

REPORT TO COUNCIL

SUBJECT

Policy Discussion on El Camino Real Bus Rapid Transit and Potential City Council Action on a Formal Position Relative to a Preferred Alternative

BACKGROUND

On January 13, 2015, staff presented to Council the City's comments on the Santa Clara Valley Transportation Authority (VTA) El Camino Real Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) Environmental Impact Report (EIR). The key areas identified in the comment letter included the following items:

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

Although not a typical process, VTA has opted to select a Locally Preferred Alternative (LPA) prior to responding to EIR comments and completing a final EIR. In Sunnyvale the options are either a no build alternative (everything stays as is except for new buses), a Mixed Flow alternative (the bus shares travel lanes with motor vehicles), or a Dedicated Lane alternative (reduces El Camino to four lanes and provides bus-only lanes). Below is the current VTA schedule for the BRT project:

- VTA presents selected LPA to VTA Committees and Commissions - March 2015
- LPA goes to VTA board for approval - April 2015
- VTA provides response to comments for the LPA - June 2015
- VTA board certifies EIR for the LPA only - Fall 2015

Based on the current VTA schedule, it is not feasible to wait for a response to comments prior to Sunnyvale having a policy discussion on whether Sunnyvale has a preferred alternative. Staff has reviewed the current EIR, comment letters from adjacent jurisdictions (Attachment 1), and information presented by VTA staff at either staff or community meetings to help guide a policy discussion on the project. Although more information and responses to comments would better facilitate a more complete policy discussion, ultimately the BRT project values a trade-off between an enhanced transit system with increased transit ridership with reducing automobile capacity and access.

It is important to note that the VTA has not formally asked for city councils to take formal action on alternatives or select a preferred alternative; however, given this City Council's interest in evaluating the alternatives more closely, this agenda item was added to facilitate such discussion and, upon that, determine if a formal action is desired. Staff has prepared this report and provided public information on this subject from other jurisdictions to facilitate the City Council's discussion and possible action.

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.

ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW

N/A

DISCUSSION

Transit projects can be analyzed from a number of different policy perspectives beyond transportation, such as economic development and social equity. For the El Camino BRT project, staff has focused their review on the transportation benefits and impacts as discussed in the EIR. The discussion focuses on the transportation and circulation concerns and transit ridership benefits. In addition, the following items should be taken into consideration as part of the discussion:

- The transit ridership forecasts seem optimistic based on previous transit projects in Santa Clara Valley.

- Conversely, if ridership numbers are less than modeled, traffic impacts could be worse than disclosed.
- The result that all the traffic using two lanes of traffic on El Camino will shift to more congested corridors is unexpected.
- The analysis provides findings for two different timeframes of 2018 and 2040, and the results vary for each one.
- There are different alternatives and implementation options the VTA could consider, such as the VTA selects lanes in Santa Clara and mixed flow in Sunnyvale. All these variations affect the overall findings; however, in an effort to simplify the discussion, staff's analysis focuses on comparing the full mixed flow to the full dedicated lane option.
- Although parking and bike lanes are very important, and have been a significant part of the discussion, staff believes that these two items will need to be addressed equally under either alternative

Traffic Impacts

As discussed in the City's comment letter, there is a concern that the traffic impacts have not been fully analyzed, and that additional traffic diversion analysis could identify other issues within Sunnyvale. The EIR did not analyze or disclose the level of service (LOS) along all East-West corridors (such as Central Expressway, US 101, and I-280), and did not provide any analysis for North-South corridors. Regardless, the current analysis does still disclose a number of impacted intersections. As part of the 2040 analysis the EIR discloses multiple AM and PM impacts mostly along Evelyn Avenue, Fremont Avenue, and Wolfe Road (Attachment 2). The project does not propose to mitigate any of the impacts and describes them as "significant and unavoidable".

El Camino Real Vehicular Capacity and LOS

All the traffic impacts within Sunnyvale are caused by traffic diverging from El Camino to other streets. The loss of two travel lanes on El Camino removes approximately 24,000 Average Daily Traffic (ADT) of capacity in Sunnyvale. Based on this overall capacity loss, it is surprising the analysis results show that El Camino actually functions better as a four-lane road than a six-lane road.

El Camino Intersections LOS

Intersection	2040 Mixed Flow	2040 Dedicated Lanes
El Camino/Mary	LOS F	LOS E
El Camino/Mathilda	LOS F	LOS E
El Camino/Sunnyvale-Saratoga	LOS E	LOS D
El Camino/Fair Oaks	LOS F	LOS E

Regardless of the EIR analysis, it is unlikely that the loss of 24,000 ADT vehicle capacity would result in less congestion on El Camino.

Closure of Mid-Block Left Turn Pockets

The project proposes to close eight unsignalized mid-block left-turns on El Camino and one signalized left-turn at El Camino/Murphy Ave. However, three locations would be reopened with left-turn signalized access (Attachment 3). The closure of the left turns would decrease overall access and add additional traffic to signalized left-turn pockets on El Camino which will cause additional

queuing and access issues. This analysis has not been completed, so at this time staff cannot make a determination as to the extent of the issues, if any. However, reduction of access and travel lanes would certainly increase congestion levels, even if it is not a Californian Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) impact.

Transit Ridership

17 - Mile Corridor Ridership

Year	Mixed Flow	Dedicated Lanes	Delta
2018	15303	18616	3313
2040	22228	30336	8108

Sunnyvale Ridership

Year	Mixed Flow	Dedicated Lanes	Delta
2018	3088	3789	701
2040	3552	4910	1358

The transit ridership data shows that the dedicated lane alternative increases transit ridership over the mixed flow alternative by 22% in 2018 and increases by 36% in 2040 (22% in 2018 and 38% in 2040 for Sunnyvale only). While the numbers seem optimistic, and staff would prefer some additional details, there is no question that a dedicated lane alternative would have better ridership. Increased ridership is driven by a decrease in travel times, which are 81 minutes for the mixed flow alternative and 48 minutes for dedicated lanes. This delta would attract additional riders to the system, and would also create a better experience for those currently using the bus system.

Overall Perspective

Although VTA has not responded to the EIR comments, staff would expect that any additional analysis would probably disclose additional congestion in Sunnyvale. Ultimately the decision to support either a mixed flow or dedicated lane alternative is based on trade-offs. The dedicated lane alternative will provide a faster transit system for future and current users. This should make for an overall better transit experience. However, the dedicated lanes alternative also reduces vehicular capacity by one-third on El Camino. This creates additional traffic impacts and congestion throughout Sunnyvale as many vehicles will have to find alternate routes. The key questions related to the tradeoff are as follows:

- Dedicated lanes BRT will increase transit ridership by 3013 riders within the full system, and ultimately, under the current modeling, could add up to 8108 riders. However to gain the additional riders you would lose approximately 24,000 trips of vehicular capacity.
- Specific to Sunnyvale users, the dedicated alternative will carry only an additional 700 riders when it first opens. This could add up to total of 1400 riders by 2040.

If you assume that you only accommodate one person per vehicle, you would trade the theoretical capacity of up to 24,000 people in vehicles for 8000 people in the BRT system. However, over 30,000 daily riders throughout the County would experience a much faster transit system if a dedicated lane

alternative is selected. Lastly, the near term transit benefit (only 700 new daily riders) of having dedicated lanes within Sunnyvale will cause congestion that will affect many more residents throughout the City.

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.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Staff makes no recommendation.

Preference on a BRT project alternative is a policy decision that values a trade-off between an enhanced transit system with reducing automobile capacity and access. The staff report is intended to help facilitate discussion and ultimately determine if the City Council would like to support a specific alternative.

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ATTACHMENTS

1. Adjacent Jurisdictions Comment Letters
2. Sunnyvale Impacts Summary
3. Left-turn Access Summary