



STAFF REPORT

City Council

Meeting Date:

5/23/2017

Staff Report Number:

17-115-CC

Informational Item:

Update on the Middle Avenue Pedestrian & Bicycle Rail Crossing Study

Recommendation

This is an informational item and does not require Council action.

Policy Issues

The project is consistent with policies stated in the 2016 General Plan Circulation Element. These policies seek to maintain a safe, efficient, attractive, user-friendly circulation system that promotes a healthy, safe, and active community and quality of life throughout Menlo Park and is included in the City Council's 2017 Work Plan (No. 51).

Background

On November 10, 2015, the San Mateo County Transportation Authority (TA) issued a call for projects for the Measure A Pedestrian and Bicycle Program. In response to the call for projects, the City of Menlo Park (City) requested \$490,000 in Measure A funds with a 30 percent local match of \$210,000 for the Project. The application for the project was approved by City Council on December 15, 2015. On July 20, 2016, the TA programmed funds for the Project from the Measure A Grade Pedestrian and Bicycle Program for the Project.

The Project was included in the City's Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) for Fiscal Year (FY) 2016-17. Prior to this phase of the project, a location study was conducted by the City and after considering numerous factors, including feedback from community meetings and the consultant retained on the project, proximity to desirable destinations, relative costs, projected usage by the community, convenience and accessibility, the Middle Avenue location was selected as the crossing location and was included as part of the El Camino Real and Downtown Specific Plan.

As identified in the El Camino Real and Downtown Specific Plan, the Project would be constructed adjacent to the Stanford University property along El Camino Real and is dependent on their property being redeveloped. Stanford University has submitted an application to redevelop its property Middle Plaza, at 500 El Camino Real, with a focal point being a publicly accessible plaza at Middle Avenue. An important community feature of the Middle Plaza will be its integration with the pedestrian promenade along El Camino Real and its role as a linking element to the crossing of the Caltrain railroad tracks. Stanford University has also agreed to make a significant contribution towards construction of the crossing.

On March 14, 2017, the City Council authorized the City Manager to enter into an agreement with AECOM for services related to the Middle Avenue Pedestrian & Bicycle Crossing Study (Project). The agreement was executed on April 6, 2017. The Project is critical to provide greater east-west connectivity, as the Caltrain railroad tracks are both a real and perceived barrier. This new crossing would improve connectivity

for neighborhoods on both sides of the Caltrain tracks with City amenities, and access to public transit and downtown Menlo Park. It would encourage the use of alternative modes of transportation and contribute to a healthier Menlo Park.

The consultant's scope of work for this Project phase consists of project management and coordination; data collection and analysis with preparation of an existing conditions report; community engagement; identification and development of grade separation conceptual designs; evaluation of grade separation conceptual designs and selection of preferred alternative; environmental clearance and documentation; 30 percent design documents; and final project report. The community engagement process includes three public outreach meetings, one Complete Streets commission meeting, one City Council meeting for selection of crossing alternative, three-dimensional graphic renderings, and extensive communications with the various stakeholders.

Analysis

The project's first community meeting was held on May 4th, 2017. Community members were able to learn more about the project, obtain answers to their questions, choose their preferred crossing type (overcrossing or undercrossing), and provide their input before the engineering design begins. Outreach for the meeting included: postcard mailers (6,000+), Nextdoor posts, City Council Weekly Digest article, changeable message board notification, directional posters, and emails to the Menlo Park School District and Menlo Park Chamber of Commerce. There were approximately 50 community members, including five Complete Streets Commissioners and two City Council members in attendance. The key outcomes of the meeting included:

- Majority of the community members expressed support for the undercrossing, with two attendees in support for an overcrossing.
- Many community members expressed concerns about access to and from the Middle Crossing, citing the lack of bicycle facilities along Middle Avenue between University Ave and El Camino Real and existing conditions at the Middle Avenue and El Camino Real intersection which make it difficult for pedestrians and bicyclists to cross El Camino Real.
- Multiple community members expressed interest in changing the location from Middle Avenue to Cambridge Avenue, a location previously evaluated as part of the location study.

The next steps in the project include developing crossing alternatives based on design constraints (right-of-way, utility and geotechnical conflicts, access requirements, etc.) and community feedback. Given that there was little support for an overcrossing, staff would move forward with continued evaluation of undercrossing options. At this time, the project scope of work does not include evaluation of alternative crossing locations, such as Cambridge Avenue. It should be noted that grant funding for the Project was awarded based on an application and scope of work specific to the Middle Avenue Crossing location, and changing the location also would require approval by funding partners and a change in the funding agreement for the Project.

In addition, the project scope of work includes the evaluation of access connections to the Middle Crossing. The consultant will be developing drawings for pedestrian and bicycle crossing safety improvements on Alma Street and at the El Camino Real & Middle Avenue intersection including integration of the future Middle Plaza. To further improve east-west connectivity, staff will also be evaluating potential Class II (Bike Lanes) and Class III (Bike Route) bike facilities along Middle Avenue, and will complete community outreach through the Project community meetings. As identified in the El Camino Real and Downtown Specific Plan, the installation of Class II (Bike Lane) facility would require removal of on-street parking from at least one side of the street.

The second community meeting will be held in Fall 2017, and the main focus will be to present crossing alternatives, potential crossing connection improvements and obtain community input. Following the second community meeting, staff would present the refined alternatives to the Complete Streets Commission. Crossing alternatives will be revised based on community feedback and will be brought forward to the City Council for selection of a preferred crossing alternative to advance to the environmental and design phases.

Key milestones are summarized below:

Key Project Milestones	
Second Community Meeting	Fall 2017
Complete Streets Commission Meeting	Fall 2017
Preferred Crossing Alternative Selection by City Council	Late 2017/Early 2018
Third Community Meeting	Spring 2018
Project Completion (i.e., alternative selection, 30% design, environmental clearance and final project report)	Summer 2018

Public Notice

Public Notification was achieved by posting the agenda, with the agenda items being listed, at least 72 hours prior to the meeting.

Attachments

None

Report prepared by:

Octavio Duran Jr., Assistant Engineer

Report reviewed by:

Kristiann Choy, Senior Transportation Engineer

THIS PAGE INTENTIONALLY LEFT BLANK