

Expanded Community Advisory Panel (XCAP)

September 5, 2019

Summary – Regular Meeting

Community Meeting Room

1. Welcome and Introductions

Present: Gregory Brail, Nadia Naik, Barbara Best, Larry Klein, Phil Burton, Tony Carrasco, Inyoung Cho, Megan Kanne, Adina Levin, Judy Kleinberg (arrived late), Keith Reckdahl (arrived late)

Absent: Pat Lau, William Riggs, David Shen

2. Community Conversations

XCAP Member Brail shared that he heard a comment from someone who thought high-speed rail wasn't coming.

XCAP Member Naik stated she has gotten many questions about how the XCAP comes to a consensus recommendation if the Group is not taking positions or voting as a group until the very end.

XCAP Member Levin noted the relevant conversations had been at the regional level. The Caltrain Board talked about the governance issues that were raised by their Business Plan and their service vision proposal to increase ridership by three to four times. That would entail a major grade separation program. One way to address that is a potentially having a grade separation authority that would have a larger scope in terms of helping to fund and deliver the projects. There will be a Board workshop in November that will be the start of the conversation about what organizational changes may be thought about for Caltrain to be able to achieve its service vision goals. The San Francisco County Transportation Authority is talking about a construction authority starting with the downtown extension project to connect Caltrain to the Transbay terminal and talking about regional construction issues.

XCAP Member Kanne remarked she had gotten some feedback from the Emerson folks that they are Emerson and the issues of the different loops were being taken into account in the new Embarcadero options on the table. More data is needed to do a proper analysis to support those options.

XCAP Member Burton indicated he would send out emails to his groups tomorrow with the information from this meeting

XCAP Member Carrasco noted his comments revolved around how fast this was going. He wanted an inclusive discussion process, not moving so fast.

XCAP Member Cho indicated there was a lot of discussion about Churchill and the closure of Churchill which is concerning to some residents.

3. Status of City Council Considerations

Ed Shikada, City Manager advised next week the City Council will take up the topic of the Rail Blue Ribbon Commission, is what is in front of the Council a refined concept for them to discuss and try draw a stronger distinction between the role of the XCAP and the RBRC. The distinction would be to try to talk about what the Group is doing in three fairly distinct phases. The first is understanding the options. He pointed out that the CAP and XCAP have been very valuable in helping understand the options, ensure the engineering work is presented in ways that are understandable from the lay persons' perspective, the material is digestible and refine the concepts that were brought forward in ways that they do reflect concerns and interests from neighborhoods and beyond. The XCAP's work would primarily focus on understanding the options. The second phase is community conversations. The third phase is the decision-making phase and how the Council's decisions on the preferred alternatives for each location fit in with the funding strategy and the regional issues. Other upcoming issues are the business tax discussion on September 16. Elements of that include transportation and potential other uses and the format of a business-related tax. Also, on that agenda staff will present potential comments for the City Council to make on the Caltrain Business Plan and its long-range service vision. An issue flagged in the report is the role that Caltrain could play in the implementation of grade separations, recognizing that VTA is not looking to do bonding for grade separation.

XCAP Member Naik remarked the news about VTA not using their bonding capacity for Caltrain is a deal the Council may want to write a letter to VTA about that. There should be a formal announcement.

Mr. Shikada replied the report should be out now. The agenda is structured that there was a discussion with VTA related to the Grand Jury Report and the same issues were discussed in terms of governance, concerns about the potential use of funds, Measure B obligations to the voters.

XCAP Member Levin noted it shouldn't be up to any one county or another to be in charge of whether a regional system is successful or not. There needs to be a different scope to manage the regional project that affects many counties and look for solutions that support this regional goal.

XCAP Member Klein agreed this is very important and asked if there has been consideration to take legal action against VTA?

XCAP Member Carrasco commented if RBRC is looking at cost alternatives will be chosen that are not compatible with RBRC. He asked for costs to be imbedded in the options.

Ms. Goodwin replied that information including total costs will be available at the September 25 meeting as well as a matrix.

XCAP Member Carrasco asked for some incremental costs or measurement to decide if an alternative is feasible or not.

Ms. Cotton Gaines clarified the new website should have a go-live date next week. A lot of the information is still on the old website including the per foot cost for each of the Meadow, Charleston alternatives that were costed out.

XCAP Member Reckdahl commented some of the cost inputs were not done. The allowable grade is a huge cost for the various alternatives.

Ms. Mercurio replied some of the alternatives developed to date require design exceptions. Regarding the Charleston, Meadow, a request has been submitted to Caltrain asking what would be acceptable and the process.

4. Outline for Design Workshop

Ms. Litzinger explained there would be a high-level project overview. Some of the engineering basics will be covered. There will be breakout tables to do a deep dive on the various alternatives.

Mr. Shikada explained the purpose of the workshop was to allow the XCAP members to do a deep dive and will be a pretty technical discussion. This will be open to Council members.

5. Design Workshop Questions

Ms. Cotton Gaines advised there was a link for the XCAP members to submit questions about the Meadow, Charleston crossing, Churchill and general questions.

Ms. Goodwin remarked at previous meetings resources for information about previous workshops was sent out.

XCAP Member Naik noted the information at the workshop would be helpful, but seemed like this was the same information as the community meetings, just a deeper dive.

Ms. Goodwin replied there would be some opportunity to do some brainstorming and drawing during the breakouts. It would be a more fruitful conversation if everyone heard everything.

XCAP Member Naik felt there were alternatives missing that were requested to specifically isolate such as roundabouts. She was also concerned about how the XCAP would do their job if they don't know what the format is.

XCAP Member Burton didn't have a sense if this was a one-way conversation or two-way interaction with some of the time community members speaking to the Group.

Mr. Shikada related that he didn't think community members should bring new ideas to this workshop. It should be an opportunity for the XCAP to weigh-in on what has been seen and concerns they have about changing the alternatives already discussed. He remarked some of the questions that haven't had much discussion could be gotten into. One of the questions, for example, was, how much money would be saved in 2 percent versus 1 percent on a trench? Another question was, where should the

viaduct be located, on the exiting rail line versus where the trees are between Alma and the existing rail. This would give the team an opportunity to explain and have a two-way discussion. The most wide-range questions were on the traffic. This has to be an open meeting, but this will be a very technical meeting.

XCAP Member Levin asked if the roadway alternatives would be presented and discussed?

Ms. Litzinger replied the roundabout was part of the discussion of solutions for Churchill.

Mr. Shikada advised new proposals as they relate to the grade separation options would not be welcome.

XCAP Member Klein asked if this included new ideas put forth by the XCAP? What resources would be put into evaluating new ideas?

Ms. Goodwin clarified that some ideas that might seem new may have already been discussed and are under alternatives no longer considered.

XCAP Member Kanne asked if no build is a table, what is there to discuss?

Ms. Mercurio replied the no build is about the traffic and queues and the increased number of trains that Caltrain will add.

XCAP Member Naik asked if there was an updated traffic report for the no build?

Ms. Mercurio replied the new traffic consultant is looking at the queues and will be presented at the next XCAP meeting.

XCAP Member Brail shared the concerns about how productive the workshop will be but time is always an issue. He would like the consultants to be prepared to answer questions.

Ms. Goodwin asked for as many of those questions beforehand as possible to be productive.

XCAP Member Cho inquired when the details about the Churchill alternative will be available?

Ms. Goodwin replied that information will be in today's presentation.

XCAP Member Burton asked if Caltrain would be prepared to speak on behalf of the Union Pacific Railroad if there were any freight rail operating issues that might impact the alternatives?

XCAP Member Naik advised maybe people haven't turned in their questions because until this meeting most people didn't understand what that meeting was for, for the public or XCAP. New XCAP members may not have enough previous information to understand the new information.

XCAP Member Brail didn't see the importance of separate tables.

XCAP Member Naik related that the information on the South Palo Alto tunnel isn't coming until the next meeting so she encouraged getting that information sooner to be prepared for the meetings on the 25 and 27. She also wanted citywide traffic information.

XCAP Member Burton didn't see the need for the break out tables.

XCAP Member Reckdahl asked what the goal was for the workshop?

Mr. Shikada advised over the course of many months, there have been a number of questions, such as the 1 percent versus 2 percent, the height of the viaduct, why a shoofly track is necessary. This meeting is to give the XCAP an opportunity to have that deeper discussion than was possible.

XCAP Member Reckdahl clarified it would primarily be between the engineers and XCAP.

XCAP Member Naik asked if a new idea came up, who would decide if that should be pursued?

Mr. Shikada replied that is a hypothetical not worth considering. The Council is always confronted with the possibility that there is something that hasn't been presented previously and would be presented in the 11th hour. Institutionally that possibility can't be precluded but practically that is very unlikely.

XCAP Member Levin thought it might be helpful to split it into two things. In terms of the roadway considerations and bike and pedestrian implications of the roadway configuration, that is less mature and the likelihood that new ideas would come out about that are much higher. When City Council is asked to choose a grade separation alternative will they, at the same time, be choosing an alternative about reconfiguring the Embarcadero interchange or is that on a separate timeline and process?

Mr. Shikada answered that in large measure the charge of this effort is to define options related to the grade separations, talking about hundreds of millions of dollars for any one of the variations. The roadway alternatives at this point are largely more of a feasibility study. For example, if the Churchill closure were to be viable, it requires a level of feasibility of the alternatives, the street modifications to confirm that this is in the ballpark of being able to mitigate the impacts of the closure. That is the question right now, to determine that initial planning level feasibility. At the same time, as it relates to the grade separation options, the cost and the potential property impacts of the options being discussed are at a magnitude to try to eliminate one or other options.

XCAP Member Naik asked what the consensus recommendation the XCAP is supposed to do?

Mr. Shikada replied depending on what the Council chooses to do with the RBRC, there may not be a consensus recommendation.

XCAP Member Naik inquired up to this point with three meetings in, the Group didn't really understand what they were doing, trying to give feedback on a meeting that will happen on the 27th, after the RBRC conversation. It is difficult to construct the meeting on the 27th if it is not known what the Council wants to the Group to do. How will there be clarity in time for the meeting on the 27th?

Mr. Shikada replied the Group could think about how the progress of the work was structured, going from a phase of understanding what the options are, to community conversations about pros and cons, to decisions about the options, then the design workshop is still all about understanding the options and ensuring that as a group and personally the questions are adequately handled in order to both understand the options and ensure the way they are described can be communicated to the community more broadly.

XCAP Member Kleinberg indicated she is on record as being against the RBRC. She was disappointed that it is only this group that would be in the workshop. She can't be there and she is the only one representing the business community. This is not adequate input discussion analysis and feedback from those that count on participating and collaborating with the neighborhoods so there is an efficient and appropriate flow of traffic. She hoped there would be some opportunity for the business community to get more information.

Ms. Goodwin replied she wrote an action item in the minutes that the staff and the team would coordinate with her for the business community. The plan would be to do a version of this whole thing so they can understand it.

XCAP Member Kleinberg remarked there is a tremendous amount of traffic passing through Palo Alto. There is no way the business community is going to sit through ten meetings to get to the level that is required to really participate. It would be great if after this workshop there could be some kind of document that is not too technical.

Ms. Goodwin advised there will be matrices that might be useful for the business community. A presentation could be built around going through all of the options from a physical sense with the videos, but also costs and construction impacts outlined.

XCAP Member Kleinberg would like to see everybody at the workshop discussing this together.

XCAP Member Kanne recommended, since there seemed to be a lot of interest in sequencing there and there might not be time during the workshop for all of them, could this group list or email what their preferred order would be? Going from the bottom up, no build, south tunnel, Churchill and Charleston/Meadow.

XCAP Member Carrasco noted some outreach was done in downtown Palo Alto. There was vehement opposition to closing Palo Alto Avenue which constrains what can and can't be done along the downtown length.

Public Opinion

Susan asked whether members of the public who feel themselves well enough educated to attend are welcome?

Mr. Shikada answered yes.

Susan inquired what the best strategy was for members of the public who want to be there and get something out of it to bone up on all of the alternatives that have been dismissed, to understand the history? She asked which website to look at for the information?

Ms. Goodwin replied Ms. Cotton Gaines is working with AECOM to have it ready by the end of the week. At the January 22 City Council Meeting there was a staff report with a history of how each alternative came about and how each was eliminated.

Mr. Shikada pointed out in preparation for the November meetings and the meetings focused on the general public, it is really critical all that information is handy that doesn't require people to do a lot of research.

Susan commented that the choice between the grade separations depends on what is happening on the roadways as a result of each alternative and asked if there was a coordinated plan for addressing traffic concerns.

XCAP Member Brail remarked XCAP Members should be better prepared and organized to help answer questions.

XCAP Member Naik noted at the previous meeting she had asked what the City's position was on the Embarcadero grade step and what is the status of the pump on the Embarcadero grade step and she didn't see that in the notes.

Steve asked regarding new ideas, there is a fairly informed resident who came forward with a variation on a previously rejected idea that he thought address some of the reasons it was rejected. If he is willing to put a little more time and effort into it and mock it up, who could he send that to?

Ms. Goodwin replied there is an email address on the website that goes to Ms. Cotton Gaines and she distributes that.

Female remarked she was very reluctant to hear Mr. Shikada say not to invite community members so she suggested inviting the whole PTC. That might be a way to get some community members and engaged people involved. If the concern is the public hasn't been brought up to speed and the level of engagement may not be productive, it is on the team to provide documents that will allow people who want to get engaged to get up to speed very quickly.

Male, noted in the context of a viaduct solution, potentially the shoofly being a single-track shoofly and you increment one track at a time on a bridge or viaduct and the pros and cons of that. A lot of money could be saved with one shoofly track. It depended on the design and where the tracks are going.

Male suggested not calling it a design workshop because it really isn't. He would like an open meeting like a fishbowl with a chance for the public to ask questions, but give the public homework to read all the links that have been assembled so the public can follow the conversation.

XCAP Member Levin commented telling people they are unwelcome is wrong but there is nothing wrong with saying this is a high-level meeting. If people are already up to speed or are willing to read a many page prep book and be prepared to deal with that level of information, feel free to audit this meeting.

Ms. Goodwin agreed that was a good suggestion.

6. Embarcadero/Alma Renderings

Peter DeStefano, AECOM, presented the alternatives still under construction. The first alternative was Embarcadero/Alma and this was presented with a series of slides. A signalized intersection was created via Kingsley, creating the connections from Alma to and from Embarcadero. The next slide showed a variation of the same alternative. The main difference is the High Street connection to Embarcadero exists as it is currently. A 3D rendering showed the full connection with High Street. Some high-level features of this alternative were a ped/bike overcrossing over Embarcadero, a right-turn pocket from eastbound Embarcadero onto Kingsley, the Alma Street bridge is widened to allow for two lanes of traffic in each direction on Alma, a left-turn pocket from southbound Alma onto Kingsley. One restriction would be the direct movement from westbound Embarcadero onto the slip ramp would not be allowed. The other restriction with this signalized intersection would be no left turns allowed from eastbound Embarcadero onto High Street.

XCAP Member Naik asked referencing the slide shown, if you come off of Alma onto Kingsley, can you go straight onto High Street? If there is a backup on Alma, cars could turn onto Kingsley and then take High Street up?

Mr. DeStefano answered yes.

XCAP Member Klein did not understand how to get from Embarcadero onto Alma?

Mr. DeStefano clarified if you are on westbound Embarcadero coming from Emerson, you would make a left turn at the intersection onto Kingsley, then reach the T intersection onto Alma. Coming from the other direction on Embarcadero, you would make a right turn onto Kingsley. He noted one of the main concerns with the closure of the crossing at Churchill is that the traffic on northbound Alma, for example, trying to get to the high school or the Town and Country, would be forced to come up to this area, make a right turn onto Lincoln, then a right onto Emerson to get onto Embarcadero. This alternative alleviates that problem. Cars cannot make a left only from eastbound Embarcadero. Westbound you can make the left onto Kingsley.

XCAP Member Brail asked how a pedestrian gets from the high school to Town and Country?

Mr. DeStefano answered the pedestrian bridge would allow that crossing over Embarcadero and those details haven't been worked out yet.

XCAP Member Naik requested a specific outreach to those living on Kingsley.

XCAP Member Levin asked if the different treatments and ideas could also include a full illustration of the pedestrian and bike implications?

7. Churchill Viaduct

John Maher, AECOM addressed the Churchill Viaduct. He explained on the left of the slide is the proposed Churchill viaduct. The purple on the right is the Charleston/Meadow viaduct. These two projects are stand alone projects. They are not linked together. Two options were analyzed. Option 1 would be that the permanent tracks remain on the current Caltrain alignment. A temporary track would be prepared east of that alignment impacting Alma Street. By doing that Alma Street would be reduced to two lanes during construction. The next slide depicted the aerial guideway. Once you reach a certain height of retained fill, you can convert to the aerial structure. Both the aerial structure and the retained fill are the same width, so the remaining street, Alma, is two lanes. Option 2 uses the existing Caltrain tracks as the temporary track and the permanent track is put on the landscaped area between the Caltrain tracks and Alma Street. At Meadow/Charleston this worked because there was 58 feet between the existing tracks and the edge of Alma. At Churchill there is only 38 feet. That new permanent track would impact Alma to the point of reducing it permanently to two lanes. The video showed the Churchill viaduct. First, the shoofly track is built, then the viaduct is built. The shoofly track is then removed.

XCAP Member Brail asked about the nature of the structure going over Embarcadero.

Mr. Maher answered on the Embarcadero side as you cross Embarcadero you are up about two feet from the existing top of rail. The shoofly itself would go off into Alma Street. There would have to be an upgrade to the Alma Street bridge over Embarcadero, the gap between the Alma Street bridge and the Caltrain bridge would have to be filled in.

XCAP Member Brail asked if the Stanford game day station was retained and if there was an opportunity with this option for additional connectivity from one side of the tracks to the other or for pedestrians and bikes?

Ms. Mercurio answered yes, viaducts have more openings through the structure so there is more opportunity for connectivity.

XCAP Member Carrasco remarked it looked like a 1 percent slope was used and that was a big impact.

Mr. Maher responded starting at the California Ave station going north, it is a 1.6 percent slope to get up and over Churchill.

XCAP Member Levin noted in general in paying attention to the Caltrain Business Plan and electrification, she has not heard any discussion about the Stanford game day station.

Ms. Mercurio replied this alternative had just been developed, so the next conversation would be with Caltrain on this. The game day station right now is only used during Stanford football games. A station could be put there, but it would be complicated and very expensive. She also advised the design for horizontal curvatures did meet Caltrain's design criteria for 110 miles per hour.

Mr. Shikada explained there will be property rights negotiations necessary as part of that type of option.

Mr. Maher responded to questions about property taken. There is no property taken with either option, however, option 2 restricts Alma to two lanes permanently.

Public Opinion

Steve asked, regarding the Embarcadero intersection, comparing the current configuration with the new configuration, what is the percentage increase in through put on Embarcadero going in both directions? In the viaduct scenario, would there be consideration of property owners being compensated in some way if there was objective impact on their property values?

Ms. Goodwin replied that would be something the City would have to look at.

Male speaker asked about the rendering that showed going from Kingsley to High Street. Only left and right turns were shown off of Kingsley but it was said cars could go straight across to High Street.

Mr. DeStefano remarked this version showed left and right turns only but you could continue across the intersection to High.

Female speaker lives on Mariposa. She asked questions about the renderings. She also suggested dimensional drawings in all directions. She also asked if this structure also handled freight and was told yes.

Ms. Mercurio replied there are full engineering drawings which are always available and the videos are developed from those drawings. The viaduct itself can be any type of structure.

Mr. Shikada advised regarding landscaping, part of the ongoing issue with Caltrain is the clearance they need from the tracks under current conditions and tree and other landscaping removal they have done as part of the electrification. Under this scenario, if the tracks are on an elevated structure, that will be a different issue in terms of what their expectations would be on how landscaping is managed.

XCAP Member Kleinberg asked if Caltrain would do anything about additional parking, possibly under the viaduct?

XCAP Member Levin reported once the Caltrain Board on October 5 has set a goal for a service vision about how many people they expect to be building up to, they're doing some access studies and will have an additional level of modeling and information about how they expect to support people getting to and from the train.

8. Summary of Action Items/Next Meeting

Ms. Goodwin announced the next meeting is September 25.

9. Adjourn

The meeting adjourned at 6:30 P.M.