



City Council Staff Report

From: City Manager

Report Type: CONSENT CALENDAR

Lead Department: Transportation

Meeting Date: August 7, 2023

Report #:2306-1687

TITLE

Direction to Evaluate with Caltrain the Viaduct Alternative and Defer Review of the Trench Alternative at the Meadow Drive and Charleston Road Crossing as Recommended by the Rail Committee; CEQA status – categorically exempt per Regulation 15262.

RECOMMENDATION

Rail Committee recommends that City Council directs staff to work with Caltrain under the Caltrain Service Agreement¹ to evaluate the Viaduct Alternative and defer review of the Trench Alternative at the Meadow Drive and Charleston Road crossing.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Rail Committee unanimously supported recommending including the Viaduct Alternative and deferring the Trench Alternative at the Meadow Drive and Charleston Road Crossings for further evaluation through Caltrain's review process. Therefore, this agenda item seeks the City Council's approval.

During the Rail Committee review of the Underpass Alternatives at the three crossings of Churchill Avenue, Meadow Drive and Charleston Road, the Pedestrian and Bicycle Advisory Committee (PABAC), Palo Alto Unified School District (PAUSD), and community members expressed concerns about bicycle and pedestrian connectivity and requested to reconsider the Viaduct Alternative.

The Rail Committee discussed the alternatives in consideration at the June 20, 2023, meeting and recommended to consider an additional review of the Viaduct Alternative for the Meadow Drive and Charleston Road crossings. The City has recently executed an agreement with Caltrain to provide technical input on the conceptual designs of the rail grade separations of the Connecting Palo Alto Grade Separation Project which includes Trench, Hybrid, and Underpass Alternatives for the Meadow Drive and Charleston Road crossings.

¹ <https://cityofpaloalto.primegov.com/Portal/viewer?id=1491&type=2>

BACKGROUND & ANALYSIS

After receiving the final report from Expanded Community Advisory Panel (XCAP) on March 23, 2021 (CMR 11797²), Staff presented a detailed review of Meadow Drive and Charleston Road crossing alternatives on August 23, 2021 (CMR 13435³) and presented details on Churchill Avenue crossing alternatives for grade separation on November 1 & 29, 2021 (CMR 13543⁴) & (CMR 13746⁵)

At these meetings, the Council eliminated the Viaduct Alternative and selected the Partial Underpass Alternative as a preferred alternative for Churchill Avenue with Closure Alternative as backup. For Meadow Drive and Charleston Road crossing, the Council narrowed the alternatives in consideration to three alternatives, namely Hybrid, Trench, and Underpass after eliminating the Viaduct Alternative. 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. On May 23, 2022 (CMR 14341⁶) the City Council authorized an amendment with the consultant to perform these additional tasks.

Staff with the support of the City's consultant scheduled separate meetings with the stakeholders to seek their input and feedback on partial underpass alternatives. Staff and Consultant attended several stakeholders' meetings and made presentations with a detailed review of the alternatives to seek feedback and comments from Stanford staff, PABAC, PAUSD Staff, CSTSC, and local design engineers involved in the original design of underpass alternatives.

Viaduct Alternative

Two Rail Committee study sessions were conducted on October 19, 2022 (CMR 14813⁷) and November 18, 2022 (CMR 14904⁸) to seek additional community feedback and the Rail Committee's review. During these study sessions and other Rail Committee meetings, the

² <https://www.cityofpaloalto.org/files/assets/public/agendas-minutes-reports/reports/city-manager-reports-cmr/year-archive/2021/id-11797.pdf>

³ Item 6, Action Items; <https://www.cityofpaloalto.org/files/assets/public/agendas-minutes-reports/agendas-minutes/city-council-agendas-minutes/2021/08-august/20210823/20210823pccsm-revised-linked.pdf>

⁴ Item 15, Action Items; <https://www.cityofpaloalto.org/files/assets/public/agendas-minutes-reports/agendas-minutes/city-council-agendas-minutes/2021/11-november/20211101pccs-amended.pdf>

⁵ Item 11, Action Items; <https://www.cityofpaloalto.org/files/assets/public/agendas-minutes-reports/agendas-minutes/city-council-agendas-minutes/2021/11-november/20211129/20211129pccs.pdf>

⁶ Item 11, Consent Items; <https://www.cityofpaloalto.org/files/assets/public/agendas-minutes-reports/agendas-minutes/city-council-agendas-minutes/2021/11-november/20211129/20211129pccs.pdf>

⁷ Item 2, Study Session; <https://cityofpaloalto.primegov.com/Public/CompiledDocument?meetingTemplateId=8985&compileOutputType=1>

⁸ Item 2, Study Sessions <https://cityofpaloalto.primegov.com/Public/CompiledDocument?meetingTemplateId=8998&compileOutputType=1>

members of PABAC, PAUSD, and the community members expressed concerns about bicycle and pedestrian connectivity and requested to reconsider the Viaduct Alternative for the Rail Committee's review and evaluation and recommendation to Council.

In addition, on March 29, 2023 (Staff Report 2302-1010⁹), and April 26, 2023 (Staff Report 2303-1199¹⁰), the Rail Committee reviewed the evaluation criteria, which led to a recommendation with additional measures to be included in the Council Adopted Evaluation Criteria. The revised Evaluation Criteria were approved by the Rail Committee and City Council. The additional measures in the evaluation criteria include reviewing impacts such as connectedness, corridor travel times, pedestrian and bicycle circulation during and after construction, traffic inducement, sustainability, sea-level rise, utility relocation, long-term maintenance costs, and visual and privacy considerations along the corridor. As a result of these additional measures, there was a desire from the community and the Rail Committee to revisit other alternatives in consideration.

Attachments for the Viaduct Alternative at these crossings are included in this report for reference and consultation. Attachment A provides the plan, profile, and renderings; Attachment B provides the fact sheet for Viaduct at Meadow Drive and Charleston Road crossings.

The Rail Committee discussed the Viaduct Alternative in consideration at the June 20, 2023 (Staff Report 2305-1546¹¹), meeting and recommended considering an additional review before recommending to the council for consideration of Viaduct Alternative.

Trench Alternative

The Meadow Drive and Charleston Road crossing currently have three alternatives under consideration: Hybrid, Trench, and Underpass. On August 23, 2021, the Council after the detailed review of the alternatives at Meadow Drive and Charleston Road also directed the staff to perform a peer review of the cost estimate for the Trench Alternative.

The Rail Committee has leaned toward pausing further analysis of the trench alternative, primarily due to its high cost and feasibility challenges in accommodating and addressing the four tracking needs of Caltrain. Caltrain is currently conducting the Corridor Crossing Study, which will provide insights into the limits of the four tracking passing segments along the Caltrain corridor and other technical constraints raised by the City of Palo Alto. However, they have indicated a strong need for the four-tracking segment north of Mountain View Caltrain Station, which will likely impact these crossings in Palo Alto. Therefore, the Rail Committee is recommending deferring the reviews of the Trench Alternative.

⁹ Item 1, Action Items; <https://cityofpaloalto.primegov.com/Portal/Meeting?meetingTemplateId=11344>

¹⁰ Item 2, Action Items; <https://cityofpaloalto.primegov.com/Portal/Meeting?meetingTemplateId=11350>

¹¹ Item 1 Action Items; <https://cityofpaloalto.primegov.com/Portal/Meeting?meetingTemplateId=11362>

Additionally, the service agreement between City and Caltrain was executed on May 22, 2023 (CMR 2304-1237¹²) for Caltrain to provide technical input on the conceptual designs and review project documents in compliance with Caltrain standards for alternatives in consideration of rail grade separations at these crossings. As Caltrain staff proceeds with their technical review, staff aims to ensure that their assessment aligns with the consideration of alternatives. Also, consultant support will be needed to review additional measures included in the Council Adopted Evaluation Criteria.

On June 20, 2023, the Rail Committee unanimously recommended additional reviews of the viaduct Alternative and deferring trench alternative at Meadow Drive and Charleston Road Crossings for further evaluation through Caltrain's review process. Therefore, this agenda item seeks the City Council's approval for staff to proceed with this direction.

FISCAL/RESOURCE IMPACT

The existing Service Agreement with Caltrain includes a review of a total of five alternatives and sufficient funding in the amount of \$120,000 is programmed in the FY 2024 Adopted Budget for this work. The swapping of alternatives reviewed by Caltrain will not impact the existing agreement with Caltrain. However, if City Council decides for Caltrain to also review the Trench Alternative, Staff will need to negotiate and develop an amendment for the additional work required to evaluate a sixth alternative. Each alternative review is estimated at an average cost of \$24,000.

STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

The Rail Committee meetings and the City Council Meetings are open to the public and therefore provide the community with opportunities to provide comments to the rail committee and City.

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. Environmental review and design for the grade separation project will be performed in the subsequent steps of the project development.

¹² Item 6, Consent Items; <https://cityofpaloalto.primegov.com/Portal/Meeting?meetingTemplateId=12654>

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment A: Viaduct Alternative Plan, Profile, and Renderings at Meadow Drive and Charleston Road

Attachment B: Fact Sheets for Viaduct at Meadow Drive and Charleston Road

APPROVED BY:

Philip Kamhi, Chief Transportation Official