

**COUNTY OF SAN MATEO
PLANNING AND BUILDING DEPARTMENT**

DATE: June 21, 2023

TO: Planning Commission

FROM: Planning Staff

SUBJECT: EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: Informational briefing on the North Fair Oaks Bicycle and Pedestrian Railroad Crossing and Community Connections Study

RECOMMENDATION

Receive staff's informational briefing on the North Fair Oaks Bicycle and Pedestrian Railroad Crossing and Community Connections Study.

SUMMARY

In 2021, the County's Office of Sustainability in partnership the Planning and Building Department and Department of Public Works was successful in securing a Caltrans Sustainable Communities grant in the amount of \$356,163 to develop the North Fair Oaks Bicycle and Pedestrian Railroad Crossing and Community Connections Study (Study). The Study seeks to improve conditions to encourage walking and biking in North Fair Oaks and improve access to transit, social and health services programs and other community destinations in a disadvantaged community.

The Study is exploring options to overcome barriers to safe bicycle and pedestrian access focusing on the area bounded by El Camino Real to the west, 5th Avenue to the south, Middlefield Road to the east and the County border with Redwood City to the north. The Study is:

1. Assessing the viability of alternative locations and designs for a new bicycle and pedestrian grade-separated railroad crossing of the Caltrain Corridor; and
2. Identifying specific bicycle and pedestrian enhancements linking a preferred community supported crossing site to key destinations within the neighborhoods on both sides that are bifurcated by the railroad tracks.

The Study is consistent with and supports implementation of the North Fair Oaks Community Plan, Unincorporated San Mateo County Active Transportation Plan, and Plan Bay Area 2050. The Draft Final Study will be presented to the Planning Commission for consideration prior to consideration by the Board of Supervisors. The Study is anticipated to be complete in Winter 2024.

WSG:cmc – WSGHH0179_WCU.DOCX

**COUNTY OF SAN MATEO
PLANNING AND BUILDING DEPARTMENT**

DATE: June 21, 2023

TO: Planning Commission

FROM: Planning Staff

SUBJECT: Informational briefing on the North Fair Oaks Bicycle and Pedestrian Railroad Crossing and Community Connections Study.

PROPOSAL

Background

The State of California Department of Transportation's (Caltrans) Sustainable Communities grants are funded by the State Highway Account and the Road Maintenance and Repair Account (Senate Bill 1, Chapter 5, Statutes of 2017). The objective of the Sustainable Communities Competitive Grants is to encourage local and regional multimodal transportation and land use planning that furthers the region's Regional Transportation Plan (RTP)/Sustainable Communities Strategy (SCS), contributes to the State's greenhouse gas (GHG) reduction targets, addresses the needs of disadvantaged communities, and assists in achieving the Caltrans Mission and Grant Program Overarching Objectives.

In 2021, the County's Office of Sustainability in partnership with the Planning and Building Department and Department of Public Works was successful in securing a Caltrans Sustainable Communities grant in the amount of \$356,163 to develop the North Fair Oaks Bicycle and Pedestrian Railroad Crossing and Community Connections Study (Study). The County also provided a local match to support the project. The Study seeks to improve conditions to encourage walking and biking in North Fair Oaks and improve access to transit, social and health services, programs, and other community destinations. The Study is identifying potential locations and viability of a grade-separated bicycle and pedestrian crossing of the Caltrain railroad tracks, and bicycle and pedestrian connections to the potential crossing. The Study supports Plan Bay Area 2050 targets for reducing GHG emissions, health impacts from poor air quality and physical inactivity, household transportation costs, and single occupancy vehicle (SOV) trips.

RECOMMENDATION

Receive staff's informational briefing on the North Fair Oaks Bicycle and Pedestrian Railroad Crossing and Community Connections Study.

BACKGROUND

Report Prepared By: Will Gibson, Planner, wgibson@smcgov.org; Joel Slavit, Resource Conservations Program Manager, Office of Sustainability, jslavit@smcgov.org

Applicant: San Mateo County Office of Sustainability

Owner: Various

Public Notification: A notice for the hearing was posted in the San Mateo Times

Location: Study area is within unincorporated North Fair Oaks bounded by El Camino Real, 5th Avenue, Middlefield Road, and County's border with the City of Redwood City

APN(s): Various

Existing Zoning: Commercial Mixed Use-District, North Fair Oaks (CMU-1, CMU-2, CMU-3, and R-2/S-50); Multiple Family Residential District/Residential Density District 5 (R-3/S-5); One Family Residential District/Residential Density District 73 (R-1/S-73); Two Family Residential District/Residential Density District 5 (R-2/S-5); Neighborhood Mixed Use District, El Camino Real-5th Avenue, North Fair Oaks (NMU-ECR); Neighborhood Mixed Use/Design Review District (NMU/DR); Planned Unit Development District 136 (PUD-136) and 128 (PUD-128); Institutional District/North Fair Oaks (I/NFO)

General Plan Designation: Medium High Density, Commercial Mixed Use; Medium Density, Neighborhood Mixed Use; Residential, Medium High Density Residential (6.1-8.7 du/ac and 8.8-17.4 du/ac); Institutional

Sphere-of-Influence: Redwood City

Existing Land Use: Commercial, Mixed Use, Residential, Institutional

Water Supply: California Water Service – Bear Gulch

Sewage Disposal: Fair Oaks Sewer District

Flood Zone: Zone X (Area of Minimal Flooding)

Environmental Evaluation: Not applicable

Setting: Urban

Chronology:

<u>Date</u>	<u>Action</u>
June 22, 2021	- County Office of Sustainability awarded Caltrans Sustainable Transportation Planning Grant for the Study.
August 3, 2021	- Board of Supervisors adopts resolution authorizing the County to accept a \$356,163 grant from Caltrans and to enter into a grant agreement to fund the Study.
October 4, 2021	- County Office of Sustainability issues Request for Proposals (RFP) to secure consultant support for the Study.
March 8, 2022	- County enters into an agreement with Kimley-Horn and Associates, Inc. (Consultant) to support the Study.
March 16, 2022	- Study kick-off meeting with Consultant and County staff.
May 2, 2022	- Joint Technical Advisory Committee and Community Advisory Committee kick-off meeting.
June 11, 2022	- Kick-off of public engagement, round 1.
June 23, 2022	- North Fair Oaks Community Council informational meeting.
July 8, 2022	- Close of public engagement, round 1.
August 24, 2022	- Planning Commission informational meeting.
November 30, 2022	- 2nd round of Technical Advisory Committee and Community Advisory Committee meetings.
March 6, 2023	- 3rd Community Advisory Committee meeting.
March 9, 2023	- 3rd Technical Advisory Committee meeting.
March 17, 2023	- Kick-off of public engagement, round 2.
April 19, 2023	- Close of public engagement, round 2.
June 15, 2023	- San Mateo County Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Committee informational meeting.

DISCUSSION

A. STUDY GOALS

The North Fair Oaks Bicycle and Pedestrian Railroad Crossing and Community Connections Study is exploring options to overcome barriers to safe bicycle and pedestrian access in the area bounded by El Camino Real to the west, 5th Avenue to the south, Middlefield Road to the east, and the County border with Redwood City to the north.

The Study is:

1. Assessing the viability of alternative locations and designs for a new bicycle and pedestrian grade-separated railroad crossing of the Caltrain Corridor; and
2. Identifying specific bicycle and pedestrian enhancements linking a preferred community supported crossing site to key destinations within the neighborhoods on both sides that are bifurcated by the railroad tracks.

The North Fair Oaks Community and part of adjacent Redwood City is separated by the four-track Caltrain Railroad Corridor. The railroad tracks separate residents from local destinations that include, but aren't limited to, community facilities and services, schools, shopping, and local bus service. There is a need for enhanced and connected bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure.

According to the Unincorporated San Mateo County Active Transportation Plan (ATP), North Fair Oaks has both the highest potential demand for walking and biking and the highest concentration of bicycle and pedestrian collisions per square mile of all San Mateo County unincorporated communities. Making streets easier to walk and bicycle on and making it easier to get to destinations with a new bicycle and pedestrian railroad crossing could help reduce collisions.

The Study aims to develop a community-guided plan to build a comfortable and convenient connection for people walking and biking across the rail corridor in North Fair Oaks that upon implementation will:

- Expand choices for traveling without a car,
- Reduce serious injuries and fatalities,
- Promote opportunities for physical activity,
- Improve access to existing bus service,
- Improve air quality and have a positive impact on the environment,
- Improve connections to and from the North Fair Oaks community and neighborhoods,

- Improve access to businesses on either side of the Caltrain railroad tracks, and
- Support opportunities to make streets better for bicycling and walking.

B. STUDY ACTIVITIES

Key activities of the Study include:

- Ongoing local stakeholder coordination with:
 - A Technical Advisory Community (TAC), comprised of County and external agency staff that include but are not limited to Caltrain, Redwood City, SamTrans and the California High Speed Rail Authority (CHSRA); and
 - A Community Advisory Committee (CAC) comprised of community leaders, representatives from community-based organizations and social service agencies.
- Development and implementation of a community engagement plan including outreach to vulnerable populations, such as youth, older adults, people experiencing homelessness and day laborers.
- Review of existing site conditions, including a community needs assessment.
- Development of evaluation criteria for the railroad crossing alternatives and accompanying bicycle and pedestrian connections.
- Development of conceptual railroad crossing locations and design alternatives with accompanying bicycle and pedestrian connections.
- Selection of a preferred alternative for the location and crossing design as well as accompanying bicycle and pedestrian connections on both sides of the railroad.

C. STUDY PROGRESS TO DATE

1. Contracting and Consultant: In collaboration with staff from Planning and Building and Public Works, the Office of Sustainability developed a request for proposals for the Study. In March 2022, the Office of Sustainability executed a contract with Kimley-Horn and Associates, Inc. as the Prime Consultant for the project. Subconsultants include Nelson\Nygaard and Associates, Nuestra Casa, and Redwood City Together to support community engagement, and Parikh Consultants and Biggs Cardosa Associates to support the technical feasibility analysis.
2. Existing Conditions Analysis: The Consultant team has analyzed existing conditions through site visits, data analysis, and reviewing previous planning

efforts, and prepared an existing conditions memorandum summarizing findings, which can be viewed at <https://www.smcsustainability.org/wp-content/uploads/2022-09-05-NFO-Existing-Conditions-Memo-Final.pdf>.

3. Round 1 Stakeholder Engagement and Feedback: The first phase of stakeholder engagement launched June 11, 2022 and ended July 8, 2022. The goal of this phase of outreach was to understand barriers to walking and bicycling, and priorities and values for a new bicycle and pedestrian railroad crossing. The Consultant team, community partners, and County staff used diverse methods to gather feedback from residents, including project website (<http://www.nfowalkbike.org/>), online and paper surveys, postcard mailers to all addresses in the Study area and within a 300-foot buffer of the Study area, 9 pop-up events, and presentations with existing community groups. The Study team engaged with about 300 people over the course of the pop-up events, and 349 people responded to the survey.

Generally, stakeholders were very supportive of the Study and its goals:

- About 37% of survey respondents stated they currently drive to destinations on the other side of the railroad tracks but would prefer to walk or bike if it were possible.
 - About 30% of survey respondents currently walk, bike, or take the bus to the other side of the tracks but find it challenging because of the distance.
 - High car speeds and poorly lit streets and sidewalks were the main factors that affect survey participants' sense of safety according to about 44% of respondents.
 - About 37% of respondents said that they don't feel safe crossing the street.
 - In considering values for a new railroad crossing, survey participants and pop-up event participants prioritized personal security, greenspace, and accessibility.
4. A technical memorandum was prepared that established project goals and draft priorities, inclusive of input from Round 1 community engagement, to guide the development of rail crossing and bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure alternatives. It also included a series of evaluation criteria that served to inform the community of trade-offs during the second round of community engagement. An initial assessment of the alternatives for each individual criteria was provided, based on engineering judgement, that can serve as a touchpoint for key considerations in the selection of a preferred alternative.

5. Concept plans with cross sections and renderings were prepared for three different rail crossing alternatives along with concepts for potential street improvements to improve bicycle and pedestrian connectivity, which can be viewed at: <https://www.smcsustainability.org/wp-content/uploads/Rail-Crossing-and-Community-Connections-Supplemental-Information.pdf>.
6. Round 2 Stakeholder Engagement and Feedback: The second phase of stakeholder engagement launched March 17, 2023 and ended April 19, 2023. The goal of this phase of outreach was to receive community feedback on preferences for three different conceptual rail crossings. The outreach was also intended to understand the different types of improvements the community would like to see on neighborhood streets in the Study area to make it safer or more comfortable for pedestrians and cyclists to access the rail crossing and local destinations. The Consultant team, community partners, and County staff used diverse methods to gather feedback from residents, including project website (<http://www.nfowalkbike.org/>), online and paper surveys, postcard mailers to all addresses in the Study area and within a 300-foot buffer of the Study area, 11 pop-up events, two door to door canvassing events on both sides of the tracks in immediate proximity to the proposed rail crossing alternatives, an Open House event and three community group presentations. In addition, a short video was produced to generate awareness and to encourage community feedback, which was shared on the project website, social media and at in-person presentations.

Through the course of in-person and online engagement, approximately 770 responses were received. Nearly 70% of survey responders indicated that they lived in the Study area, between Middlefield Road and El Camino Real. The community's preferred crossing option was the Dumbarton Avenue Bridge (Option B). When asked to share their first and second preferences for the crossings, 62% of survey responders selected Option B, followed by 46% for the Middlefield Junction Bridge (Option C), 33% selected the Dumbarton Avenue Tunnel (Option A), and 6% selected "Do nothing". Nearly 80% of survey respondents said that they would use the crossing frequently, which included responses for multiple times a week (59%) and once a week (19%). Sidewalk and crosswalk lighting, high-visibility crosswalks, and accessible (ADA) curb ramps were the top three infrastructure improvements survey respondents would like to see incorporated on neighborhood streets. Participants expressed that safety, maintenance, accessibility, and opportunities to provide public spaces and art were their top priorities for the railroad crossing.

7. North Fair Oaks Community Council: Members of the North Fair Oaks Community Council participate on the Study's Community Advisory Committee. On June 23, 2022, the Office of Sustainability presented to the Council on the status of the Study. The Council was supportive of the project and offered additional ideas for engaging residents, including a suggestion for pop-up events at Mi Tienda Market and Paisano Market, visiting smaller churches in the area, and canvassing the streets that will be most impacted by the crossing.

D. NORTH FAIR OAKS COMMUNITY PLAN CONSISTENCY

The Study is consistent with and implements the North Fair Oaks Community Plan.

1. Goal 3.1: Improve overall neighborhood connectivity throughout North Fair Oaks, Policy 1B: Identify optimal multi-modal railroad crossings across both railroad corridors that would ensure critical north-south connections within the community to support pedestrian and bicycle safety. Explore, as options for any new rail crossings, pedestrian-and bicycle-only crossings, and at-grade, underground, and overpass crossings. Prior to creating new rail crossings, pursue full feasibility analysis and impact studies, and ensure that assessment of potential crossings includes full participation of residents in areas that could be impacted by creation of new crossings.

The Study supports implementation of Policy 1B by using a robust stakeholder engagement process to identify a viable crossing of the Caltrain corridor in North Fair Oaks. The Study has four phases of community engagement and includes diverse activities to reach residents, including pop-up events, mailers sent to all residents in and adjacent to the Study area, presentations at existing community groups and with the North Fair Oaks Community Council, and a Community Advisory Committee with representatives from schools, local businesses, and community leaders. The Study will include feasibility considerations such as utilities, available right-of-way, minimizing impacts to adjacent properties, and others.

2. Goal 3.2: Improve existing pedestrian facilities, and provide new facilities throughout North Fair Oaks, Policy 2A: Improve and enhance pedestrian facilities along key streets that connect to destinations throughout North Fair Oaks to prioritize “complete streets” design standards that give equal space to pedestrians, bicyclists, public transit, and cars.
3. Goal 3.3: Improve bicycle connectivity throughout North Fair Oaks by providing additional designated bicycle facilities such as bike lanes and paths and by improving the safety of existing infrastructure. Policy 3C: Designate “bicycle boulevards” that emphasize shared use between vehicles and bicyclists on streets that are not main streets, but that provide equivalent connectivity.

The Unincorporated San Mateo County Active Transportation Plan (<https://www.smcsustainability.org/livable-communities/active-transportation/unincorporated-smc-active-transportation-plan/>), adopted by the Board in 2021, includes proposed bicycle boulevards to improve connectivity in the Study Area. The Study will further evaluate these locations and others to connect to the preferred railroad crossing location and identify improvements to increase both bicyclist and pedestrian safety and comfort.

E. NEXT STEPS

The Draft Final Study will be presented to the Planning Commission for consideration prior to consideration by the Board of Supervisors. The following timeline lists anticipated phases of the Study:

- Summer-Fall 2023: Coordinate with the Peninsula Corridor Joint Powers Board to seek a use variance for a preferred alternative
- Summer- Fall 2023 Determine preferred alternatives and prepare Draft Study.
- Fall 2023: Gather feedback on Draft Study.
- Winter 2024: Prepare Final Study and present to advisory and decision-making bodies for consideration.

ATTACHMENTS

A. Study Area Map

WSG:cmc – WSGHH0180_WCU.DOCX



COUNTY OF SAN MATEO - PLANNING AND BUILDING DEPARTMENT

ATTACHMENT A

MAP OF PROJECT AREA



— Highways

Proposed Bikeways

--- Class 1 Shared-use Path

--- Class 2 Bike Lane

--- Class 3 Bike Blvd.

--- Class 4 Separated Bicycle Lane

Existing Bikeways

--- Class 1 Shared-use Path

--- Class 2 Bike Lane

--- Class 3 Bike Blvd.

--- Class IV Separated Bicycle Lane



NFO Community Plan Proposed Railroad Crossing

Existing Railroad Crossings

Railroad Tracks

SamTrans Bus Stops

Study Area

Proposed Transit Hub

Pipeline Affordable Housing Projects

Schools

Key Destinations