

### REPORT TO COUNCIL

#### **SUBJECT**

Staff Comments to the Santa Clara Valley Transportation Authority on the Draft Environmental Impact Report of the El Camino Real Bus Rapid Transit Project

#### **BACKGROUND**

The Santa Clara Valley Transportation Authority (VTA) has completed the Draft Environmental Impact Report (DEIR) of a San Jose to Palo Alto Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) project in Sunnyvale via El Camino Real. This project is the result of a VTA Countywide evaluation of potential BRT corridors that found the El Camino Real corridor to be a high priority for development. VTA retained a consulting firm, and over the last few years, analyzed civil engineering requirements, traffic impacts, urban design considerations, operations and ridership, compatibility with local plans and policies, and pedestrian and bicycle concerns. The VTA has also conducted public outreach, including a Sunnyvale Council study session on November 11, 2014.

The VTA studied multiple alternatives for BRT service on El Camino Real including dedicated bus-only lanes and mixed-flow lanes (the bus shares the lane with motor vehicles). The bus-only lane alternative reduces El Camino Real to four lanes while the mixed-flow alternative maintains the current six travel lanes. Throughout the process staff has given guidance to the VTA on consistency with related City policies and commented on design guidelines and technical studies. The DEIR considered seven alternatives; these alternatives are shown in Figure ES-3 of the Executive Summary (Attachment 1). Two project scenarios have been studied, a near term (2018) and a long term (2040).

#### **EXISTING POLICY**

Legislative Advocacy Position 1.1 (1) Monitor the El Camino Real Bus Rapid Transit project conceptual engineering and environmental analysis to ensure that the City's interests are addressed.

The Land Use and Transportation Element of the General Plan contains goals and policies that are generally applicable to bus transit but not specifically the Bus Rapid Transit project. These goals and policies include:

- Goal LT-1: Protect and sustain a high quality of life in Sunnyvale by participating in coordinated land use and transportation planning in the region.
  - Policy LT-1.1: Advocate the City's interests to regional agencies that make land use and transportation system decisions that affect Sunnyvale.
  - Policy LT-1.2 Support coordinated regional transportation planning and improvements.
  - Policy LT-1.8: Support statewide, regional and sub-regional efforts that provide for an effective transportation system.

- Policy LT-1.9: Support flexible and appropriate alternative transportation modes and transportation system management measures that reduce reliance on the automobile and serve changing regional and citywide land use and transportation needs.
- Goal LT-5: Attain a transportation system that is effective, safe, pleasant and convenient.
  - Policy LT-5.5: Support a variety of transportation modes.
  - Policy LT-5.6: Minimize expansion of the current roadway system, while maximizing opportunities for alternative transportation systems and related programs.
  - Policy LT-5.11: All modes of transportation shall have safe access to city streets.

The Precise Plan for El Camino Real also includes long-range goals that are relevant but are not specific to the Bus Rapid Transit project:

- Goal 3.2.3: Maintain and enhance the capacity of the street to accommodate automobile and transit traffic, while providing improved facilities for bicyclists and pedestrians.
- Goal 3.2.5: Design, develop and maintain the public right-of-way in a manner which creates a strong, positive image of the city of Sunnyvale for both residents and visitors.
- Goal 3.2.8: Encourage development which supports the use of public transit.

## **DISCUSSION**

In 2012 VTA initiated the analysis of seven alternatives, resulting in the release of the Draft Environmental Impact Report (DEIR) on October 29, 2014 (the report can be found here: <http://www.vta.org/Projects-and-Programs/Transit/El-Camino-Real-Draft-Environmental-Impact-ReportEnvironmental-Analysis>). Upon release of the DEIR, the public and public agencies were given the opportunity to comment on the document; the public comment period closes at 5:00 p.m. on Wednesday, January 14, 2015.

The DEIR describes project alternatives, existing environmental setting, and potential impacts from the construction and operation of BRT. Where impacts are identified, mitigation measures are recommended to alleviate project impacts. Staff from Public Works, Community Development, and Economic Development reviewed the DEIR and are providing comments for consideration. At this time City staff is not making a recommendation on a preferred alternative, but is requesting additional analysis or clarification to assure that all required information is available. VTA will prepare a response to comments and complete the Final EIR. After the Final EIR is completed, staff expects to come back to Council to determine if the City will support either the dedicated lane or mixed flow alternative in Sunnyvale.

The comment letter that will be mailed to VTA is Attachment 2 of this report. The comment letter is due by Wednesday January 14, and no additional changes or comments are expected unless a (1) fatal flaw is identified in the analysis or (2) Council would like to provide specific policy direction. Below is a bullet point summary of the key areas identified by staff as part of its review:

- Concerns over diverted traffic and additional congestion within Sunnyvale
- Operational concerns due to removal of left turns on El Camino
- Parking needs along the corridor
- Sunnyvale specific transit ridership data

- Station locations, aesthetics, and trees

VTA's response to the City's comments and concerns will provide the City the best available information to make a decision on the project. However the City's support on an alternative will ultimately be a policy decision that will value the loss of two travel lanes on El Camino which will reduce vehicular capacity, increase congestion, and decrease vehicular access to the benefits of a more enhanced transit system and increased transit ridership.

### **PUBLIC CONTACT**

Public contact was made by posting the Council agenda on the City's official-notice bulletin board outside City Hall, at the Sunnyvale Senior Center, Community Center and Department of Public Safety; and by making the agenda and report available at the Sunnyvale Public Library, the Office of the City Clerk and on the City's website.

Also, on November 11, 2014 City Council held a joint study session with the Planning Commission and the Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Commission. Representatives from VTA made a presentation on findings of the DEIR.

Prepared by: Carla Ochoa, Transportation Engineer

Reviewed by: Manuel Pineda, Director, Department of Public Works

Reviewed by: Robert A. Walker, Assistant City Manager

Approved by: Deanna J. Santana, City Manager

### **ATTACHMENTS**

1. El Camino Real BRT DEIR Executive Summary
2. Staff Comments to the Santa Clara Valley Transportation Authority on the Draft Environmental Impact Report of the El Camino Real Bus Rapid Transit Project