

Expanded Community Advisory Panel (XCAP)
October 14, 2020, 3:30 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, Nadia Naik, Keith Reckdahl, David Shen, Cari Templeton

Absent:

2. Staff Updates

Philip Kamhi, Chief Transportation Official explained Mr. Bhatia had some additional information regarding other trench projects, but he noted looking at a trench from just the length is not a fair comparison. There are complexities to each project that make the costs not comparable. The slides from Mr. Bhatia show just a quick staff look at how the projects would be compared and they are not cost comparable.

Ripon Bhatia, Senior Engineer, had slides comparing several other trench projects. He advised each project is unique in its own way regarding design and construction elements. He presented information on slides for the Carlsbad Trench Project.

Mr. Kamhi also reported the Carlsbad project was still in an early phase of development and the current estimate is about \$375 to 395 million. He presented slides showing the areas of the Carlsbad trench and the Palo Alto trench.

XCAP Member Burton asked Mr. Kamhi if the soil conditions had been compared?

Mr. Bhatia replied there was a minimal soil study done on our project because this is a preliminary plan.

Mr. Kamhi felt going into too much depth regarding these comparisons was not merited.

XCAP Member Burton speculated that AECOM included significant allowances for the need to stabilize the soil in Palo Alto.

XCAP Member Reckdahl agreed there are differences in these projects, but he did not know how the differences could be so great that it would triple the cost.

Mr. Kamhi reiterated there are extremely significant differences that would lead to an extremely significant cost estimate.

Chair Naik inquired if the Carlsbad shoofly tracks had to be at the same operating speeds. Unique to Caltrain is that they have to do regular operations on the shoofly tracks and she wondered if that changed anything.

Mr. Bhatia answered Caltrain did say the shoofly tracks did not have to meet the same standards as the permanent tracks, but nothing about speed. Mr. Bhatia also responded to a question at the last meeting about the \$35 million in flagging costs. AECOM explained that it was based on the estimates given to them by Caltrain, which is about 7 percent of the estimated construction cost for projects between \$250 million to \$1 billion. They had questioned Caltrain about getting better estimates or breakdowns, and had received no response yet.

3. Oral Communications

Kathy Jordan added information to the data points previously presented to XCAP. There was an article on CNBC about how San Francisco's drop box announced on Tuesday that it will make remote work its standard practice even after the pandemic ends. This is in addition to similar policies announced by other companies. This will have an impact on the work XCAP is doing and any potential work that may occur at these grade separations. This continues some of the trends that California and the country have been following, particularly regarding remote work. Remote work prior to COVID had surpassed public transit use in the United States.

Phone caller Roland commented on the Staff Report that currently the Fresno trench is under construction. The cost is \$1 billion for one mile of trench. Currently, the VTA will be building an extension to the light rail tunnel at Deridon (phonetic) exactly as what he proposed for Palo Alto last year. No temporary shoofly tracks because there is no room for them. Regarding passing tracks (interruption) a full-blown high-speed rail station and will use the existing passing tracks at the regular junction. Looking carefully at the Caltrain engineering standards, there is nothing like a four-track grade crossing. If Caltrain or anyone else wants to put four tracks through Palo Alto, they will have to pay for it, not the residents of Palo Alto.

Keri Wagner strongly recommended not putting a raised structure through the center of Palo Alto. It would divide the City. Other cities that had raised structures are removing them.

Renee Hofer lives on Park Boulevard between Meadow and Charleston. She strongly opposed the elevated option and many in her neighbors feel the same. She and her husband have been very active in their community. She has heard from these meetings that it will be cheaper and more expeditious to do the elevated alternative and she feels the rest of the City should be taking care of those living on the train tracks. She also heard residents should be grateful that there will be less noise and that is insulting.

4. XCAP Member Updates and Working Group Updates

Chair Naik promised a full edited version of Member Burton's chapter back to him. She advised him to follow the matrix regarding the engineering things. Does every paragraph need a footnote or noting these are the recommendations of XCAP?

XCAP Member Brail noted about half of Chapter Six, the safety chapter, is his distillation of Pat Lao's original safety report which made specific recommendations.

XCAP Member Burton noted Ms. Lao's written document is the source.

XCAP Member Brail replied that document is in the public and he summarized it and took out some of her opinions on different alternatives.

Chair Naik clarified that section is somewhat different from the rest of the report because it is really suggestions generally, not in detail at this level of design work. Probably citing a specific page in the document would be okay.

5. Continue Deliberations – Meadow/Charleston

Public Comment

William Robinson referred to Jefferson in Redwood City, which is an underpass and remarked he has never seen a cyclist and rarely a pedestrian on the separated path provided for that purpose. There are signals at both ends of the grade and there are problems with visibility because of the grade change, making it unsafe. Therefore, he discouraged underpasses for Meadow and Charleston. Hybrid are used in San Carlos. The berm used for the hybrid separates the community. During construction, El Camino was not compromised because there was enough room for the shoofly. He does not favor hybrids. He supports his neighbors regarding the trench, which he feels is the best. His second best would be the viaduct because significant community visibility will be maintained at ground level. Trees can be planted in the old track way adding canopy and noise control. No matter how rail is separated from the road, the community will continue to have noisy air traffic overhead and truck traffic next door. If a train travels on the viaduct in his neighborhood only a quickly passing whoosh will be heard.

XCAP Member Comments

Chair Naik shared a graphic she did based on the discussion from the last meeting which showed Members were quite spread out in their choices. She asked how set Member were in their first and second choices. This Group committed towards trying to work towards a consensus and there is no clear consensus.

XCAP Member Brail indicated he has been increasingly advocating for a combination hybrid underpass. His worry about the underpass is the property takings, especially the apartment building. There are property takings in both Charleston and Meadow, but more in Meadow. There are fewer turning movements at Meadow which send cars into surrounding neighborhoods. If there was a hybrid at Meadow and the underpass at Charleston, the amount of the neighborhood that is subjected to elevated rail is limited to the train going up to Meadow then down again, which is a much smaller number of people impacted by elevated rail. There will still be property impacts at Charleston, but to a much less degree. He cannot support the underpass design as it is with all the property takings and that bothers him because he feels like the underpass is the only compromise between the high level of emotion about not wanting elevated rail and the high cost of the trench. He asked if anyone was willing to think about a hybrid/hybrid option?

XCAP Member Burton related that what troubles him about property taking is fair market value in Palo Alto doesn't equal the ability to buy comparable housing in Palo Alto. He imagined a very rough number for a house in Charleston/Meadow would be about \$2.5 to 3 million. Fair market value would have to be replacement value which could be upwards of \$5 million, but the law is not set up for that.

XCAP Member Brail agreed and that was why he thought of his proposal, with which there was less property impact.

XCAP Member Burton noted that still sacrificed a number of people.

Chair Naik indicated her support for the underpass was contingent upon the fact that she didn't believe that alternative had received the same number of iterations as the other alternatives. The design that was proposed for Meadow by the consultants was not the originally proposed design. The location of the most impacts on Meadow where the apartment is was the result of a roundabout concept not being done, which was originally considered. She supports that alternative because she believes the design modifications can be made to reduce property acquisition, which should be the number one goal. The number two goal would be to respond to the bike and pedestrian concerns that have been brought up in the designs shown. The default is the hybrid. She believed if the Group did not decide on anything specific, probably a hybrid is where it ends up. The underpass is not raising the rail and is not lowering the rail, but keeping it where it is and trying to make the best out of a terrible situation. The current design is not a fair assessment because it had not been fully reviewed. When COVID hit, there was an internal discussion with Staff and a decision was made that at least the work done to date needed to be released. But the level of design is not what any Members wanted and not all concerns were addressed.

XCAP Member Brail responded that the bicyclists have given the Group very good advice and they are not happy with the underpass. He thought a better job could be done on the pedestrian and bicycle aspects of the underpass. He did not see any way a partial underpass could be built that would not have some property impacts and he would like to reduce that.

XCAP Member Carrasco was also worried about property takings, both the emotional and financial aspects. Regarding the underpass, he agreed with Chair Naik and he feels there is tremendous opportunity for the underpass, but it needs a lot more work. He thought a mixed hybrid option might work.

XCAP Member clarified he meant a hybrid at Meadow and an underpass at Charleston. He would like this to be a conversation about prioritizing bikes and pedestrians over cars.

XCAP Member Carrasco confirmed he meant a hybrid with Elizabeth Alexis' (phonetic) version because of the circulation and ease of construction compared with the full underpass or the present hybrid.

XCAP Member Templeton felt she and Chair Naik were in agreement on the underpass needing more study and she felt this was worth more investigation. She did not know how to push for that given the budget situation, but felt it would be a disservice to

residents to not get more information about that option. There is a continued item about coming to a recommendation. Is that the goal, does there have to be a choice, or can XCAP say here's what needs to happen next?

Chair Naik clarified the recommendation to Council is for further study. This Group is trying to prioritize and reduce the number of alternatives to move forward on, one, two or three. Her concern about the hybrid is most of the time the video simply showed an intersection showing the space underneath. A hybrid is a 15-foot wall. Her second choice was a viaduct because she was not comfortable with a wall. With a hybrid, the bikes and pedestrians have to go down. In the underpass alternative, the bikes and pedestrians are completely grade separated from the train at Alma. If her choice is between a hybrid and a viaduct, she feels strongly she would like to keep the bikes and pedestrians as flat as possible. The hybrid is five feet down and fifteen feet up.

XCAP Member Carrasco's first choice was the viaduct. The first reason is that it scares him to be able to build anything else in the time of gridlock. There isn't enough information about where traffic will go during gridlock. This will be irritating for many people. He viaduct, like the underpass, has not been explored well. The viaduct is far away from houses. There is 120 feet of dimension, Alma's right-of-way and the fences. The viaduct is 48 feet. The shoofly tracks can be placed one on the existing track and one close to the fences. The viaduct then is about 85 to 90 feet away from the fences, which is far enough away not to be seen with a 15 to 20-foot-high tree. He did not think the visual issue was as important as people think with no picture. It can be built quickly without closing Alma or Churchill for more than three to four months. The bikes and pedestrians stay on grade which is important.

XCAP Member Shen expressed there are many unknowns. Ideas are being thrown out, but it seems this Group is unwilling to put a vote on one alternative. He advocated the Group take a step back and stop talking about the options themselves. At this point, the Group needs to take what is known and discuss stack ranking the alternatives. Finish this discussion and work towards the end.

XCAP Member Cho was against the viaduct and in two years she and Member Carrasco have not changed their minds. Nothing more can be said to convince people that a viaduct is okay? She respected Mr. Carrasco's opinion because he has a lot of experience, but why do the residents of those neighborhoods have to suffer because of the ridership of Caltrain?

XCAP Member Carrasco felt people would be much more disgusted with the construction time and gridlock.

XCAP Member Cho felt no matter what the best solution is, if residents don't want it, what good is it?

XCAP Member Brail suggested asking if people wanted a fifty-foot structure behind their house or a six or seven-year construction project? He wanted a decision made on complete information.

Chair Naik related XCAP Members have received a very large number of emails over the last few days about the underpass and the viaduct. The challenge for this Group is to make suggestions based on the information they have received. With the trench design, Caltrain would have to say that Palo Alto would have to show that its design does not preclude four tracks and that information is not available. Even if that is what the community wanted, Caltrain has the right to say no.

XCAP Member Templeton asked if Caltrain had enough right-of-way for four tracks in Palo Alto?

Chair Naik answered definitely in South Palo Alto, it would be a very close fit at Churchill.

XCAP Member Klein agreed that there will not be a majority vote or consensus on a specific alternative and present those findings to Council. He addressed the public, XCAP understands they don't like either of the raised structures, which leaves the trench. Everyone needs to be reminded there is a cost to everything. There are only two sources of money, Palo Alto or an external source. Regarding the trench, the external sources will question spending a lot of extra money when other communities have done okay with the hybrid? They may offer as much money as the hybrid would cost, and Palo Alto will have to cover the rest. The most likely way to finance this is a bond issue. The bond issue in 2008 was for \$76 million. For each \$100,000 of property assessment, the cost to a homeowner was \$28.74. For a \$2 million assessment, the bond cost would be (interruption). Using AECOM's estimate for the trench of \$450 million that would cost the homeowner with a \$2 million property assessment \$3404 a year. How do people in South Palo Alto think they will persuade residents in other parts of the City to lay out that \$3404 a year for thirty years? The bond issue requires a two-thirds vote to pass. If people feel that some type of underpass might work with more study, that should be recommended to the Council. He did not believe he has heard that, aside from Member Brail's idea today. He thought the Group should say there is a difference of opinion and go with that in the report.

XCAP Member Burton noted no one had done the calculation Member Klein just provided within the XCAP. He asked if that could be documented in such a way that he could include that in the findings?

Chair Naik replied to Member Klein's remarks. There were a number of people pushing for a proposed business tax last year. One of the alternatives included having a per square foot charge of \$.20 per square foot. What she recalled was \$.20 per square foot depending on how the size of the buildings would produce about \$20 to 40 million a year. Part of that proposal was putting money towards grade separations and toward building affordable housing. That could be a tax measure lasting thirty years. She disputed Member Klein's remarks that either a bond is done or ask for Federal, State or local money and that is not necessarily true. Palo Alto does not have a business tax to pay for transportation issues. That could pass the voters and is a potential source of revenue. Given the pandemic and the economic conditions so that probably will not happen now. Even if there is an economic recovery, this might still be an alternative that could potentially be on the table. The Stanford General Use Permit (GUP) was pulled. One of the things advocated was that Stanford, as basically

a nonprofit almost municipality that operates next to Palo Alto also participate with grade separation. There is about \$350 million in Measure B money that could be combined with a potential business tax and the question of the County having Stanford put up some money because they depend on Caltrain to not go over their traffic numbers. She was not comfortable listing any financial items.

XCAP Member Cho encouraged getting rid of the viaduct because residents did not want that and get rid of the trench because it is too expensive. If there anything left?

Chair Naik noted Member Klein said he did not see any other designs that would fix the problems at Meadow. She remarked the original design proposed by Elizabeth included having another roundabout type of alternative at Meadow, but the consultants did not draw that picture. In the what else is missing category is having a design that matched the one at Charleston.

XCAP Member Burton indicated Meadow was considerably narrower than Charleston so there would probably be more property takings than at Charleston.

XCAP Member related that Elizabeth's original design of having a U-turn as opposed to a traffic circle might work there.

XCAP Member Burton reported there is also the issue of JLS, which would be very close to whatever traffic device proposed and the impact on school traffic would have to be studied.

Chair Naik indicated Member Klein may not be familiar with some of the other potential design alternatives because they did not get much of a public airing.

XCAP Member Brail reported some emails suggested closing Meadow and build the underpass at Charleston. The disadvantage of closing Meadow is that it would send traffic to other neighborhoods but those are the neighborhoods that don't want an elevated train.

Chair Naik advised that the consultant said from a circulation perspective, Meadow could not be closed.

Mr. Kamhi remarked he heard a comment earlier that nobody from the public liked the hybrid option. He called XCAP's attention to the Town Hall Report shared last week. On page 10, when looking at Charleston/Meadow, the hybrid was actually the alternative that received the most positive feedback of all the alternatives followed by the trench and underpass and the tunnel was not far behind those. The viaduct received the least positive response.

Chair Naik acknowledged fiscal impacts cannot be ignored and in light of the economic downturn and pandemic, some of the numbers look very scary. She remarked she was hearing from the Group that it seemed they could not come to an agreement. She suggested taking a break with no meeting next week and begin to write, what is it that has been said about all the alternatives and set about getting a version out to make sure everything is captured about each alternative that is relevant.

XCAP Members Brail and Carrasco agreed with that.

XCAP Member Shen asked if any disclosure was needed about where the Group Members are before working on that?

Chair Naik brought up her screen again.

XCAP Member Brail responded the viaduct is his first choice, based on many of the arguments made by Member Carrasco. He feels the underpass has more potential and he would make that his second choice. He is concerned about the cost of both alternatives. If an underpass was possible with very little property impacts, he would feel better about that.

XCAP Member Shen offered a further researched underpass would be his second choice.

XCAP Member Templeton replied if this is not a vote but listing which alternatives interest her the most, she felt the underpass had the most promise and hoped the Council could be persuaded to invest a little more in understanding what it could be. She is very familiar with these crossings and she understands the opposition to the viaduct. She asked if these remarks are saying this is the recommendation or indicating where more research is needed.

Chair Naik replied this is recommending more research dollars because the Group could not agree on a specific design.

XCAP Member Klein advised the Council's charge to XCAP was to recommend to them the preferred alternative.

XCAP Member Templeton did not think the Group had the ability to choose the best alternative with the information available. There is the obligation to recommend but there is lack of information.

Chair Naik asked how many would be more comfortable saying the Group can't make a choice and full stop, then offer the pros and cons of all the alternatives. This is a discussion about the preferred alternatives the Group Members have, but much more information is needed before most Member would feel comfortable with a definitive choice.

XCAP Member Templeton felt the Meadow/Charleston alternatives did not receive the same amount of vetting as Churchill but XCAP needs to conclude its work at some point, but how do these two issues get reconciled?

XCAP Member Burton believed this Group will never get all the information it wants, but it does have to make a recommendation to Council. He feels with more study, a better job could be done on the underpass in terms of acceptability, cost management and possibly a better way to handle property takings than with the trench. He did not believe the AECOM estimates for the trench could be cut by even 50 percent. His second choice based on speculation would be the underpass.

Chair Naik offered an abstain category, which is undecided.

XCAP Member Burton responded that circumstances allowed Members to abstain.

Chair Naik heard Council Member say is, the world changed with the pandemic. She didn't believe anyone would fault XCAP for spending so much time on this and not come to a decision.

XCAP Member Burton did not feel the pandemic really affected the construction costs, property takings or turning motions that are physically feasible.

Chair Naik reiterated the pandemic impacted the Group's ability to do a better discussion of the underpass, so spend the time needed on South Palo Alto and to have the Town Halls and community discussions.

XCAP Member Burton asked about telling the Council XCAP is really uncertain and more money is needed to study this alternative before being more definitive with Council? Would they oppose giving the Group a little more money to study this versus all the unknowns.

XCAP Member Templeton understands the need to come to a conclusion. Meeting weekly and still needing more information is frustrating. If necessary, her second choice might be no build for Meadow, not Charleston. She would like more discussion about a different treatment for Meadow versus Charleston.

XCAP Member Brail felt the underpass was the second choice and he would support asking Council for the means to study this further.

XCAP Member Templeton asked, regarding the abstain category could be changed to "can't decide with current information"?

XCAP Member Shen suggested the Group needs to address Council's mission to the Group, which was please give them a recommendation. In that case, the vote might be "sorry, Council, we can't decide because there is insufficient information available". Once that is established as a Group, then the Group can decide what to offer other than recommended alternatives.

XCAP Member Reckdahl noted at the last Council meeting, they were not adamant the XCAP give a recommendation. There was more interest in pros and cons. The Council's decision will depend on Caltrain's study. He indicated his two choices were the trench with more study, and the underpass. The problem with the underpass is there is not enough land, so it could be functional but not luxurious.

XCAP Member Cho agreed with Member Shen.

XCAP Member Carrasco noted this Group has come a long way and accumulated a lot of information, but it is only about 60 percent of what is needed. The choices have been narrowed down to three to four. He felt a little more money was needed to be sure what is planned and presented to the residents of the City, so they get a better idea of what is proposed. The underpass, the viaduct, the hybrid and the costs of the

trench and others are good ones to study at the next level. His choice would be can't decide with current information.

XCAP Member Cho asked Member Reckdahl if the current cost for the trench is accurate, would he still support that?

XCAP Member replied by asking what are the two things heard most from the community? They are no elevated tracks behind houses and no property acquisitions. The trench fixes both of those, so for him the trench is the winner based on that. The cost makes that a difficult choice but the actual cost may be lower than the estimate.

XCAP Member Cho felt there was a danger of eliminating an option based solely on cost.

XCAP Member Reckdahl continued if the cost of the trench came down half, then it is in the same ballpark as the viaduct, that makes the choice of the trench much easier.

XCAP Member Carrasco valued what Member Klein said. It is unrealistic to think the City can tax itself to that extent, so cost is a big issue. That is why he did not like the tunnel. He agreed with looking at the costs of the trench in more detail, but the costs may also come down across the board, but the relative costs will probably not change much.

XCAP Member Reckdahl believed the trench costs could come down more than the others. He did not feel the hybrid costs could come down much at all.

XCAP Member Carrasco responded another look at the cost studies is important.

Chair Naik advised there will probably be a section in the report that lists things that need more information.

XCAP Member Cho changed her vote to "cannot decide" because she has decided she did not want the viaduct.

XCAP Member Reckdahl asked for clarification about this vote, can't decide what the favorite is?

Chair Naik answered, the Group cannot give a recommendation to Council.

XCAP Member Shen clarified, Council gave XCAP the mission to recommend options at every intersection and the Group needs to figure out how to respond to that given conditions. His proposal is, the response should be, and vote on, "sorry Council, we cannot decide with the current information". Once that is clear, then the decision about what to include in the report can be made.

XCAP Member Klein advised the ground rules say a decision can be made only by a two-thirds vote.

Chair Naik asked Members Burton and Brail for their vote.

XCAP Member Brail responded if a decision was necessary, he would decide, but he feels more information is needed, especially the underpass, so he is in the "can't decide" column.

XCAP Member Burton also is in the "can't decide" column.

Chair Naik asked for a motion.

XCAP Member's motion is, in response to the Council's directive that XCAP recommend alternatives for this intersection, the Group's response should be "we cannot decide with the current information"

XCAP Member Burton seconded the motion.

XCAP Member Brail voted yes.

XCAP Member Burton voted yes.

XCAP Member Shen voted yes.

XCAP Member Carrasco voted yes.

XCAP Member Cho voted no.

XCAP Member Klein voted no.

XCAP Member Reckdahl voted yes.

XCAP Member Templeton voted yes.

Chair Naik voted yes.

The motion passed 7-2.

Chair Naik suggested the group who voted similarly on their choices, such as the three who were most in favor of hybrid, Members Burton, Shen and Klein, might write something for the report that described their feelings about it, leave as is, more information is needed, etc. The four Members interested in the viaduct could write their feelings about that. Members Reckdahl and Cho could prepare the section about the trench discussion. For the underpass, she asked if there were any volunteers who would like to work on writing more about what more information is needed for that option? She will work on that.

XCAP Members Burton and Brail agreed to help with the underpass work.

XCAP Member Klein felt the Members who had the options as their first choice should to the work on them.

Chair Naik agreed. The groups of Members writing opinions on the options changed to Chair Naik and Member Templeton would do the underpass, Members Carrasco and Brail would do the viaduct, Members Reckdahl and Cho would work on the trench and

Members Burton, Klein and Shen for the hybrid. She then proposed skipping the meeting next week so Members can write. That means anything posted for the October 28 meeting needs to be turned in to Sarah Wilson by noon, Thursday, October 22. She also explained November 11 is Veteran's Day holiday and asked if a meeting Tuesday, November 10 would work. November 25 is the day before Thanksgiving, so possibly a Tuesday meeting that week.

XCAP Member Burton asked about distributing his Chapter 4 when it is completed.

Chair Naik advised it will have to go through Sarah to be distributed.

XCAP Member Cho asked for a format or template to make it easier for Council to read.

Chair Naik suggested starting with free form, and as each Group's work is reviewed that may lead to some kind of format. Member Templeton's matrix could be used or the matrix from the consultant. She then encouraged everyone to read Member Burton's Chapter 4, then add what he hasn't captured. She also advised the public to check the Final Chapter Report Tracker and Feedback Tracker links on the agenda to see a table that shows the latest chapter the Group is working on.

6. Adjourn

The meeting adjourned at 5:20 pm