

Expanded Community Advisory Panel (XCAP)

July 29, 2020, 3:00 PM

Summary – Special Meeting (virtual, through Zoom)

1. Welcome and Roll Call

Present: Gregory Brail, Phil Burton, Tony Carrasco, Inyoung Cho, Larry Klein, Nadia Naik, Keith Reckdahl (arrived late), David Shen, Cari Templeton

Absent:

2. Oral Communications

Rebecca Eisenberg explained she has a strong personal as well as political interest in this matter. She urged the XCAP to reconsider opening the idea to build the underground tunnel. A lot has changed since this was taken up by the City Council who voted last May 2019 four to one to reject the idea of a tunnel. The other ideas such as elevated tracks and closing Churchill offer a lot of disadvantages to the community, including safety hazards to community, issues of isolating communities from each other, difficulty of children, especially those with disabilities who need buses to get to Paly, creating noise and pollution to the residents. The reports done last year did not sufficiently investigate the financial advantages of the tunnel, especially the opportunity to reclaim approximately fifty acres of usable land owned primarily by the City, possibly with a Caltrain easement that could be taken underground. That land could possibly be used for housing.

Susan Newman advised that a group of residents in Southgate were conducting a second survey of the neighborhood residents to gather input on all the current options. They previously surveyed as many neighbors as possible on the Churchill closure at the time when the viaduct was the only other option. In advance of the community meeting planned for March 2020, which did not happen, they shared descriptions of the three options then under consideration, including the partial underpass. They are now conducting a second survey with each participant receiving an even-handed and objective description of the three options under consideration. This is posted on Nextdoor Southgate. They hope to achieve proportionate representation of all parts of the neighborhood and the results will be shared with XCAP members and City Council.

Peter Coughlin advocated for trying a prototype of the closure, putting up a temporary barrier and see how the traffic flows.

- 3. Discussion/Action: Review Layouts & Renderings for Underpass options and Fact Sheets for Meadow-Charleston, Churchill and Matrix (Summary of Evaluations with City Council Adopted Criteria.**
 - a. Layouts**
 - b. Renderings**
 - c. Fact Sheets**
 - d. Matrix – Summaries of Evaluations with City Council Adopted Criteria**

Millette Litzinger, AECOM, reported the changes they made were pretty minor. For the renderings and the layouts, they edited them to show the eastbound Meadow Drive left turn on Alma Street and the U-turn at Alma Village Circle in the Alma intersection. They added notes indicating other items of the geometry that may not be seen in the renderings.

XCAP Member Brail commented that the renderings were beautiful but had to work very hard to figure out which one is which. These will have to be labeled if they are going to be distributed widely. He asked if the renderings were better than the previous ones for the viaduct and the hybrid and trench? They seemed to be a bit higher quality and he worried that people might get biased one way or the other if there is a very realistic-looking high quality rendering on one and a more primitive rendering on the other.

Ms. Litzinger remarked when these are uploaded, they will all be labeled. Regarding resolution, these are all based on the same model so they should be similar resolution.

Peter DeStefano, AECOM, explained these will be uploaded to the virtual room. Members will be able to click on certain areas of the map to see the renderings from particular views. It should be self-evident where the image was taken from.

XCAP Member Shen reiterated labeling the renderings would be good. Regarding the partial underpass, it was very hard to see the right-of-way line that is east of the tracks. The purple of the change in the road is laying on top of the magenta line. He asked if there was some way to separate those lines.

Mr. DeStefano explained they could do some things to get it to pop out.

XCAP Member Shen noted if Caltrain didn't give the right-of-way, it would be important to indicate that better. He wondered about other property impacts, which aren't clearly noted on these images.

Mr. DeStefano responded that they were shown on the fact sheets currently. Showing right-of-way acquisitions and impacts on this map will cause it to get very cluttered and difficult to read. If needed, a separate exhibit could be created just showing either partial or full partial acquisitions.

XCAP Member Shen wondered if there were going to be additional profiles for the bike/ped options? On one of the Meadow/Charleston renderings, a cross section was shown, but not the other direction.

Mr. DeStefano noted that was added to the fact sheets and text. He thought the profile for the ped/bike path was shown on the Meadow/Charleston. Kellogg was not included but it was mentioned in the fact sheets that the ped/bike ramps at Kellogg and on the other side near the school were based on eight percent grades with the five-foot landings. To flatten the grades to five percent, that would increase the length of the ramps.

XCAP Member Shen asked for comparison, what the California Avenue grade was?

Mr. DeStefano answered it was eight percent grade.

Ms. Litzinger advised there is a ped/bike profile and it would be part of the exhibit boards.

XCAP Member Burton agreed with the suggestion of labeling the drawings and renderings very carefully. He commented he had to look hard at the layouts because he couldn't see any legend for the yellow lines. He suggested when PDF output is created to do at least 300 dots per inch, if not 600. He referred to page three of the layouts where he didn't see the left-turn lane from eastbound Meadow to northbound Alma indicated.

Mr. DeStefano replied there was no left-turn pocket, but the left turn can be made from the thru lane. It is hidden underneath the structure, but the left turn is allowed.

XCAP Member Burton related that the issue was communication and people may think there are many left turn lanes not allowed.

Mr. DeStefano explained it is shown on the renderings, the striping indicates left turn is allowed and it was added to the fact sheets. Creating transparency may cause confusion.

XCAP Member Burton reiterated turnouts are an issue for this design so they need to be as complete as possible. Going back to the same page, he noted it looked like a right turn could be made into Alma Plaza only from the transition lane, not from the main roadway on Alma. He would like to see indicated that from the right thru lane, you can turn into Alma Plaza.

Mr. DeStefano reiterated that all the exhibits were meant to show the proposed striping layouts.

XCAP Member Burton questioned why in several places the designs called for twelve percent grades on the underpasses and is that allowable for a WB-40 vehicle.

Mr. DeStefano replied yes.

Chair Naik wanted to be more specific about the labels and asked if it would be possible to put the names of the streets on the street itself, and insertion of a compass indicator. She also suggested for the exhibits for the Town Hall, the traffic report has a turn map that showed how all the turns were possible. Something similar to that may be needed at a future Town Hall meeting to explain all the movements. In the fact sheets, there are some images that are easier to see. The concept plan view maps are also very helpful because the structures and property impacts are clearer.

Ms. Litzinger continued, regarding the fact sheets, they had been going back and forth between the underpass alternatives with the adjusted title of the property impacts to conceptual private property and a footnote was added. The color schemes were updated on the property impact maps so it did not conflict with the plan view. That included the ped/bike ramps and sidewalks a lighter pink shade. The wording updates made on the matrix were carried over to the fact sheets. On Meadow, the concept plan view and intersection turning diagram to incorporate the left turn were updated. All the other fact sheets that had previously gone to the public were in the package and on all of those the first paragraph was changed and the matrix text was updated to be consistent with the matrix sheets. There was some adjusting done on the cost estimates wording in several places. On the matrix they updated the footnote on the bottom that said it was comparative at this location and added the potential for the sound barrier for the underpass option and the order of magnitude cost under row E was updated. On Churchill, they adjusted the color and incorporated comments received. Some minor changes were made, such as Connecting Palo Alto needed to be updated because it only had seven alternatives and currently there are nine.

XCAP Member Shen noted in the matrix item two was added, the Caltrain right-of-way impact, but it isn't reflected in the fact sheets and the lists.

Ms. Litzinger explained that was in the engineering challenges portion of the matrix. None of the engineering challenges were called out specifically in the fact sheets.

XCAP Member Shen asked if on the Connecting Palo Alto site, the last sentence could be edited to be more accurate, given the current situation. In the "What happens if we do nothing" section, the uncleared queues presentation for Churchill, changing the wording to say this is an example of what happen across every intersection, not just at Churchill.

XCAP Member Brail indicated on the second page of the fact sheet there is information about the gate down times and the number of collisions. Care needs to be taken with that language because people tend to dismiss all grade crossing incidents in Palo Alto as suicides, but on Churchill since 2008 there have been six car/train collisions and none of those resulted in deaths. On Charleston in the last ten years there have been ten accidents, five of which were collisions with vehicles and five were collisions with pedestrians which were ruled as suicides. He would like the word collisions changed to accidents.

Chair Naik explained this was pulled specifically out of the Caltrain Business Plan so they are citing a sourced document. A footnote could potentially be added that describes what collision is defining. Chair Naik remarked on the matrix she had two questions. On the Churchill evaluation criteria page, closure with mitigations, first

column, letter G, under partial underpass there is a line about the six-foot noise parapet that could reduce noise and that is not listed under the closure with mitigations, even though it is on the fact sheets. Under J of that same column, it says "minimize disruption and the duration of construction", is the widening of the Alma bridge at Embarcadero encapsulated in the description of the construction and duration? Will it only be closed on nights and weekends?

Mr. DeStefano advised the bridges can be widened while maintaining traffic. If the bridge is completely replaced, that would likely require temporary closures.

Chair Naik continued, under I of Engineering Challenges it talked about the relocation of the pump house at Embarcadero Road, which would be required to do the widening of the Alma Street bridge. Where would that pump station go?

Mr. DeStefano thought there was room to move it slightly to the east.

Public Comment

Eduardo Llach thought the matrix looked good and was happy with the work. He is pro Churchill closing given that it is the best for the City wide, less expensive, less disruptive, safety for the children. He looked forward to the presentation of this to the City Council.

Drew remarked one of the XCAP Members was talking about the Meadow undercrossing going north to the Alma Village. He expressed the idea of putting just to the east of the brown bridge, a thru left small arrow, a pavement arrow. On the merge going north on Alma coming up from the undercrossing and turning into the village, make the solid white line there dashed for about half that length before it becomes solid again for the right turn lane, would help with the merge discussion.

Teri believed it was necessary to make clear that some of the options have some issues regarding property seizures and right-of-way access from Caltrain. The closure of Churchill is the cheapest option and with mitigations, it will be the most efficient to do. She agreed with a trial of closing that crossing for a time to evaluate the traffic situation.

Adrian Brandt indicated regarding the terminology of accidents and crashes and collisions, there is a movement away from using the term accident because especially the Caltrain collisions that occur and other incidents where vehicles get stuck on the track, they are almost always the result of one or more willful vehicle code violations. Regarding the viaduct option, apart from the visual, that has no property impacts. If a lower viaduct were to be used, there would be a bridge over Churchill, it would lower the whole structure by up to five to seven feet, which would reduce the need for the grade exception and reduce the length of the approaches and greatly reduce the impact on the twenty-three homes that run along Mariposa Avenue. By the time it reached the park it would largely have no effect. It is the best of the remaining alternative. It is not the best but not the least expensive.

Rob Levitsky noted he and many of his neighbors do not believe the mitigations Hexagon has reported. There are typically 9,500 cars a day that cross the tracks, and

if Churchill is closed those cars will go north to Embarcadero or south to Oregon. It is Hexagon's opinion that the cars will take the closest route, which is Embarcadero, so that street would get about 7,000 of the 9,500 cars. Those cars would be on Embarcadero at the worst time of day after another signal is added to slow things down. It is not a mitigation that will work. It is not fair to dump all the cars from the Churchill closure onto Embarcadero.

Yoriko Kishimoto felt the verbiage and wording in the descriptions favor the closure of Churchill and worked against people who live on or near Embarcadero. The intersection at Embarcadero is called an intersection improvement, not an expansion. The Comp Plan calls for no intersection expansion if at all possible, because of bike/ped safety issues. Embarcadero right-of-way seems to be about the same as Churchill. She asked if someone who lived on or near Embarcadero could help review the language to make sure it is more evenhanded.

Roland believed the official term used by Caltrain when a train hits an object or a person is known as trespasser incident, whether it was a suicide, a car on the tracks or pedestrian accidentally hit, that is the term they use.

Chair Naik noted XCAP Member Reckdahl joined the meeting.

XCAP Member Burton commented that a temporary closure of Churchill to measure traffic diversions would not be meaningful because traffic volumes overall are way down currently.

Chair Naik encouraged speaker Kishimoto to send in writing any specific suggestions about the language, the specific wording she feels is weighted in a specific way, the Group will take those into consideration.

XCAP Member Klein reminded everyone that this was the report of the consultant and the Group had no right to change the wording down to that level. The Group will be writing a report that may or may not agree with the consultant's report.

XCAP Member Brail noted that some of the public comments and letters were about the language in the safety draft that was attached to this.

4. XCAP Member Updates and Working Group Updates.

Chair Naik informed XCAP Members that for Brown Act reasons the drafts of Chapters one, two and six had to be released. She and XCAP Member Klein have not discussed how to integrate these. There is not time to discuss each chapter in detail at this meeting.

XCAP Member Carrasco remarked that XCAP Member Klein alluded to the staff's findings versus the Group's. He wondered how those two things would merge together. Specifically, he and XCAP Members Burton and Reckdahl were to work on the findings report. In their opinion, they were still looking for solutions and guidelines that will shape some of the choices that will be made. Is that part of the matrix because a lot of the findings were in the Matrix that Cari did.

Chair Naik replied the matrix that is called the summaries of evaluations with City Council adopted criteria is basically taking the City Council criteria and adding the engineering section. XCAP Member Templeton's matrix is somewhat of a direct reflection of that. Throughout the process additional questions or concerns have been identified, and Chair Naik thought the section XCAP Members Carrasco, Burton and Reckdahl were working on would call out such things as, the general matrix from AECOM says one thing, but there are other things to consider. It could be about missing information that might change the answer, a combination of things might work. This should reflect what the Group discusses, not the opinions of that small three-person group. It doesn't mean the AECOM matrix should be updated. Ms. Templeton's is what will be used as a tool as this is worked through.

XCAP Member Templeton remarked that was how she was thinking it about it. Currently two people have reached out to her with comments about the matrix.

Chair Naik advised XCAP can discuss the matrix at a public meeting, but discussion by a subset group has to be limited to three.

XCAP Member Brail related that he wanted to comment on the safety section. Previous XCAP Member Lau's report went into a lot of detail on each of the crossings and specific recommendations. He didn't believe all of that needed to be included in the XCAP report. A shorter section could include some of the information about lethal means restriction and some specific recommendations for all of the options. He asked how to proceed and how much of the minute safety details should be included in the main report, or should Ms. Lau's report stand alone as an appendix?

Chair Naik thought it might be easiest if XCAP Member Brail went over this and that can be made public at the next meeting. She realized there are entire days blocked off for deliberations but also what needs to be done is taking part of the meetings to discuss the making of the report.

XCAP Member Klein believed XCAP Member Brail is on the right track. He took a look at what Ms. Lau submitted and what will be helpful to all writing various chapters, the first person writes their report. If that person doesn't agree with what is in the full report, then that person can have an appendix to the report. In general, what will be looked for is a shorter chapter on safety.

XCAP Member Brail explained the high-level outline he was thinking of was to discuss safety considerations for all alternatives based on the information from Ms. Lau.

XCAP Member Shen thought when reading Ms. Lau's report, it wasn't necessarily written as the section, but to tell the Group all she had learned and known to that point. He had some questions about his section, two. They described all the intersection alternatives, but wondered if that was enough. Is more detail needed or advised for more information look at the fact sheets? Also, it seemed like at some point this will all have to be assembled together and the whole report gone over looking for repeat information or inaccurate information or information that is needed to be updated.

Chair Naik explained it was possible that once she and XCAP Member Klein read all the sections together, they decide the outline may need to be reordered. With some good editing, repeated things will get eliminated and a structure to put everything together will be forthcoming. That would mean the XCAP would have to agree on a new outline or support their editing skills to give them the freedom to create an outline based on what they have.

XCAP Member Shen asked if there was a timeline for the missing chapters?

Chair Naik advised one of them will be the section done while doing deliberations. Section three is basically a summary of what is in the matrix. Section four is XCAP findings and Section five is recommendations and rationale, which may get written together.

XCAP Member Burton didn't think there was a decision on the method of collaboration, but Google Docs would probably be useful so everyone could collaborate without meeting at the same time.

Chair Naik explained that all members could not participate in Google Docs. The smaller groups can do that.

XCAP Member Burton suggested for Chapter two, at a minimum the traffic count diagrams should be included that Mr. Black produced and showing turning movements at intersections.

XCAP Member Carrasco related it is getting cumbersome to collaborate. On the findings issue, could the Group get an indication of what a finding is and what a fact is.

Chair Naik responded to her a fact is such as, you need a specific number of feet to make a left-hand turn. A finding might be that there are unique things that happen that are not listed in a traffic report, something that could be flagged for a future group, something learned that isn't necessarily in any of the document and not described any other way, but it was learned might be an issue. An example could be at Churchill, when the light changes, there are many cyclists that gather at a light waiting to cross and that creates a large group, which has some bearing on the potential width of an underpass.

XCAP Member Burton remarked it sounded like there would be documentation of a lot of the engineering tradeoffs or Council Criteria tradeoffs. That material may be duplicated, but it is a question of how many places do people need to go to in order to get the complete picture.

XCAP Member Klein related that the editing task should remove repetitions. He proposed when he did some editing, before it went back to the full Group, it could be sent to several of the chief authors with his thoughts on how that should be revised and get agreement on any changes, so when a chapter is brought to the full Group, there are people who have already agreed to that chapter.

Chair Naik advised it may mean weekly informational items will be put out, draft chapters because of the Brown Act.

XCAP Member Brail wanted to make sure Ms. Lau's information is included in the report.

Chair Naik explained her original draft could be included in the appendix.

XCAP Member Shen inquired if he could retain ownership of Chapter two and work on it for another two to three weeks.

Chair Naik replied XCAP does not meet again until August 12 so he can keep writing and add to his chapter until then.

XCAP Member Burton asked what the method is for the public to provide comments on the published parts of the draft report?

Chair Naik responded the public can email their comments because there is no time during the public meetings to discuss the drafts. The public is asked to send feedback to the XCAP address, not to a single XCAP Member. Members are not required to respond to individual members of the public.

XCAP Member Cho wanted to make sure everyone understood the deadline. XCAP Member Shen wrote Chapter two which she edited it but she didn't have time to do much work on it. The public is now reading this draft (audio problems)

Chair Naik explained there was difficulty with the audio but thought XCAP Member Cho was asking for a timeline for both the feedback from the public and the deadline for her draft.

XCAP Member Klein responded if a member of the public sends in comments on drafts it should be emailed which Chair Naik outlined and should go back through staff and goes out to all members of the XCAP. If a Member wants to respond to an email from the public, they can do that but there is no obligation to respond to any member of the public.

Chair Naik clarified the next XCAP Meeting will be on August 12, so anything that will be printed and put in the packet and released to XCAP would have to be in by Thursday, August 6.

XCAP Member Shen assumed then that he would still be able to work with Members Templeton and Cho and also talk with Member Klein.

XCAP Member Templeton explained he would have to remove Chair Naik from permission for the document.

XCAP Member Reckdahl reiterated the Group has been working on this for a long time and learned a lot and if this is all put on paper it will be very time consuming to write, but also time consuming to be read. He encouraged everyone to start each section with a high-level summary, as crisp and short as possible, then add details after that.

Chair Naik advised another way to handle this as a group is, it is not unusual to have a detailed report, but also an executive summary, so there could be a high-level short version then have the full report. She encouraged members of the public who read the drafts of the chapters, the best way to send feedback is to send an email to XCAP@CityofPaloAlto.com.

Mr. Kamhi clarified if someone wanted to provide feedback via public comment, the Chair's request is to received those comments in writing if possible.

a. Draft of Chapter 1 provided by XCAP Members

b. Draft of Chapter 2 provided by XCAP Members

c. Draft of Chapter 6 provided by XCAP Members

Public Comment

Roland addressed the best way to address transparency when seeking input from the public, he suggested one or more blogs may be useful. That eliminates the person-to-person dialog and it is open to the general public. It gives the external viewers the opportunity to look at the comments of other people.

Susan wondered if there was a possibility of giving viewer-only access to Google Doc representations of chapters before the meetings they will be presented at. With the viewer-only access, it would be possible to make a copy of the document and insert comments and proposed changes in a way that could be helpful then share it with XCAP. She also felt there was a bias in Ms. Lau's document with the wording used.

Chair Naik indicated in terms of being able to see what other people are emailing in, the XCAP email address, for every meeting there is a summary of the letters received by XCAP. If feedback is sent to XCAP, that feedback will also be printed in that packet. Everything sent to XCAP Members is also included in the meeting packet. Regarding Google Doc, after a conversation with Legal, the problem is that everything has to be facilitated for even folks who don't have technology access. That also constitutes having a serial meeting.

5. Staff Updates

Mr. Kamhi related that the City is looking at doing a blog or multiple blog posts related to the virtual Town Hall.

XCAP Member Klein asked for an update on the Town Hall.

Mr. Kamhi responded the virtual Town Hall is coming together well. He believed the date was set for the 19th or around there, which ties to the dates it will be up and not starting on a weekend or a Monday when there is a Council Meeting. They want to have a tutorial video to be released at the start to help people orient to the virtual Town Hall environment. The plan is to keep it open through Labor Day to give the public time to comment on it.

XCAP Member Carrasco noted some of the solutions from AECOM infringe on the norther section of the alignment and he wondered what the status was of that alignment. That had some geometric impacts on how that section dovetails into Embarcadero and the AECOM solutions. He confirmed this was the Palo Alto crossing that ends up at Embarcadero.

Mr. Kamhi explained he did not have an update on that. The plan was that it would follow this process which is not complete, but also ties into something related to the downtown plan and he didn't know what the timeline was for that.

XCAP Member Carrasco asked if this has to be tied to the downtown plan?

Mr. Kamhi indicated currently the plan is to keep them separate.

Chair Naik encouraged XCAP Member Carrasco to consider that an opportunity as a place to give his thoughts on wherever there might be linkages.

Mr. Kamhi shared that last night the San Francisco Board of Supervisors unanimously approved moving forward with putting in a ballot measure for Caltrain. It has some potentially difficult items that have been amended in the resolution related to government's issues and there is some concern about whether they conform to the original Senate Bill that authorized this ballot measure. It will be progressing pretty quickly in the next several weeks through August 6.

Chair Naik thought it was on the City Council Agenda for August 3 and also on both the Santa Clara County Board of Supervisors and the VTA Board of Supervisors Board of Supervisors meeting for August 6. The deadline is August 7. XCAP will continue with their process no matter what is happening with Caltrain. Caltrain will likely still operate at some point in the future and there will still be these issues.

Mr. Bhatia

6. Adjourn

The meeting adjourned at 4:45 PM.