

Expanded Community Advisory Panel (XCAP)

August 12, 2020, 3:00 PM

Summary – Special Meeting (virtual, through Zoom)

1. Welcome and Roll Call

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

Absent: Nadia Naik

2. Oral Communications

Kathy Jordan stated her opposition to closing Churchill Avenue. She questioned the applicability of discussing recommendations for grade separations in light of the circumstances that have modified the way people are working, commuting and living. Recently several companies announced that they will permit workers to stay working from home indefinitely. The memo from the Chair noted the impetus for grade separations was to increase service and frequency of Caltrain. There is a loss by Caltrain of 95 percent of its ridership, there is less vehicle traffic and congestion and projections for population growth that, based on recent data, no longer hold true. She asked the Working Group to take all this into consideration and share their knowledge, but not make any lasting recommendations.

Ken Joye stated there are layouts for the three under crossings, but there is not a profile drawn for Meadow Drive. The lack of that profile means the proposal cannot be accurately assessed.

Teri Llach favored the closure of Churchill. There were very significant negative aspects to the viaduct, but there are also negative aspects to both closing Churchill and the partial underpass. The negative aspects of the partial underpass really affect the people along the train route in a severe way. The problems with closing Churchill are minor and are less expensive.

Lisa Nissim remarked the train line is an important connection for Palo Alto to San Francisco and points north and south. The Churchill crossing unites all of Palo Alto and requested that not be closed. Closing Churchill would turn Southgate into an island within Palo Alto and limit access to other parts of Palo Alto. One consequence of closing Churchill would be to physically and mentally untether Southgate from its current association with Old Palo Alto and would disconnect Southgate from the entire City of Palo Alto, including schools, libraries, emergency services and City Hall.

Richard Burke lives in the Old Palo Alto neighborhood. He acknowledged the closure of Churchill was believed to be the most cost-effective option and did the best for general transportation across the rail corridor. One element of the partial underpass plan that is concerning is that in the process of building the partial underpass, the intersection is widened both north and south of Alma. This moves the street ten to

twelve feet closer to homes that face Alma. This eliminates the current buffer zone between the northbound traffic lanes and sidewalks for the two blocks north and south of Churchill. This is an arterial, a truck route from San Antonio up Alma and would cause a dangerous circumstance.

David Kennedy remarked on the proposal suggested at the last meeting regarding doing a pilot study by temporarily closing Churchill, to see what happens to the traffic patterns. These are unusual times currently and traffic levels are very different than previously. He wondered if the results of a temporary closure for one or two years could be adjusted to determine what affect that might have. Many feel it will have a much greater affect than traffic models have projected. Also, Kellogg Avenue would be very different if the partial underpass is done to get from the east side to the west side.

Eduardo Llach appreciated all the information and the matrices. He asked how these chapters fit together, so comments could be made on them. From the survey it looked like the partial underpass was favored marginally over closing Churchill. There are very critical differences in results if Churchill is closed versus an underpass or a viaduct. Closing Churchill, based on the data for traffic and the mitigations on Embarcadero and Oregon, plus the various forms of mitigating bicycle traffic, gives a result that is significantly better without affecting people existentially and critically affecting people on either Mariposa or Castilleja or Churchill.

Steve Carlson advised he and several others from Southgate would present the results of a neighborhood survey. No neighborhood is more impacted by a potential change to the Churchill intersection than Southgate, but the majority of the neighborhood has not been directly represented in this process. Knowing there is strong interest in the issue, he helped raise awareness for the Town Hall Meeting scheduled in late February but that meeting was cancelled due the pandemic. Community input is vital to XCAP's role and he hoped to assist in that process by sharing the feedback from the neighborhood. The goal was to reach out to all residents and give them their own voice. In sharing the data, this group hoped to provide XCAP with valuable feedback from the neighborhood, and XCAP finds it helpful as part of their community outreach mission in terms of engagement and useful feedback.

Several public speakers ceded their time to allow Eileen Fagan to present the results of the survey.

Eileen Fagan presented the Southgate survey results. Flyers were distributed to every household, including apartments and posting on Nextdoor. Each respondent was asked to provide their name and address before the survey was sent to ensure participation was from Southgate residents only. That participation was tracked on a zoning map. An email was shared with information that all pointed back to connecting Palo Alto and the work XCAP has done. The results were shared with XCAP. Participation was 59 percent of all households in Southgate. There was strong distribution across the neighborhood. There is a caveat at the bottom which notes that 88 percent of residents close to the intersection responded, but there was no response from eight duplexes near El Camino. The zoning map was used to ensure the respondent addresses were part of Southgate, and to track distribution. There were

138 individual responses from 122 household. She noted there were sixteen responses where two people from the same household responded to the survey. Fifty percent of the double household responses had different opinions. Results of the survey revealed 88 percent of Southgate residents were aware of the proposed changes to the Churchill intersection. Four percent felt uninformed and 96 percent felt at least somewhat informed to very informed on this issue. Addressing the question of being in favor of or against the closure of Churchill, 36 percent were for it, 56 percent were against it and 8 percent were undecided. She noted 27 percent of the comments to this question reference being against the viaduct. When asked to pick a favorite out of the three options, 56 percent chose the partial underpass, 9 percent chose the viaduct, 30 percent chose closing Churchill and 7 percent were undecided. On the next slide, Ms. Fagan called out that when asked, the 30 percent is less than the 36 percent that favored closing Churchill. Six percent of the people who said they were for closure, changed their vote to the partial underpass. There was a clear trend when the analysis was done. Three blocks were driving more than 80 percent of the votes to close Churchill as the favorite option. Alternatively, every block except for Churchill Avenue had votes for the partial underpass. Given that opening Castilleja at Peers Park has been brought up as a traffic mitigation in public comments, 56 percent were against reopening Castilleja. In the last data point, 100 percent chose to stay on the email list. She summarized that participation was very strong at 59 percent and broad based across the entire neighborhood. Fifty-six percent of respondents were against closing Churchill, 36 percent were in favor. Of those in favor, 83 percent were clustered on three blocks in the neighborhood. Only 9 percent favored the viaduct. More than half the neighborhood wanted the partial underpass.

3. Final Traffic Report from Gary Black of Hexagon

Gary Black from Hexagon presented the traffic report. He noted the updates to this traffic report were minor. Some of the incorrect headers were fixed, the pages were numbered. Also, the language was recast so the partial underpass option for Meadow and Charleston included a U-turn at the Alma Village signal as part of the project rather than a variant. There is no new information from the previous report. There are some new images from AECOM in the report, so it is consistent with their latest designs. He shared that he received an email yesterday which questioned the design for the slip ramp at Embarcadero and Alma. That slip ramp now is twenty-four feet wide and currently there is a drawing in the report that showed that slip ramp would be two lanes. The email comment was that having that slip ramp as two lanes would not work for that immediate area. That was double checked and only one lane was needed. Mr. Black didn't know why the drawing showed two lanes, but that correction could be made.

XCAP Member Shen expressed when working on the documents, it would be helpful to record the changes made from the previous documents such as versions.

XCAP Member Burton remarked it would be helpful if the City Staff could create a folder with links to the current versions of all the documents.

Mr. Bhatia explained staff is updating the Connecting Palo Alto website and all the documents will be current to the final accepted reports from XCAP.

XCAP Member Burton suggested another archive called obsolete or some way to have traceability.

Mr. Kamhi related the history of all the prior versions are typically contained in the agenda and items for each XCAP meeting. There will be an area that will have all of the most recent documents.

XCAP Member Reckdahl noted one of the concerns the neighborhood had was induced demand. If the delay at the train tracks is eliminated, will that make the route through Churchill more attractive and could that that studied?

Mr. Black replied induced demands were studied on Churchill and the answer is in a Q&A document in the record. There was an estimate of the induced demand on Churchill with a description of how that was calculated based on how much additional capacity would be available if Churchill was closed.

XCAP Member Reckdahl addressed traffic calming and what could be done to prevent this from becoming a freeway. He asked how the City would handle that? Would they do a traffic survey now, then monitor the traffic for increased speeds or volumes?

Mr. Kamhi answered that was correct. The City would look at volumes and speed and make determinations for what changes would be appropriate.

Mr. Bhatia indicated the traffic calming process requires data collection at different points relating to speed and volumes. Over time and the growth of the City and other changes, there will be changes in traffic volumes and circulation all over Palo Alto at different times. That is how the model updates would project the features. Usually a traffic calming is initiated through a request as a process. The actual construction of the grade separations is not known, but preproject data collection could be done as part of the project. That information could be retained and continued monitoring could be done after the project is completed. That information could be used to determine mitigation for some of the impacts.

XCAP Member Reckdahl asked how difficult that monitoring would be?

Mr. Bhatia reiterated it could be part of the project scope rather than City staffing. It would depend on how far out distance wise the data analysis would go. Some minor data collection would not be a problem. If it calls for evaluating many streets throughout the whole project area, that becomes a bigger scope requiring a bigger budget and more time and effort.

Mr. Kamhi voiced that it is not prohibitively difficult for staff to do it. They could prepare the necessary resources to do that study. This is a regular activity that the Office of Transportation engages in and typically is a combination of staff and using consultants on call. Priority of projects is done through the Council.

XCAP Member Reckdahl advised in the report it was mentioned that bicycles were included in all the analyses and he asked Mr. Black if all the delays due to bicycles were incorporated in the calculations.

Mr. Black replied yes.

XCAP Member Reckdahl asked if the level of service is generic to the intersection and would bikes have the same as cars?

Mr. Black clarified it would be slightly better for bikes for cars, but with the different factors involved, the easiest way to think of it is that the bikes have the same delays as cars.

XCAP Member Reckdahl inquired about what kind of analysis could be done to get better insight on how this impacts bicycles for any of the options?

Mr. Black responded the way to calculate the impact for the bicycles would be to look at the reduced delay the bikes would experience with the improvements, but average delays are not substantial. The main benefit for bikes with all the alternatives is a safety improvement.

XCAP Member Reckdahl asked about street light data for bikes.

Mr. Black advised street light data could be for bicycles, but he didn't know how accurate it would be. Street lights get their data from cell phones. Street light data can identify bikes versus cars based on the speed.

Mr. Kamhi noted a member of staff did research on street light data and how useful it would be for the City. There were significant discrepancies found between tire counts and street light data.

Mr. Black explained street light data could be used to identify a routing pattern, but not useful to identify the number of bikes or cars.

XCAP Member Reckdahl asked how to determine the best place to put bike tunnels from a traffic standpoint?

Mr. Black responded one way is to look at Strava (phonetic) which is software that logs bike rides with data to determine which streets bikes are using.

Mr. Kamhi related that school children are very unlikely to use Strava. The City is working on getting the Strava license which is a useful tool for collecting bicycle data. Another source of data is working through the Safe Routes to School team. They are well connected to what the school bicyclists and pedestrians doing and could help establish what the best routes would be.

XCAP Member Burton asked if there is a policy or guideline for tradeoffs between what might be called improved service for cars versus bicycles, or a minimum standard of service for any class of transportation?

Mr. Kamhi did not believe there was anything that established tradeoffs between them. The goal in the Comp Plan is to provide service for all.

XCAP Member Burton inquired if there was a level of service definition just for bikes or pedestrians as opposed to vehicles as a way of relating levels of service for different modes?

Mr. Black answered there are methodologies for determining levels of service for pedestrians and bikes. These are very dated and intensive and in his experience, is not used very much.

XCAP Member Brail commented on the Strava software and its usefulness. It should not be used as a formal traffic study. He remarked that people have asked a number of times during this whole process, why not just close Churchill for a few days and see what happens to get some data?

Mr. Black responded that different cities, including Palo Alto, have implemented temporary changes in roads before making anything permanent, so it is possible to do that.

Mr. Kamhi encouraged caution against doing any of these temporarily. Trying to close Churchill without the mitigations would likely fail. If this is considered, it should be done with the mitigations, which would take a very large effort.

XCAP Member Brail assumed a closure would have to be accompanied by a traffic study to get reliable data.

XCAP Member Reckdahl remarked that if a street like this is closed, it would take some time for people to discover a good alternative route. This would have to be closed for quite a while to make this a meaningful test.

Mr. Black noted typical tests done in the past for other cities, were for at least three to six months.

Public Comment

Ken Joye responded to the comment that if there was a partial underpass at Meadow or Charleston bicyclists would not have any delay at all and it would be a safety improvement. He pointed out the current design involved some convoluted movements for bicyclists, particularly challenging for those riding cargo bikes. It raised some question about the viability of having all bicyclists move, for example, to the north side of Charleston Avenue. Regarding the traffic report, he asked whether it is the case that Wilkie Way would not be impacted at all? He could not find mention of this in the traffic report.

Drew appreciated the traffic report update and the layout for Meadow and Alma.

Jason remarked on the point of inducement on Churchill. He could not find the Q&A document regarding that. Hexagon has evaluated the inducement onto Embarcadero and Alma in the case of a Churchill closure. Today's discussion was different from what he remembered from a prior meeting.

Rob Levitsky reiterated there are 9,500 cars that were crossing Churchill a year ago. He can you make things better by jamming two-thirds of those cars to Embarcadero and one-third to Oregon. Embarcadero is currently a functioning underpass.

4. XCAP Member Updates and Working Group Updates

Vice Chair Klein noted there have been a number of emails asking what the process is for XCAP's report. First drafts have been received for Chapters one, three, four and six. These are drafts and not the opinions of the full XCAP and have not gone through the editing process. Given what has been received, he thought it looked like the outline of the report needed to be revised. An introduction is needed that sets forth some of the definitions, so those don't have to be repeated in the report, such as the history of the XCAP. Currently there are two different drafts of Chapter 4.

XCAP Member Carrasco inquired about how to collaborate to get more opinions?

Vice Chair Klein noted the placement of the reports on the public agenda resets the Brown Act rules so different people can talk about a chapter than did before. The whole Group cannot talk about this off line. When the draft is completed, it will go to the full Group for comments.

XCAP Member Shen presented an update on Chapter Two. He rewrote it based on Vice Chair Klein's comments but didn't make the submission deadline for this meeting. He asked if it was within Brown Act rules to appoint one person who will go through all the copies and ensure continuity, redevelopment of the outline, repeats of information?

Vice Chair Klein thought that would come at the end of the process, because that person would have to be given the authority to make any of the changes. He and Chair Naik would go through the drafts for editing.

XCAP Member Brail noted he send Vice Chair Klein and Chair Naik a draft of the safety chapter and he is waiting to hear what the next steps might be.

XCAP Member Templeton asked if there was conversation at a previous meeting about staff pulling everything together?

Vice Chair Klein related the guiding principles when XCAP was formed said staff would be working on the report and staff said no. Sarah Wilson said she could do some proofreading when nearing the end.

XCAP Member Templeton thought staff could pull everything together into a cohesive document.

Mr. Kamhi advised this had been mentioned at previous meetings. Staff will help as much as possible, making sure there are no grammatical or spelling issues. They can pull the report together and provide any resources possible. The Office of Transportation can help with this.

XCAP Member Carrasco asked if staff could send XCAP Member Burton a copy of the Chapter four draft that was not his?

Vice Chair Klein replied it is attached to the July 20 agenda.

XCAP Member Burton indicated that went back to his point of having a central repository for all current documents.

Vice Chair Klein moved on to the comment about the difficulty of meetings starting at 3:00. It was suggested to start the start time back to 4:00.

XCAP Member Shen indicated that would be helpful.

XCAP Member Templeton noted PTC starts on some Wednesdays at 6:00.

Mr. Kamhi also noted Transportation staff has many PTC meetings they will be involved in coming up.

XCAP Member Cho preferred to have meetings start at 4:00 or 5:00.

XCAP Member Templeton thought the PTC meetings were the second and last Wednesday's of the month.

Vice Chair Klein asked if everyone was comfortable starting at 4:00 on the first and third Wednesdays?

All replied yes.

Vice Chair Klein advised next week is the third Wednesday and is everyone agreed to start at 4:00 next Wednesday.

All replied yes.

Public Comment

5. Staff Updates including Update on Virtual Town Hall Meeting

Mr. Bhatia advised staff is preparing to launch the Town Hall for community outreach. This will be the week of August 17 and launching dates will be August 18 and 19. The virtual Town Hall will have pictures that provide a good overall view of the different grade separation locations. There will be a centerpiece where all the layouts would be located. A host will do the introduction and a City introduction video explaining how to utilize the website. There will be a feedback pole to bring in information and question the visitors about their experience and preferences on the alternatives. There will be questions about each alternative as well as general questions about the whole project itself. Exhibit room, documentation and links will be ways to provide information in this virtual room environment. There will be a center board where all the grade separation locations will be displayed with pointers on the different views and 360 videos. On there screen there will be different renderings, fact sheets, all animations for the different alternatives. Clicking on an alternative will provide more detailed information about the actual renderings, layouts, fact sheets, matrices and all the

study reports. In the COVID-19 environment, face-to-face meetings are not allowed. This presentation was set up as close as possible to a conference room environment that people are used to.

XCAP Member Burton inquired about the devices necessary to view these displays productively and clearly.

Mr. Kamhi added that Town Hall meetings in the past have been on a single night during a specific time. This display will be available for about three weeks. That gives everyone the option to access it at any time. It will be a holding place for all the information plus providing narration, talk throughs of the construction staging and animations which should provide a good benefit to people not familiar with the project. It will help people who are familiar with their neighborhood to orient themselves to the project. There are also plans for three different live sessions throughout this. One will be a tutorial video with AECOM staff, then two separate meetings that will answer questions that came up during the process. This will work on web-connected devices, computers, tablets and cell phones, and it has been tested down to 3G speed. Limitations such as minimum requirements will be provided.

XCAP Member Burton asked if there could be a link to the repository of information through this virtual Town Hall?

Mr. Bhatia responded that all the links and documents will be available on the virtual Town Hall site and will also reference back to the Connecting Palo Alto website which will also have all the information.

XCAP Member Templeton inquired if there are alternatives for those who cannot access the virtual Town Hall, such as the ability for screen readers to access it or those who don't have computers or a smart phone?

Mr. Bhatia replied those are the limitations of the virtual environment.

Mr. Kamhi added there is software for visually impaired which can read documents. There would be a location on Connecting Palo Alto that housed all the documents used in this virtual Town Hall so anyone who can't access the virtual Town Hall can go to that site to get the information. There will be call-in options for the three meetings and video which will have a description and background on the project which will all be audio.

XCAP Member Shen, as a user experience designer, he expressed the need to appreciate what the medium can support and cautioned that during the Town Hall, it may slow down tremendously. He also urged staff to provide an alternative, a page of what is shown but with links one at a time because this may be overwhelming for some people.

Mr. Kamhi responded there will be a place where all the documents are listed, which will be on the Connecting Palo Alto website. The advantage of the virtual Town Hall is that anyone can go to the site anytime in the three weeks it is held. This seems to be the best way to move forward with a Town Hall meeting in the COVID environment. It is hoped this will reach a bigger audience than with a regular Town Hall.

Vice Chair Klein asked for clarification about when this will go live.

Mr. Kamhi answered it is scheduled to go live on Wednesday, August 19, time unknown at this time.

Vice Chair Klein inquired about how the public will know about this virtual Town Hall.

Mr. Bhatia replied the Communications Department is working on that, looking at social media, the City's website, mailing lists.

Mr. Kamhi reiterated this meeting is not just occurring on one night, but will be open for three weeks. The Communications Officer felt too much lead time would not be appropriate for this type of project and has a planned schedule to release the information.

Vice Chair Klein indicated at the bottom of the screen it said polling. What was that for?

Mr. Kamhi explained the whole bottom of the screen will be changed. There will be something that will be an option for feedback, which will be a survey and an option for feedback.

Public Comment

Ken related when he has attended Town Hall meetings in the past, some of the input he provided was formed by what other people attending have said or asked. He wondered if the virtual Town Hall would allow him to see what other people have commented on?

Karen was interested in the survey or polling portion of the virtual Town Hall and how it will be designed. Who is designing this survey and will it take into account what XCAP has talked about, where people live, bike riders, etc.? Will the survey require an address from respondents?

Mr. Kamhi responded as follows. Regarding Ken's question, the intention of having two live meetings is to address questions received during the process. The first is scheduled for August 27, the second September 3. In answer to the second question, the survey and feedback forms were designed in a similar fashion to what was done at the previous Town Halls, but this is designed to collect feedback after each alternative is looked at by anyone. At the end there will be a feedback location which will give more feedback. Specific addresses will not be asked for, but the neighborhood respondent live in will be asked for.

Vice Chair Klein remarked the City policy is not to require people to give their addresses when testifying before the City Council.

Mr. Kamhi related they typically get more information when they ask for neighborhoods rather than a specific street address.

6. Adjourn

The meeting adjourned at 5:03 P.M.