



Item No. 2 Town of Atherton

CITY COUNCIL STAFF REPORT – STUDY SESSION

**TO: HONORABLE MAYOR AND CITY COUNCIL
GEORGE RODERICKS, CITY MANAGER**

FROM: MICHAEL KASHIWAGI, COMMUNITY SERVICES DIRECTOR

DATE: JUNE 4, 2014

SUBJECT: UPDATE OF EL CAMINO REAL EFFORTS WITH CALTRANS

RECOMMENDATION

Review and discuss.

BACKGROUND

El Camino Real within the Town of Atherton is an existing State Highway (SR 82) and a major north-south transportation corridor serving the San Francisco Bay Area Peninsula. Currently, the corridor is “incomplete” since it is designed primarily for vehicular travel with minimal or no facilities to safely accommodate pedestrians and cyclists. Within Atherton, El Camino Real is a six-lane arterial roadway with a pavement width which varies from 80-85 feet. The road cross section also includes landscaped medians. The average daily traffic within the 1.6 mile segment of El Camino Real within Atherton exceeds 31,000 vehicles per day.

Walking and biking to destinations through the Town require crossing El Camino Real at one of 5 marked crosswalks at uncontrolled intersections. The 1.6 mile segment of El Camino Real is served by only one signalized intersection. Accordingly, most bicycle and pedestrian crossings of El Camino occurs at the uncontrolled intersections. In addition to Holbrook Palmer Park, uses which create the need to improve bicycle/pedestrian safety along and across El Camino Real include 7 public and private schools which reside within the Town.

Over the past 18 months, staff has been working with Caltrans to identify short and long term solutions to improve pedestrian, bicycle, and vehicular safety along El Camino Real. Items discussed include:

- Installation of enhanced signing and striping at marked crosswalk locations at uncontrolled intersections.
- Trimming trees and removing vegetation within landscaped medians to improve visibility for pedestrians and vehicles.

- Place flashing beacons at selected crosswalk locations to improve driver awareness.

Although a longer term solution, the Town and Caltrans also agreed that developing a plan for the entire 1.6 mile segment of El Camino Real would be the most effective approach to improving safety. Specific improvement ideas included:

- The reduction of travel lanes from six lanes to four lanes to reduce pedestrian crossing distance and vehicular speeds.
- At uncontrolled intersections with marked crosswalks, widen the existing center median and construct a pedestrian portal to provide a safe refuge for pedestrians crossing El Camino Real.
- Remove vegetation and trees in the medians to improve visibility.
- With implementation of lane reductions, provide a Class I bike facility along El Camino Real.

DISCUSSION

Although there has been overall agreement between the Town of Atherton and Caltrans on the items discussed above, it was also acknowledged that the identified changes/improvements would be costly to implement and would require agreement with other jurisdictional stakeholders. However, progress has been made and some of the improvements have already been implemented or are in the planning/design phase.

Enhanced Crosswalk Markings and Vegetation Removal

Enhanced crosswalk signing and striping improvements have been provided at the 5 marked crosswalk locations (Selby Lane, Stockbridge Avenue, Almendral Avenue, Isabella Avenue, Alejandra Avenue) and Caltrans will continue to refresh the signing and striping as needed. The Town will continue to trim and remove vegetation within the landscape medians as needed.

Construction of Flashing Beacons at Selected Crosswalk Locations

Per the request of Town staff, Caltrans has agreed to allow the use of Pedestrian Hybrid Beacons rather than the Rapid Flashing Beacon originally proposed. Staff favors the Pedestrian Hybrid Beacon since it is designed to stop vehicles through a series of steady and flashing yellow and red lights. The hybrid beacon operates much like a traffic signal. Pedestrians activate the beacon when ready to cross, otherwise the beacon is dark and motorists proceed as usual.

Staff has been successful getting two crosswalk locations included in a Caltrans Crosswalk Enhancement Project in San Mateo County. This project is currently in the environmental review stage and includes pedestrian hybrid beacons at Isabella Avenue and Alejandra Avenue. This project is entirely State funded. Environmental review is scheduled to be completed by the end of

2014. Plans, specifications, and construction estimate is scheduled to be completed by the end of 2015. Construction is scheduled to begin in late 2016. Therefore, it is anticipated that the pedestrian hybrid signals within Atherton will be under construction in 2017.

Selby Lane/El Camino Real Intersection

Per Caltrans, the intersection of Selby Lane and El Camino Real meets criteria for the installation of a traffic signal. Per Caltrans policy, Caltrans will only contribute 50% of the cost for a traffic signal since two legs of this intersection are outside of their jurisdictional control. One leg is within the Town of Atherton and the other leg lies within San Mateo County. Per letter dated January 9, 2013, San Mateo County stated they do not support contributing funds for this signal (attached).

The need and support for a traffic signal at Selby was discussed by City Council at our December 18, 2013 meeting. At that time, the City Council did not support construction of a traffic signal due to concerns of increased traffic on Selby resulting from a new traffic signal as well as the required contribution towards construction. At the February 5, 2014 Study Session, the City Council discussed potential traffic calming measures but chose to not move forward with a study due to staff assessment that there were limited options available to effectively reduce vehicle volumes and speeds and that the better ultimate solution was the narrowing of lanes on El Camino Real or restrictions to left turn movements. Staff was directed to investigate these options further and report back to the Council.

According to accident information provided by Caltrans, during the 10-year period from 2002 to 2011, a total of 50 accidents were reported at the Selby Lane/El Camino Real Intersection. All of the reported accidents were vehicle related. There were no reported pedestrian related accidents. Of the 50 accidents, the primary collision factor for approximately half of the accidents was due to failure to yield and improper turns. Approximately half of the accidents were cars being broadsided.

Restricting Left Turn Movements at Selby Lane/El Camino Real

Staff believes the primary factor contributing to accidents is poor visibility due to heavy vegetation in the median and the opposing left turn lanes on El Camino Real. Staff recently met with Caltrans to discuss potential solutions to improve visibility and operations at this intersection. Staff and Caltrans believe the visibility and operations of this intersection would be improved by eliminating one of the left turn movements. However, doing so would impact access into an existing residential area. Caltrans would also need to perform an operational analysis of the existing traffic signal at 5th Avenue and El Camino Real to determine the feasibility of this option.

Lane Reduction on El Camino Real

Caltrans and the Town of Atherton agree that developing a plan for the entire 1.6 mile segment of El Camino Real would be the most effective and comprehensive approach to improving pedestrian, bicycle, and vehicular safety. The reduction of travel lanes from six lanes to four lanes would improve pedestrian safety by decreasing crossing distance and would also reduce vehicular speeds. The lane reduction would also provide additional space within the right of way to install pedestrian portals within the existing medians as well as Class I bicycle/pedestrian facilities.

It is also acknowledged that these types of changes would be very costly to study and construct and would require the participation and agreement of a number of stakeholders including adjacent jurisdictions who may be impacted by the reduction in travel lanes. Accordingly, in 2013, the Town of Atherton partnered with the Local Government Commission to apply for a Caltrans Community-Based Transportation Planning Grant to fund the necessary engineering operational analysis and community outreach/involvement necessary to advance this concept. The grant application was submitted in April 2013 and unfortunately in September 2013, we learned that the grant application was declined.

Following continued direction in February 2014, in May 2014 staff met with Caltrans to outline a process for moving forward. Caltrans indicated that a necessary next step is to perform an operational analysis to determine impacts of the travel lane reduction. The anticipated work scope would include:

- Traffic counts
- Determination of vehicle metrics such as travel times, queues and intersection level of service
- Travel demand forecasts
- Traffic modeling and simulation
- Caltrans coordination/review

It is anticipated that the consultant and staff cost to perform this work would be in the range of \$80K - \$120K. At this point, staff does not recommend seeking funding partners for the required engineering operational study. Our rationale is the primary interests and benefits of this work will be for the Town of Atherton. The primary operational improvements, bicycle/pedestrian safety benefits, and community enhancement opportunities resulting from lane reductions on El Camino Real will primarily benefit the Town. Accordingly, staff believes it's important for the Town to drive and control the scope and schedule of the operational/technical analysis required by Caltrans as well as the community engagement and stakeholder outreach necessary to advocate and champion proposed changes to El Camino Real.

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Since the reduction of lanes on El Camino Real may also impact capacity of this corridor, the results of the operational analysis must also be evaluated based upon adopted C/CAG traffic impact policies.

ATTACHMENTS

Letter of January 2013 from County

Prepared By:

Approved:

Michael Kashiwagi, P.E.
Community Services Director

George Rodericks
City Manager



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January 9, 2013

Mr. Roland Au-Yeung
Chief, Office of Traffic
California Department of Transportation
P.O. Box 23660
Oakland, CA 94612

RE: El Camino Real/Selby Lane Traffic Signal Proposal

Dear Mr. Au-Yeung:

I received your letter summarizing Caltrans' proposal for the installation of a traffic signal at the intersection of El Camino Real and Selby Lane.

At this location, the Town of Atherton controls Selby Lane to the west of El Camino Real and the County controls Selby Lane to the east.

The County portion of this intersection supports very little traffic. During peak hours, your counts show no vehicles exiting Selby Lane for southbound El Camino Real and just one vehicle crossing El Camino Real. For the entire day, just 11 vehicles make this left turn or choose to cross El Camino Real. For southbound El Camino Real traffic, a dedicated left turn lane off of El Camino Real towards Selby Lane already exists. Further, two traffic signals located within less than 2,000 feet already serve the unincorporated community, which can be accessed from the County's segment of Selby Lane.

For these reasons, we are unable to support the contribution of County funds towards the installation of a signal at this location. If others were to fund a signal, we would agree to share in the ongoing cost of the signal maintenance.

Should you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at (650) 599-1421.

Very truly yours,


James C. Porter
Director

cc: Joseph Lo Coco, Deputy Director, Road Services
Diana Shu, Road Operations Manager