

Continued from XCAP Meeting – November 13, 2019

Agenda Item #7: Review the 2017 City Council-Adopted Rail Problem Statement and Offer Recommendations for Updates Based on Where the Project is Today

Memorandum

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To: XCAP

Date: November 11, 2019

Subject: Agenda Item #7: Review the 2017 City Council-Adopted Rail Problem Statement and Offer Recommendations for Updates Based on Where the Project is Today

The Council adopted a Problem Statement in 2017 (link on page 29: <https://www.cityofpaloalto.org/civicax/filebank/documents/61108>). Since the XCAP is now making recommendations to the City Council, it makes sense to review it to ensure it's contemporary and adequately reflects what the Council, Staff and community have articulated in the work to date. The Problem Statement will be used in our community to explain why we are doing grade separations, and to serve as the basis for our evaluation framework and "Measurable Criteria" we will be developing to make recommendations. The Problem Statement and Measurable Criteria will be presented to City Council at the next check-in meeting tentatively scheduled for December 9th, 2019.

1. What is a transportation Problem Statement and why do we need one?

A Problem Statement (aka Purpose and Need Statement), is the description of the transportation problem that provides the basis for the transportation project. It establishes the beginning framework for alternatives evaluation and is used to clearly identify the objectives the project is intended to achieve.

According to the Federal Highway Administration¹, a good problem statement:

- is concise, understandable and focused on the primary challenges to be addressed
- is stated in terms of underlying causes (why is this project and expenditure needed)
- relates the transportation, community, and environmental components to one another
- reflects a customer focus
- does not include or pre-figure solutions
- is not mode specific

2. Current Problem Statement

In 2017, the City worked on a Problem Statement, but it was written before Caltrain had gone through their Service Vision process. The 2017 statement was derived in part by the work of the Rail Corridor Study's² (2012) stated goal: *"To create a vibrant, safe, attractive, transit rich area with mixed use city and neighborhood mixed use centers that provide walkable, pedestrian and bicycle friendly places that serve the community and beyond; and to connect the east and west portions of the city through an improved circulation network that binds the city together in all directions."*

¹ https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/planning/css/key_references/css_primer/ (pg 8)

² <https://www.cityofpaloalto.org/civicax/filebank/documents/38025>

Today, the recently adopted Caltrain Service Vision articulates that future service could double to triple the number of trains traveling through Palo Alto by 2040, further reinforcing the need for addressing grade crossings. In addition, since 2017, the City Council and City Manager have repeatedly reaffirmed commitment to building grade separations and the City adopted a Comprehensive Plan that includes pursuing grade separations as a City priority.

Problem Statement – September 2017

“While enhanced rail transit service is important to the City of Palo Alto, the Caltrain corridor creates a physical and visual barrier to east/west connectivity within the City, and is also the source of safety concerns for pedestrians, bicyclists and motorists, especially at existing at-grade crossings. The rail corridor also creates issues in surrounding neighborhoods, such as noise, vibration, traffic, and visual impacts. While the City of Palo Alto benefits from Caltrain service, and supports Caltrain modernization (including electrification), some of the issues experienced along the rail corridor will continue to get worse with future increases in Caltrain service, increases in regional traffic, and the probable addition of high speed rail.”

(Source: <https://www.cityofpaloalto.org/civicax/filebank/documents/61108> on page 29)

3. Proposed Updated Draft Problem Statement

The following statement is a DRAFT intended for discussion by the XCAP:

Imminent expansion of Caltrain corridor train service will provide transit benefits such as increased throughput and reduced pollution, and it will relieve demand on regional streets and highways. At the same time, this expansion may degrade local traffic conditions at existing at-grade crossings in Palo Alto and increase the risk of accidents.

The city must develop solutions for existing at-grade crossings that support a safe corridor, that improve circulation for all modes (pedestrians, bikes, personal and public vehicles) in all directions, and that improve neighborhood cohesion while minimizing noise, vibration, visual, and other environmental impacts.

4. Best Practices:

XCAP may want to draw from the following concepts considered Best Practices by the USDOT:

Qualities of Excellence in Transportation Design³

A Project should:

- Satisfy the purpose and needs agreed to by full range of stakeholder.
- Is safe facility for both the user and the community
- Is in harmony with the community, and preserves environmental, scenic, aesthetic, historic, and natural resource values of the area
- Exceeds expectations of designers and stakeholders and achieves a level of excellence in people's minds

³ Pg 10. Performance Measures for CSS – A Guidebook for State DOTs: <http://nap.edu/22063>)

- Involves efficient and effective use of resources (time, budget, community) of all involved parties
- Is designed and built with minimal disruption to the community
- Is seen as having added lasting value to the community

Sustainability and Livable Communities Goals⁴

A Project should:

- Consider new and emerging technologies, funding sources, and public policy issues aimed at addressing major drivers such as energy supply, climate change, and sustainability initiatives.
- Address livability issues such as bicycle and pedestrian facilities, transit, and multimodal connections.
- Embrace sustainability principles such as stormwater management, water quality, and the use of recycled materials throughout their lifecycles.

⁴ https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/planning/css/key_references/css_primer/ (pg 9)