Ravenswood Avenue Railroad Crossing Project

Summary for Community Meeting #2

October 4, 2016

MENLO PARK
RAILROAD CROSSING

AECOM

apex STRATEGIES

Introduction

The City of Menlo Park hosted a community meeting on Tuesday October 4th, 2016, from 6:30-8:30 p.m. to discuss the proposed railroad grade separation project at Ravenswood Avenue. The meeting was held in the Menlo Church Social Hall, 700B Chestnut Street in Menlo Park. Twenty-five community members attended the meeting.

Councilmember Catherine Carlton attended the meeting and was introduced. Caltrain Principal Planner Jill Gibson and Casey Fromson, External Affairs, also attended the meeting and answered questions. Menlo Park Fire Marshall Jon Johnson and Police Sargent Matt Ortega were available for questions as well. City staff Nikki Nagaya, Transportation Manager and Project Manager Angela Obeso also presented and answered questions. The speaking members of the project team were Etty Mercurio, AECOM Project Manager and Eileen Goodwin, Apex Strategies, Community Outreach lead. Since the meeting format involved a break-out session at stations, additional city and AECOM team staff were also in attendance.

This was the second meeting with the community regarding this project with this project team. There was a meeting in May 2016 regarding the project and approximately half of the attendees indicated they had attended that meeting as well. There has also been previous city sponsored studies regarding grade separating the railroad from Ravenswood Avenue dating back decades. The purpose of this second community meeting was to get input from the community on the three alternatives that were presented.

The following summary of the meeting was prepared by Eileen Goodwin, Apex Strategies, who facilitated and documented the meeting.

Meeting Summary

The meeting started at 6:40 p.m. In addition to the personnel there to answer questions and present information, 25 members of the public attended (See Attachment B). When asked about the meeting notification methods (See Attachment A), ten percent (10%) of those in attendance indicated they saw street signs about the meeting. The City website was mentioned by no one. About seventy percent (70%) said an e-blast was how they found out about the meeting. The City sent two e-blasts for the meeting. The Almanac on-line story was mentioned by 10% of the attendees. The Chamber e-blast was mentioned by one of attendees as well. No one indicated they saw the flyers the city staff had posted at the Library, Recreation Center and the City Hall.

After a brief introduction by the City's Project Manager, the AECOM Project Manager spoke to a PowerPoint presentation (See Attachment E). The presentation covered the purpose of the project, some existing conditions, how the community input from the first meeting was incorporated into the project and the details of the three alternatives that were under consideration. A 'question and answer' period followed the presentation.

After the presentation many questions, suggestions and opinions were offered to the staff and project team. The comments and responses offered during the meeting are captured below in the order they were given (See Table 1).

The meeting format also included forty (40) minutes of time for attendees to give additional input and review several exhibit boards at four stations (See Attachment D). That input has been captured at the end of this meeting summary in Table 4.

At the very end of the meeting the facilitator convened the attendees and each station lead reported out on the themes that were coming through from the feedback at the individual stations. The meeting adjourned at 8:20 p.m.

This meeting summary also includes a transcript of the meeting comment cards that were handed in at the meeting as well as e-mails received by city staff (See Attachment C). Comment Cards and e-mails are listed in Table 2 and 3 below.

Table 1: Summary of Comments and Responses

Comment/Question	Response
How long is the elevation—as long as the town?	The limits of the profile modification for Alternative C is from just south of Encinal Ave to just north of San Francisquito Creek, a total length of about 1.3 miles.
To avoid rollercoaster effect, is there coordination with other cities?	Although the planning is a city by city effort, Menlo Park is coordinating with Palo Alto and Atherton staff. They are aware of the planning that is taking place. Also, Caltrain staff is very involved with the planning and there are certain design criteria that must be met to avoid some amount of rollercoaster effect. Menlo Park has looked at the undertaking as a safety project. The opportunity to improve safety at this intersection is our reason for moving forward with this planning.
From a safety perspective do all the alternatives take into account fire truck heights?	Yes, the City has been coordinating with both the Police and Fire Departments. The design takes into account the height, width and weight of their vehicles.
Prefer a trestle rather than a wall. When will those decisions be made?	We are not designing specifics tonight. That kind of design detail is important to mention and we will capture it in the notes for consideration later. Be sure to reiterate this request at the stations.

If the option with the highest grade is chosen will the locomotives be strong enough to pull the trains from Palo Alto or Atherton through Menlo Park at that grade?	Yes, anything that we would present would have to be designed to meet Caltrain and UP design criteria. The design standard is 1% maximum grade and these design options are all at or below that threshold.
Why is the team only showing options with the local roads depressed? Why aren't their options showing the railroad in a trench?	Ten years ago all of the options and variations were studied. The City Council has narrowed down the options through cost and feasibility criteria. The options for consideration in this stage of the project are shown here tonight. The designs you see here this evening are consistent with Council direction.
For the miles long berm shown in Alternatives B and C, how many truck-loads of dirt will be required to put such a berm in place?	We will be bringing that level of detail to the next meeting for the project. The quantity take-offs have not yet been run, but they will be to develop the cost estimate as well as for constructability issues. Both of these topics will be presented at the next meeting in early 2017.
Maintaining access to the Library is very important. I prefer A over B or C. Please consider connecting Alma in Alternative A.	The Alma connection can be explored. It is not shown because the grade difference is 22' and the reconfiguration to make the connection does cause quite a few impacts to adjacent properties.
Excluding Encinal is defeating the purpose of the project. Horns will still be blowing and accidents and Caltrain delays will still happen if Encinal is not grade separated. That would be a big problem. Our mission is to fix these issues. There is a big push in Menlo Park to support a lot of development. These infrastructure projects should be in	It would be ideal to do what you suggest. Unfortunately, the development projects are moving faster than this project can. We also do meet with developers to make sure the team understands what the properties will look like once they are redeveloped and

place prior to more development being approved. Can we consider no more development?	that potential project impacts can be addressed ahead of time.
Does Alternative A that lowers just Ravenswood keep the railroad the same?	Yes, the railroad's elevation in Alternative A remains as it is today.
In 2010 the Cities of Menlo Park, Atherton and Palo Alto hosted a coordinated workshop to get input from their residents on what they would like to see. The unanimous feedback was for the railroad to be in a tunnel or a trench. The communities do not want a berm or a wall to divide their communities. I understand this team has been given Council direction to pursue the options you are but if the residents challenged the Council to change the focus of the alternatives is this team prepared to be flexible and study something else.	That would be a scope change for the consultant work. The City team would have to find additional resources to add alternatives or start over with different alternatives.
Is there additional right-of-way needed to fit the railroad in?	Should a passing track be required at the station area then additional right-of-way will be needed. It is not clear at this time whether the passing track would be located in Menlo Park or in another location along the corridor. However for the purpose of this study, the alternatives do not preclude a passing track. Caltrain's right-of-way does vary along the corridor between 60' and 120' feet in some places.
Do any of the alternatives impact the historic station or the other historic buildings?	The team is trying to preserve the buildings and work them into the design. One or more buildings may need to be relocated. We should know more by the next meeting.

If sidewalks are below grade will they flood? Will there be pumps? How does that work during a power outage?	There could be a need for a small pump station. Typically pump stations have redundancy for safety reasons. The power and controls are not housed where water can get to them. The system can be designed to allow a generator to be connected as back-up power.

Table 2: Comment Cards

1. Please consider a timed stoplight at this intersection. We've waited long enough. 2. Please provide info on how you expect traffic to flow to park/gym/library. This impacts our decision. 3. Please share costs for each project. Please maintain access to Alma.
I prefer Alternative A only. The best would be the train in a cut.

Table 3: Emailed Comments sent to City Staff

I was not able to attend the meeting as I am traveling out of the area. But I wanted to register as strongly supporting grade separation at all of the crossings. Frankly, I was disappointed Menlo Park didn't deal with this in the '90s when Redwood City, San Carlos, and Belmont added grade separations and federal funds were readily available. I also want to suggest that whatever plan is adopted it include provision for more tracks, as I think the idea of forcing the HSR to share tracks with CalTrain is inane. (Almost, but not quite as bad as the '60s vote of San Mateo County to not be part of BART, which condemned Bart to its San Francisco focused wide swing west route.)

I also suggest the plan pay attention to access to the Library - one of Menlo Parks assets.

I have recently been traveling in Europe by train and having reliable grade separated electrified trains is a fantastic way to get around.

I attended the October 4, 2016, presentation of the railroad crossing Alternatives. The presentations were very informative and, although I missed the May presentation, it was clear that a lot of thought and work had gone into following the Council's requests and the "grant" requirement.

I am listing below the comments I made to various project personnel at last night's meeting.

As one participant noted, people seem to have forgotten meetings a few years ago, when the high speed rail was proposed and which I attended, that the residents of Menlo Park and adjacent cities want the railroad tracks BELOW grade, yet last night there were two proposals to raise the railroad above grade, on a 12-15 foot high berm that will divide the city for almost its entire length in Menlo Park.

That berm will undo all the multi-year planning that went into our updated downtown plan and bring thousands of dump-truck loads to the city streets, with the inevitable damage, noise and congestion.

The railroad running on the elevated berm will also, as presenters noted, enormously increase the noise from train traffic. Just look at all the sound walls built on our highways to contain noise, and the highways are at grade level.

Another problem with the sketches presented is the bypass "shoofly" rail line that would be built parallel to the existing tracks for the duration of the project, which could be 2-3 years. What impact will that bypass have on the adjacent homes, commercial properties and streets?

Even "Alternative A", which addresses the creation of just the one underpass at Ravenswood, has a lengthy shoofly/bypass. The designers need to show how the Ravenswood underpass can be constructed without a rail bypass.

All the alternatives presented have a third rail line running down the middle. No dimensions were given in the presentation material that compares the existing rail width with the proposed width, but it is fair to assume this 3rd rail significantly increases the width of the railway.

This is contrary to all the public input on the high speed rail, which led to the general understanding that it would share the two existing tracks with the existing operators and NOT add a 3rd (or 4th) rail. It was said that this 3rd rail line was a requirement of "the grant", so it is very surprising that the Council accepted "the grant" with that condition and contrary to the Council's public position. Any work going forward should eliminate that 3rd rail at the street intersections and station and get back to the "existing two rails" promised for the past few years.

As a resident of Menlo Park for over 40 years, I am very concerned the proposals put forward cause more problems than they solve. My conclusions:

1. The money is better spent directly on "first responders'" facilities and personnel
2. The train noise will increase, not decrease, and disturb a wider part of the City
3. The multi-year vehicle congestion will be a nightmare for residents and first responders

Table 4: Summary of Comments at each Station

Station 1—Alternative A

- Request for good pedestrian access especially to Library.
- Lower Alma Street instead of grade separate it.
- High Speed Train accommodations, wider tracks.
- Connectivity
- Bike lanes
- Concern regarding access to properties that are impacted.
- How is this planning coordinated with Caltrain electrification?
- Implement pocket turn for bicyclists at Ravenswood to avoid collisions, improve safety and provide a safe route to school, etc.
- Alma Lane is a dead end—add more parking spots and bike racks. Concerned about the impacts to businesses. This hurts businesses.
- Concern that the project will isolate the city center.

- What will level of service be for El Camino Real for all alternatives?
- Prefer the berm.
- Alma Street at grade loses connectivity to Ravenswood.

Station 2—Alternative B

- What will Oak Grove access look like when the project is complete?
- Please provide a visualization of what the excavation looks like.
- Is the 22' from top of soil to the surface of the road? Explain the vertical clearance requirement.
- Will Alma Lane be 'knocked out" on Alternative A?
- Will there be vehicle access to the Library on Alternative B?
- Track profile to be lowered at Glenwood and Oak Grove.
- Unhappy with prospect of embankment and retaining walls dividing the town.
- Maintain interface between sidewalks and businesses.

Station 3—Alternative C

- Is access from Alma Street to Alma Lane connected? Maintain access.
- Axis training access—back access from Alma Lane.
- Marriott Access parking, emergency access, noise impacts during construction. The grade separation would help mitigate train noise which is a good thing. Serves families, Stanford visitors, extended stays. Prefer Alternative C.

- Fire Marshall prefers Alternative C. The grade separations would increase access. Concerned about maintaining access/response times on Garwood Way and to the Marriott property. Need to make sure the design features work for the fire department.
- Does the railroad shoo-fly impact properties or just parking lots? Do the impacts change by alternative?
- Should include Encinal (two commenters). C is most preferred but should also include Encinal. This increases safety to pedestrian crossings. It is a route to school. Concern with backing up traffic on El Camino Real.
- Trenching versus elevated structure, look at the money
- Quiet Zone
- Encinal should be considered for grade separation
- Concerned with property access at Alma Lane and Garwood Way.

Station 4—Caltrain, Aesthetics, Other Options, etc.

- Concern about it being too dark.
- Concerned/wants good pedestrian and bike paths.
- Prefer trestle to berm/wall.
- Where is funding coming from? How flexible/timely will that funding be? Will the funding be available?
- Supports berm/grade separation for all grade crossings in Menlo Park.
- Supports trench or tunnel versus elevated grade separations.
- Show the electrification poles in the visuals.
- There needs to be more clarity about the passing track—should be included with or without high speed rail.
- East Bay examples are not like Menlo Park.

- El Camino Real is problematic for emergency services and congested.
- Encinal should be elevated.
- Keep rail profile as flat as possible.
- Coordinate these planning activities with other cities.
- Get feedback/lessons learned from cities that already have grade separations.

Meeting Summary by Apex Strategies.

Attachments:

Attachment A – Meeting Notice
Attachment B – Sign-In Sheets
Attachment C – Hand Written Comment Cards
Attachment D – Exhibit Boards
Attachment E – PowerPoint Presentation

ATTACHMENT A

MEETING NOTICE

1.0 Ravenswood Avenue Railroad Crossing Project Meeting

This community meeting is an opportunity to give input on the study to separate Ravenswood Avenue from the Caltrain railroad tracks. A consultant team has been hired to perform the project study report for the Caltrain tracks crossing and a series of three community meetings will be held and up to seven commission and City Council presentations will be made.

This project evaluates the engineering feasibility of replacing the existing at-grade crossings of the Caltrain tracks by building grade separations of the roadways from the tracks at Ravenswood Avenue, Oak Grove Avenue, Glenwood Avenue and Encinal Avenue, with priority on Ravenswood Avenue.

Date: October 4, 2016

Time: 6:30 pm - 8:30 pm

Location: Menlo Church Social Hall

Address: 700B Chestnut St.
Menlo Park, CA 94025

Source: https://www.menlopark.org/Calendar.aspx?EID=2570&month=10&year=2016&day=4&calType=0

2.0 Menlo Park meets on Ravenswood Avenue grade separation

Posted on Sun, Oct 2, 2016

By: Kate Bradshaw / Almanac

The Ravenswood Avenue railroad crossing in downtown Menlo Park is being studied for the feasibility of a grade-separation project there that would separate the roadway from the railway.

At 6:30 p.m. Tuesday, Oct. 4, a public meeting to gather feedback on options for rail crossings will be held in the Menlo Church Social Hall at 700-B Chestnut Lane.

Consultants contracted by the city of Menlo Park are studying that rail crossing and three others in the city: Oak Grove, Glenwood and Encinal avenues. The study aims to help the City Council decide whether and where to build grade separations, which can reduce traffic delays and increase safety.

The event will be the second of three such meetings to gather community input. Angela Obeso, the city's associate transportation engineer, said exhibits to illustrate the project and the options will be available.

Go to menlopark.org/Ravenswood for more information.

Source: http://www.almanacnews.com/news/2016/10/02/tuesday-menlo-park-meeting-on-ravenswood-avenue-grade-separation

ATTACHMENT B

SIGN-IN SHEETS

MENLO PARK RAILROAD CROSSING

Caltrain

SAN MATEO COUNTY Transportation Authority

Ravenswood Avenue Railroad Crossing Project

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Community Meeting #2

October 4, 2016

Sign-In Sheet

Name and Affiliation (If Applicable)	Address	City, Zip	E-mail
Pamela Jones			
Jodi Ables			
Allison Allen			
DAVID JOHNSON			
Henry Riggs			
Jim Lewis			
Kristin Smith			
Lia Kandel			
Alison MADER			Inet
Kevin Kelly			
Nevada Merriman			

Project Email: transportation@menlopark.org

Project Website: www.menlopark.org/ravenswood

MENLO PARK RAILROAD CROSSING

Caltrain

SAN MATEO COUNTY Transportation Authority

Ravenswood Avenue Railroad Crossing Project

Community Meeting #2

October 4, 2016

Sign-In Sheet

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Name and Affiliation (If Applicable)	Address	City, Zip	E-mail
BRAD PHILLIPS			
DAN HILBERMAN			
RICH WIPFLER			
KATHY NEUMAN			
AURORA LEE			
Brooke Cotter			
JEFFREY FENTON			
STEVE SCHMIDT			
Scott Nora			

Project Email: transportation@menlopark.org

Project Website: www.menlopark.org/ravenswood

ATTACHMENT C

HAND WRITTEN COMMENT CARDS

MENLO PARK RAILROAD CROSSING

Caltrain

SAN MATEO COUNTY Transportation Authority

Community Meeting #2

Tuesday, October 4, 2016

Ravenswood Avenue Railroad Crossing Project

Comment Card

Comment cards may be deposited in the comment box, mailed or emailed to:

City of Menlo Park
Public Works Department
701 Laurel Street
Menlo Park, CA 94025
Email: transportation@menlopark.org

Name: Brooke Date: 10/4/16

Affiliation (if applicable): _____ Email: _____

Address: _____ Phone: _____

Comment/Question:

(1) Please consider a timed stoplight at this intersection. We've waited long enough.

(2) Please provide info on how you expect traffic to flow to park/gym/library. This impacts our decision.

(3) Please share costs for each project

(4) Please maintain access to Alma.

Thank you for your participation.

For more information visit: **www.menlopark.org/ravenswood**

Email: transportation@menlopark.org

MENLO PARK
RAILROAD CROSSING

Caltrain

SAN MATEO COUNTY
Transportation
Authority

Community Meeting #2

Tuesday, October 4, 2016

Ravenswood Avenue Railroad Crossing Project

Comment Card

Comment cards may be deposited in the comment box, mailed or emailed to:

City of Menlo Park
Public Works Department
701 Laurel Street
Menlo Park, CA 94025
Email: transportation@menlopark.org

Name: BRAD PHILLIPS Date: 10/4/16

not

Address: [illegible] Phone: [illegible] 3

Comment/Question:

I prefer ALT A =only=

Best would be the Trains in a cut.

Thank you for your participation.

For more information visit: **www.menlopark.org/ravenswood**

Email: transportation@menlopark.org