caltrain Technical Comments Review Staff Presentation at Rail Committee (January 2024)

Attachment K: Caltrain Technical Review Results (Caltrain and City Staff Presentation) at Rail Committee (March 2024)

Attachment L: Staff Presentation to the Rail Committee (May 23, 2024)

Attachment M: Summary of Evaluation Matrix based on Council Adopted Criteria Assessment (May 2024)

APPROVED BY:

Philip Kamhi, Chief Transportation Official