



**TOWN OF LOS GATOS  
COUNCIL AGENDA REPORT**

MEETING DATE: 03/03/2020

ITEM NO: 5

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DATE: February 26, 2020  
TO: Mayor and Town Council  
FROM: Laurel Prevetti, Town Manager  
SUBJECT: Highway 17 Bicycle and Pedestrian Overcrossing Feasibility Study  
a. Approve the Project Purpose and Need  
b. Authorize Staff to Proceed with Design Alternatives for a Separate Bicycle and Pedestrian Overcrossing

**RECOMMENDATION:**

Review the status of the Highway 17 Bicycle and Pedestrian Overcrossing Feasibility Study and:  
a. Approve the project Purpose and Need.  
b. Authorize staff to proceed with design alternatives for a separate bicycle and pedestrian overcrossing.

**BACKGROUND:**

Highway 17 presents a barrier for bicyclists and pedestrians wanting to cross from one side of Los Gatos to the other. Current crossings are largely vehicle focused and often uncomfortable for other transportation modes. The Highway 17 Bicycle and Pedestrian Overcrossing Feasibility Study is included in the Fiscal Year 2019/20 Capital Improvement Program Budget aimed at providing an alternative to existing crossings.

At the June 18, 2019 meeting, the Town Council authorized a Request for Proposals for the Highway 17 Bicycle and Pedestrian Bridge Feasibility Analysis and Conceptual Engineering. In September 2019, the Town selected BKF Engineers as the consultant and officially kicked off the project. The final feasibility analysis and conceptual engineering work is expected to be completed in approximately 12 months.

**PREPARED BY:** Ying Smith  
Transportation and Mobility Manager

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Reviewed by: Town Manager, Assistant Town Manager, Town Attorney, and Parks and Public Works Director

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BACKGROUND (continued):

At the November 19, 2019 meeting, the Town Council approved staff's recommendation to submit grant applications for the Measure B Bicycle and Pedestrian Competitive Grant Program for five candidate projects. The Final Design for the Highway 17 Bike and Pedestrian Overcrossing (BPOC) was one of the candidate projects. The recommended actions associated with this report advance the project to a point where it can be more competitive for Measure B funds.

DISCUSSION:

*Project Purpose and Need*

In order to develop the project to reflect the community's vision and priorities, it is important to establish the purpose and need at the onset of the project development phase. The project purpose and need, as presented in the following paragraphs, have been prepared based on the project feedback from early outreach.

**Purpose:** The project would improve bicycle and pedestrian mobility across Highway 17 in the vicinity of the Blossom Hill Road overcrossing. The project includes a focus on improving safety for all modes of travel, creating a safe route to schools while promoting active transportation. Additionally, the project would result in reduced traffic congestion and greenhouse gas emissions by providing comfortable mobility alternatives.

**Need:** With two travel lanes in each direction, carrying upwards of 63,000 vehicles per day, Highway 17 creates both a physical and psychological barrier for both pedestrians and bicyclists as it divides the Town in two. Blossom Hill Road is one of only a few roadways that provide east-west connectivity across the highway.

The current Blossom Hill Road Overcrossing provides 10.5-foot wide travel lanes, 4-foot wide bike lanes, and 5-foot wide sidewalks in each direction. This sub-standard width does not meet current and future bicycle and pedestrian demands. The deficiency becomes more apparent during school hours when the bicycle and pedestrian volumes are high. Furthermore, the narrow width lacks the necessary separation and protection between the various modes and creates less than optimal conditions given the high volume and speed of vehicles on the roadway. The current facility is considered high stress, especially for vulnerable street users including youth, older adults, and those with access and functional needs.

DISCUSSION (continued):

Design Alternatives

The Town has included proposed improvements for Highway 17 crossings in several policy documents, including the General Plan and the *Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan*. Over the years, the following three options have been identified in the planning documents:

1. A new bicycle and pedestrian bridge connecting to Nino Avenue
2. A separate bicycle and pedestrian bridge along Blossom Hill Road (BHR)
3. Widening the existing BHR bridge for bicyclists and pedestrians

The project team has completed a preliminary evaluation of these three options. To fully assess the feasibility of options, BKF Engineers and Town staff initiated a coordination process with Caltrans for preliminary feedback on the project's study alternatives. The project team had an introductory meeting with Caltrans in December 2019. It is important to start early consultation with Caltrans to discuss compliance, potential design exceptions, and the approval process, especially regarding the work required for the widening of Blossom Hill Road. The main point of discussion has been the nonstandard vertical clearance of the Blossom Hill Road structure and challenges foreseen with a structure widening alternative.

Based on BKF Engineers' experience working on similar overcrossing projects adjacent to State freeways, widening the current Blossom Hill Road overcrossing will present the most engineering and cost challenges. Widening is constrained by the existing nonstandard vertical clearance of 15'2". The Caltrans standard for roadways is 16'6". Caltrans could require replacement of the entire bridge, which would increase project costs significantly. It is highly unlikely that Caltrans will approve a design exception for maintaining or proposing nonstandard vertical clearance, especially since the underside of the bridge was recently struck. Due to these challenges and uncertainties, staff is recommending not to pursue the widening option (Alternative 3) as part of this project.

Concurrently, the project team evaluated the feasibility of a separate structure for the BPOC, with alignment alternatives between Blossom Hill Road and Nino Avenue. The alternatives can be grouped into either those connecting to Nino Avenue or Blossom Hill Road:

Alternatives 1A, 1B, and 1C: A separate BPOC connecting to Nino Avenue

Alternative 2: A separate BPOC adjacent to the Blossom Hill Road overcrossing

The alignment alternatives are illustrated in Attachment 1. All four alternatives are considered feasible based on the engineering work completed to date. Town staff is not recommending a decision on a specific alignment alternative at this early stage. Instead, the project team is

DISCUSSION (continued):

seeking input from the community as next steps to further its evaluation. The input will help the project team evaluate the alternatives in refining the design.

Preliminary Cost Estimates

One of the deliverables of the Feasibility Study is a cost estimate for the project. BKF believes Alternative 1 will be the more costly of the two and has developed a preliminary estimate to support the Town's planning efforts in pursuing VTA Measure B funding. The estimate for this alternative would be \$30 million total, including approximately \$5 million for the final design and environmental clearance phase. While this estimate will suffice for the grant application requirements, the BKF scope includes development of an additional cost estimate for Alternative 2 to establish a cost range for comparison of the two alternatives as the Feasibility Study advances.

Relationship to Other Regional Efforts

Currently the Santa Clara Valley Transportation Authority (VTA) has started the State Route 17 Corridor Congestion Relief Project in partnership with the Town and Caltrans. Improving bicycle and pedestrian facilities is one of the goals of the project. The project team will continue to engage the regional partners to coordinate the planning efforts and leverage any synergies.

Community Engagement

Community engagement will follow the framework identified in the Connect Los Gatos toolbox, which is included in the Connect Los Gatos item on the same agenda. In the fall of 2019 Town staff began the outreach effort. A project website was set up in early February and a community meeting was held on February 25, 2020. Approximately twenty community members attended the meeting, including residents near the project area, parents of school-aged children, and Complete Streets and Transportation Commissioners. Many of the attendees cited that they received notices regarding the meeting via direct mailing, social media, flyers placed on the streets and local businesses and the Town's website. The attendees received background on the design alternatives and their benefits and challenges. The presentation was followed by an open house workshop to allow attendees to interact with the project team and express their preferences and concerns. The attendees expressed support for the project's purpose and appreciation for the benefits. Several residents live within the project area shared their concerns about the increased foot traffic in the neighborhood associated with the alternatives connecting to Nino Avenue.

The project team is planning to evaluate the input from the community to refine the alternatives. Additional community engagement events are planned in the spring.

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SUBJECT: Highway 17 Bicycle and Pedestrian Overcrossing Feasibility Study

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CONCLUSION:

Staff is recommending approval of the project Purpose and Need. Staff also recommends the Town Council approve proceeding with design alternatives for a separate bicycle and pedestrian overcrossing.

COORDINATION:

Staff presented the draft project Purpose and Need and alignment alternatives to the February 3, 2020 Parks Commission meeting and the February 13 Complete Streets and Transportation Commission. Both Commissions recommended approving the staff recommendations.

FISCAL IMPACT:

There is no fiscal action associated with the recommendations because the Council has already awarded the design contract for the current work phase.

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT:

This is a project as defined under CEQA and an environmental analysis will be prepared in the Final Design phase.

Attachment:

1. Highway 17 BPOC Alignment Alternatives