

ADMINISTRATIVE REPORT

AGENDA ITEM #_

SS₂

Meeting Date: March 2

APPROVED BY:

TO:

HONORABLE MAYOR AND CITY COUNCIL

DATE:

February 26, 2009

SUBMITTED BY:

Larry A. Patterson, Director of Public Works

SUBJECT:

Update on High Speed Rail Project and Environmental Scoping Process

RECOMMENDATION: That the City Council provide staff direction regarding the City's position regarding high speed rail through San Mateo, design preferences and draft comments in response to the environmental review scoping meeting.

BACKGROUND: Public Works has been working with the Peninsula Corridor Joint Powers Board (PCJPB) and the San Mateo County Transportation Authority (SMCTA) to define rail alignment and grade separations within San Mateo. This is being accomplished through the preparation of Footprint Studies. The first Footprint Study was prepared for the segment between the Hillsdale and Hayward Park Stations. The draft Footprint Study for the downtown segment is scheduled for consideration by the City Council at its April 6, 2009 Study Session.

Passage of the Proposition 1A, Reliable High-Speed Passenger Train Bond Act in November 2008 has provided initial funding for the design and construction of the high speed rail system. In addition, high speed rail received funding through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009. Some expect the California share of this funding to be in the neighborhood of \$2 billion. Initial funding of high speed rail and the plan to construct one of the initial corridors between San Jose and San Francisco along the PCJPB Caltrain alignment has added urgency for the City of San Mateo's consideration of the high speed rail project and its implications for our community. A summary of the high speed rail project is provided in Exhibit A.

<u>CITY POSITION</u>: There is considerable discussion within and among Peninsula cities, residents and businesses regarding high speed rail. Menlo Park and Atherton may be pursuing litigation with the California High Speed Rail Authority (Rail Authority). Other cities are meeting to consider common interests so that a unified voice can be provided to the Rail Authority. It is important that staff understand the City Council's position and concerns so that we can represent those interests in discussions with the Rail Authority designers, environmental consultants, the PCJPB and the SMCTA. The following are potential elements of the City position related to high speed rail.

- The City Council generally supports the California High Speed Rail plan.
- The City Council generally supports the construction of high speed rail within the San Jose to San Francisco segment along the Caltrain alignment.
- The City supports the grade separation of all existing at-grade crossings of the rail alignment.
- The City's support for high speed rail is conditioned on the completion of a design that reflects the City's long standing preference for a raised alignment in the Hillsdale to Hayward Park segment and a depressed alignment through downtown San Mateo.
- The City's support for the high speed rail project is also conditioned on the Rail Authority's effective mitigation of significant environmental impacts of the project.
- The City encourages cooperation of the Rail Authority and City staff to seek design solutions that address both the high speed rail and City interests.

Requested Input: That the City Council review these statements, modify them to accurately represent the City Council's position regarding high speed rail and add statements that help define that position.

<u>DESIGN ISSUES</u>: There is very little clear definition of the high speed rail project at this time. It is anticipated that 15 percent design plans will be created concurrent with the preparation of the Environmental Impact Report/ Environmental Impact Study (EIR/EIS) for the project. Staff is recommending that the City include input into that design effort as part of our comments within the environmental review scoping process. Our recommendation is that the high speed rail design:

- Be limited to a depressed alignment in downtown San Mateo
- Consider a tunnel alternative through downtown San Mateo
- Reflect the City Council's preference for a raised alignment between the Hillsdale and Hayward Park Stations as discussed as part of the Footprint Study for that segment
- Incorporate planned grade separations at 25th, 28th and 31st Avenues as reflected in the Footprint Study
- Avoid grade separation options that require significant lowering of El Camino Real
- Minimize land use impacts in downtown San Mateo where the rail right of way is constrained
- Minimize access impacts for properties along Railroad Avenue
- Incorporate City of San Mateo design standards for modified street alignments

Recommended Input: That the City Council review and modify, as appropriate, the design recommendations so that they can be forwarded to the Rail Authority for incorporation into their design of the high speed rail project.

ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW SCOPING COMMENTS: The public comment period for EIR/EIS scoping ends on April 6, 2009. City staff is in the process of writing a formal comment letter. This letter will include issues raised at the March 2, City Council study session. As noted in the Notice of Preparation, a variety of environmental issues will be examined as part of the EIR/EIS. For the City of San Mateo, there are also specific issues to be examined, including the following:

- 1. Right of Way and Access Impacts The most constrained right of way width in San Mateo is in the Downtown area (see discussion in Exhibit A). Where right of way is not adequate to accommodate the proposed rail alignment, alternative rail alignments and construction methods should be evaluated to reduce potential impacts to adjacent properties. Construction activities could restrict or prevent access to properties along Railroad Avenue. Mitigation of these impacts must be addressed during the environmental review.
- 2. Physical Division of the Community The California Environmental Quality Act includes a sample checklist to be used for determining potential environmental impacts. This checklist, known as an "Initial Study' includes under the category of land use, a question which reads "Would the project physically divide an established community?" A raised rail alignment has the potential to divide the east and west side of the railroad to a greater degree than exists today, both in a physical sense as well as visually. The impact of the project on the Downtown community, both existing and as envisioned in the future, should be examined. Alternative design treatments should be developed to mitigate this potential impact.
- 3. Construction Impacts While permanent long term impacts will be examined, the short term construction impacts related to noise, air quality, water quality, geology, plant and animal species, traffic and parking will need to be examined. A detailed construction phasing and staging plan will need to be developed to insure these impacts are adequately mitigated.

- 4. Conflicts with Existing Transit Policies The City of San Mateo has or is in the process of working with the Peninsula Corridor Joint Powers Board to develop footprint studies of the Hillsdale Station and Downtown Train Station. The plans for the high speed rail should be examined for compatibility and consistency with those efforts. If a significant inconsistency results, alternative designs to the high speed rail should be examined to reduce this conflict.
- 5. **Traffic Impacts** While grade separations will provide for added safety, the resulting circulation system may result in altered travel patterns. The impact on adjacent intersections and the impact of potentially increased traffic volumes should be examined, and adequate mitigation developed in the event of a significant impact.
- 6. **Hydrology, geology, biologic resources** Changes to drainage, water quality, flooding potential, erosion, structural stability, plant and animal species should all be examined. As noted above, this would be both in the long term after the project is completed as well as during construction.
- 7. **Aesthetics** As noted in the Physical Division of the community section above, the appearance of a raised rail line has the potential to divide east and west sides of the City. In addition, the design and appearance of the rail will be of importance as a major public facility in the community which spans though several different neighborhoods.
- 8. Hazards & Hazardous Materials The High Speed Rail authority has indicated the need to reduce speeds to 125 miles per hour given the urban nature of the San Jose San Francisco corridor. However, at this speed, the potential safety impacts on adjacent properties, particularly residential neighborhoods, should be examined. In addition, recent projects along the rail alignment have discovered some hazardous materials resulting from historical activities in the area. The potential for hazardous materials in the rail alignment should be considered.
- 9. General Plan Consistency The City of San Mateo General Plan has specific policies regarding grade separations. These policies are being strengthened as part of the current update (Exhibit B). It is our hope that these policies will be reflected in the high speed rail project.

Any issues raised at the Council study session will be included in the letter sent to the High Speed Rail Authority concerning the scope of the proposed EIR/EIS. A goal of completing the environmental review portion of the project in two years was stated at the scoping meeting. However, no timeline was stated for preparation of a draft EIR/EIS for public review. Given the overall timeline, it would be expected that an EIR/EIS would be completed sometime during the late calendar year 2009. Upon completion of the Draft EIR/EIS, the City would receive a notice indicating that the document is available for review, and setting the timeframe for submittal of comments on the draft document.

Recommended Input: That the City Council and public review and modify, as appropriate, the recommended list of specific environmental impacts of concern to the City of San Mateo so that they can be forwarded to the Rail Authority within the revised deadline.

BUDGET IMPACT: Tracking and involvement in the high speed rail design and environmental review process is not currently funded. Public Works has entered into a small contract (\$20,000) with Harry Hecht, an expert in rail design who was the project manager for the City during the Transit Center and Main Street Garage Projects. Mr. Hecht will assist Public Works in tracking the high speed rail development and environmental review and in advancing the City's interest related to the design of the High Speed Rail Project. Funding for the staff and consultant effort will come from the Transportation Engineering Program (10-46-61) and eligible expenses will be funded by transportation impact fees and grade separation funding from the San Mateo County Transportation Authority.

<u>NOTICING</u>: All Homeowner Associations, the Downtown San Mateo Association, the Chamber of Commerce and individuals who have expressed an interest in the high speed rail or Footprint Study efforts were notified of the Study Session. Noticing of individual property owners and businesses in San Mateo was not practical for the study session since it could be of interest to virtually everyone in San Mateo. Public Works will issue a press release prior to the meeting to help alert the public of the project and environmental review process.

EXHIBITS:

- A. High Speed Rail Project Summary
- B. Draft General Plan Policies
- c: City Attorney
 City Clerk
 Deputy Director/City Engineer
 Director of Community Development
 Chief of Planning
 Project File
 Public Works A.R. Binder

Exhibit A

High Speed Rail Project Summary

Authority and Funding

The California High-Speed Rail Authority was established in 1996 and is the state entity responsible for planning, constructing and operating a high-speed train system serving major metropolitan areas in California. In August of 2000, Governor Gray Davis signed AB 1703 which extended the tenure of California High-Speed Rail Authority to Dec. 31, 2003. He also included \$5 million in the state budget to begin the environmental clearance for a statewide high-speed train system. In 2002, the legislature made the rail authority permanent.

Proposition 1A, Reliable High-Speed Passenger Train Bond Act was passed by the California voters in November 2008. Proposition 1A authorized the issuance of \$9.95 billion in bonds to establish high speed rail within the adopted corridors. Initial implementation of the system will include a segment from San Diego and Los Angeles, a segment between San Jose and San Francisco and a test track segment in the Central Valley.

Selected Alignment and Project Characteristics

In July 2008, the California High-Speed Rail Authority selected the Pacheco Pass – San Francisco and San Jose Alternative as the preferred corridor and alignment for the future High-Speed train service. The detailed design of the High-Speed rail project has not begun. The actual design characteristics are expected to evolve over the coming months as preliminary design efforts get underway. The starting point will be the assumptions used in the program level environmental analysis. Key design assumptions from the program level environmental review and those provided at the scoping meeting include:

- Electrification of the rail
- Grade separations through the entire length of the line; it was stated that there are currently 46 at grade crossings that will need to be grade separated as part of the project.
- The High Speed Rail train will operate at reduced speed (estimated 80 to 125 mph) along the Peninsula due to the urbanized nature of this rail segment.
- Top speed in the rural segments in the Central Valley is estimated to be approximately 250 mph.
- A 4-track alignment would be needed, 2 tracks for the High Speed Rail, 2 tracks for Caltrain.
- There will be no High Speed Train Station in San Mateo.
- The program level EIR/EIS assumed that the tracks would be above grade through San Mateo.

Design of the proposed High Speed Rail alignment will continue in parallel with the environmental review. Preliminary engineering and project-level environmental review will commence to the extent needed to assess site-specific issues and potential environmental impacts not already addressed in the Final Program EIR/EIS. Project-level environmental review would focus on a portion or portions of the proposed high speed rail system and would provide further analysis of potential impacts and mitigation at an appropriate site-specific level of detail to obtain needed permits and to implement High Speed Rail Projects. The Authority is beginning to work with local governments, transportation agencies, and private parties to identify right-of-way preservation needs and protective advance acquisition opportunities consistent with State and federal authority and requirements.

Project Status

With the certification of the Statewide Final Program-Level Environmental Impact Report /Environmental Impact Statement (EIR/EIS), the Authority has begun implementation of the 800-mile high-speed train system serving Sacramento, the San Francisco Bay Area, the Central Valley, Los Angeles, the Inland Empire, Orange County and San Diego. High-speed trains will be capable of maximum speeds of 250 miles per hour with an expected trip time from San Francisco to Los Angeles in 2 hours and 40 minutes. The system is forecast to potentially carry over 100 million passengers per year by 2030.

Environmental Review

The program level EIR/EIS was certified July 9, 2009. This EIR/EIS included an analysis of use of the Caltrain right of way for the High Speed Rail (HSR) route from San Jose to San Francisco. A very preliminary vertical alignment was shown, with the rail elevated through San Mateo. However, there were no specific project level details shown or analyzed in that EIR/EIS.

The High Speed Rail Authority is now in the process of preparing a "project" level EIR/EIS for construction and operation of the High Speed Rail system from San Francisco to San Jose. A series of public scoping meetings were held to solicit issues to be addressed in the EIR/EIS (see attached Notice of Preparation). These scoping meetings have been general in nature, since detailed engineering has not commenced. It was stated that the EIR/EIS will be accompanied by 15% completion engineering drawings, which provide much greater detail than was analyzed in the previously certified program EIR. The City's Planning and Public Works staffs were in attendance at a scoping meeting held on January 22, 2009 in San Carlos.

Right of Way Requirements

Initial analysis by the PCJPB has indicated that a four-track design can be accommodated within a 70 to 80 foot width depending on the selected alignment. However, depending on the alignment chosen, construction methods and other factors, construction activities may require 110 feet of width. The existing PCJPB right of way varies but is typically more than 100 feet for the segment south of 10th Avenue. The narrowest section is in the downtown with the right of way limited to 55 to 60 feet between 3rd and 5th Avenues. Also, right of way less than 110 feet exists in some segments north of the downtown. In the downtown, Railroad Avenue parallels the rail right of way. A 20 foot right of way is provided for Railroad Avenue east of the tracks. A similar width for Railroad Avenue exists between 3rd and 9th Avenues.

Clearly, construction of the high speed rail improvements in our downtown will create right of way, construction and access impacts on Railroad Avenue and for adjacent properties. A number of design decisions can affect the magnitude of these impacts. The actual width required to accommodate the high speed rail may vary from these preliminary PCJPB estimates. Again, some of these issues can be addressed within the on-going Footprint Studies which could then be used to inform the high speed rail design.

Draft General Plan Policies

Both the General Plan and Downtown Plan are presently undergoing revision. Previous policies have strongly encouraged a depressed rail alignment due to the potential impacts associated with a raised alignment. However the existing policies were developed prior to the proposal for high speed rail within the Peninsula Corridor Joint Powers Board (JPB) right of way. The previous policies reflect the sense at the time that the costs for grade separating the downtown at grade rail crossings would be prohibitive and the improvements were not likely within the foreseeable future.

Introduction of high speed rail within the corridor and designation of the San Jose to San Francisco Segment as one of the segments selected for early implementation has significantly changed the potential horizon and likelihood of downtown grade separation. As a result, staff is proposing strengthening of the General Plan and Downtown Plan policies related to the rail corridor and potential grade separation. The proposed Circulation Element includes the following policies:

- C 3.5: Grade Separation of Rail Line. Promote the elimination of existing at grade crossings to improve local circulation and safety.
- C 3.6: Below Grade Rail Line. Depress the rail line through the downtown with street crossings remaining at grade as Caltrain service is increased and high speed rail through the corridor is implemented.
- C 3.7: San Mateo Rail Corridor Transit-Oriented Development Plan (Corridor Plan). Improve east-west access via new grade-separated rail crossings at 28th and 31st Avenues.