



City of Emeryville

CALIFORNIA

MEMORANDUM

DATE: January 18, 2022
TO: Christine Daniel, City Manager
FROM: Mohamed Alaoui, Public Works Director
SUBJECT: Letter of Support, Update, and Review of the I-80/Ashby Avenue (Route 13) Interchange Improvements Draft Environmental Document

RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends that the Council receive a status update on the Interstate 80 (I-80)/Ashby Avenue (Route 13) Interchange Improvements Project ("Project"). Additionally, staff recommends that the Council review the Draft Environmental Document ("DED"), provide comments, and authorize Mayor Bauters to sign a letter of support for the Project incorporating Council's comments on the DED.

BACKGROUND

Alameda County Transportation Commission ("Alameda CTC"), in cooperation with California Department of Transportation ("Caltrans") and the cities of Emeryville and Berkeley (Cities), proposes to reconstruct the I-80 / Ashby Interchange to improve safety, provide traffic congestion relief, and enhance mobility at this critical access point and important intersection of regional transportation routes. The project will also provide multimodal transportation options, while improving community connectedness, including connectivity to the existing Bay Trail. These improvements collectively are hereafter referred to as the "Project."

The Project is currently in Project Approval and Environmental Document ("PA&ED") phase. Caltrans, as assigned by the Federal Highway Administration ("FHWA"), is the lead agency for securing California Environmental Quality Act ("CEQA") and National Environmental Policy Act ("NEPA") clearances for the Project. Caltrans released the Draft Environmental Document ("DED") for the Project on December 15, 2021. Caltrans in cooperation with Alameda CTC and the Cities will lead the outreach efforts during the 45-day comment period. A 90-minute Virtual Public Open House meeting will be held on January 11, 2022, starting at 5:50 PM. Comments are due on January 31, 2022.

After comments are received from the public and reviewing agencies, Caltrans may: give environmental approval to the proposed Project, conduct additional environmental studies, or abandon the Project.

If the Project is given environmental approval and funding is obtained, Caltrans and Alameda CTC could design and construct all or part of the Project. Final project approval is expected to be secured in early 2022. Caltrans and Alameda CTC will be applying for various federal, state, and regional grant sources starting in March 2022.

The Alameda CTC Project team presented a project update to the Emeryville City Council on June 15th, 2021, during a Council Study Session. The update included exhibits and discussions for project alternatives, design variances, Bicycle and Pedestrian Overcrossing (“BPOC”) and siting options, and other items that were to be released officially in the DED. Updates to the Project since that time will be reflected in this staff report.

DISCUSSION

Project Purpose and Build Alternatives

The interchange, constructed in the 1950s, does not provide access to or from westbound I-80 or Shellmound Street in the City of Emeryville. Additionally, the area including the interchange lacks connectivity for different modes of transportation (e.g., vehicular, bicycle and pedestrian users). For these reasons, the interchange suffers from the following key operational issues:

- The existing interchange provides no access to Shellmound Street to/from westbound I 80 and no access from Shellmound Street to Frontage Road
- Access from westbound traffic to Emeryville is forced to use the Powell Street interchange
- There is no direct pedestrian and bicyclist access to the San Francisco Bay Trail (“Bay Trail”) from 65th Street/Shellmound Street area

The Project proposes to reconstruct the I-80/Ashby Interchange to provide a standard interchange familiar to users of all modes, construct a new stand-alone BPOC structure over I-80, and connect the bicycle/pedestrian facilities, located east of I-80 with the Bay Trail located along the shoreline west of I-80. These improvements will enhance safety, provide traffic congestion relief, and enhance mobility at this critical segment of I-80. In summary, the purpose of the Project is to:

- Improve interchange access and circulation
- Provide a westbound I-80 connection to Shellmound Street
- Provide safe bicycle and pedestrian connectivity across I-80
- Improve circulation at I-80/Powell Street and 7th Street
- Alleviate local surface street congestion

The proposed Project would alleviate congestion, improve multi-modal access, and support implementation of local and regional land use and transportation plans. Since Fall of 2017, the Project team has reviewed various project alternatives and worked with stakeholders to narrow them down to two project alternatives: a “No Build” alternative and a single tight diamond interchange “Build Alternative”.

The Build Alternative would replace the existing elevated interchange connector ramps with a new bridge over I-80, realign West Frontage Road, and introduce a new bicycle and pedestrian overcrossing connection from 65th Street/Shellmound Street to the San

Francisco Bay Trail. Under the No Build Alternative, none of the improvements included under the proposed project would occur. The No Build Alternative is considered the environmental baseline against which potential environmental effects of the Build Alternative are evaluated.

The Project team is also reviewing various structure types and conform alignment options for a stand-alone Bicycle/Pedestrian Overcrossing (BPOC) structure.

DED Release

As discussed at the June 2021 City Council Study Session, the public now has the opportunity to review and comment on project alternatives, including the BPOC structure and conform types during the DED review and comment period. Comments are due on January 31, 2022.

Although it is not a requirement, it would be helpful to the Project for future grant opportunities that the City Council adopt a support position by writing a letter of support for the Project. Alameda CTC anticipates the City's participation throughout project development, including through construction completion.

Environmental Determination

The proposed Mitigated Negative Declaration (MND) is included to give notice to interested agencies and the public that it is Caltrans' intent to adopt an MND for this project. This does not mean that Caltrans' decision regarding the project is final. This MND is subject to change based on comments received by interested agencies and the public.

Caltrans has prepared an Initial Study (otherwise known as the DED) for this project, and pending public review, expects to determine from this study that the proposed project would not have a significant effect on the environment for the following reasons:

- The proposed project would have no impact on farmlands/timberlands, growth, mineral resources, population and housing, and recreation.
- In addition, the proposed project would have less than significant impacts on land use, communities, noise, and utilities and system services.
- With avoidance and minimization measures incorporated, the proposed project would have less than significant impacts on visual resources and aesthetics, cultural and tribal cultural resources, air quality, hydrology and floodplains, geology and soils, hazards and hazardous materials, public services, and traffic and transportation.
- With mitigation measures incorporated, the proposed project would have less than significant impacts to aquatic resources.

Prior City Council Comments for the Project

During the June 15th City Council study session, Council members reserved their comments for the Western Conform Options and the BPOC Design Variations aspects of the project. For the Western Conform options there was majority support for the midblock crossing with traffic calming and safety enhancements, such as a traffic signal. There was not majority support for the portal design due to safety, maintenance, and sea-level rise considerations. For the BPOC design variations there was majority preference for the basket handle design since it mimicked the design of the South Bayfront Pedestrian/Bicycle bridge. The majority of Council members did not support the box girder design.

City Staff Comments and Recommendations to City Council

City of Emeryville staff has reviewed the DED and has summarized the following comments for consideration by City Council:

1. **MND for the project (Page 6 of Exhibit B):** Staff is in support of the MND, the reasoning for the determination, and the use of avoidance and minimization measures. As part of the avoidance and minimization measures, it is critical that thorough messaging and outreach efforts to the resident and business community are conducted. Staff are also interested in creative ways that temporary bike and pedestrian detours could become leveraged into permanent facilities.
2. **Purpose of the proposed project (Pages 15-16 of Exhibit B):** Staff suggests revising the purpose bullet point as follows: "Provide safe bicycle and pedestrian connectivity across I-80 and Frontage Road to the Bay Trail."
3. **Regarding the Build / No-Build Alternative (Page 16 of Exhibit B):** Overall staff supports the "Build Alternative". The "No Build Alternative" is not consistent with the City of Emeryville General Plan, or regional goods and movement plans. The "No Build Alternative" would continue the lack of pedestrian and bike access from Shellmound to the Bay Trail.
4. **S-3 Parks and Rec Facilities (Page 17 of Exhibit B):** Staff recommends the project employ all practical measures to limit closure of Point Emery and Aquatic to vehicular access and ensure bike and pedestrian access are available at all times.
5. **S-5 Traffic and Transportation/Pedestrian and Bicycle Facilities (2.1.9) (Page 19 of Exhibit B):** Staff suggests that the bike and pedestrian diversions employed in traffic control plans not cause a significant or burdensome increase in travel distance.

6. **AMM VIS 1 Visual/Aesthetics (Page 19 of Exhibit B):** Regarding: “The final design will include measures to discourage creation of encampments”, the project should follow appropriate policies and regulations concerning the impacts on unhoused residents during the course of project construction. Furthermore, during the June 15th 2021 Council study session the majority of Council members did not support a portal design option for the western conform of the project due to safety concerns associated with that design.
7. **S-9 Air Quality (2.2.8) (Page 23 of Exhibit B):** Consider including the impacts of a shift towards bike and pedestrians modes in the statement about air quality.
8. **Noise (Page 24 of Exhibit B):** During the construction phase of the project the activities should be compliant with the City of Emeryville Noise Ordinance, with particular sensitivity to the residents of 6701 Shellmound Street.
9. **S-10 Energy (2.2.8) (Page 24 of Exhibit B):** Consider the benefits of a mode shift to pedestrian and bicycle travel in the statement about energy consumption
10. **BIO-1 (Page 24 of Exhibit B):** As part of reducing the overall carbon footprint of the project consider a tree removal/replacement ratio of 1:2 instead of 1:1.
11. **TOAR summary (Pages 30-31 of Exhibit B):** Ensure the project is consistent and conforms with the Emeryville Quiet Zone project in the existing conditions and lane configuration analyses.
12. **Interchange Build Alternative (Page 43 of Exhibit B):** Add a crosswalk to the Bay Street/Shellmound on-ramp.
13. **BPOC build alternatives (Page 48 of Exhibit B):** In 2021, the Emeryville Transportation Committee and City Council supported the basket handle design since it mimicked the design of the recently opened South Bayfront Pedestrian/Bicycle Bridge. No discussions have yet taken place regarding maintenance responsibility for the various design alternatives. Maintenance remains an important concern of the City and needs to be weighed heavily as part of the design selection process.
14. **Temporary Construction and Phasing (Pages 50-55 of Exhibit B):** Transportation Committee, Bike and Pedestrian Stakeholders, and City staff request that the bike/ped bridge is scheduled to an early phase of construction. This would facilitate bike and pedestrian detours needed during the course of construction for the interchange, and provide critical access where there is currently none.

- 15. Construction Impacts and Design Variances:** Staff requested that the ACTC project team provide a summary of construction impacts and design variances. The following response was received:

“Construction of the proposed Ashby Ave. interchange and bicycle/pedestrian overcrossing (BPOC) structure will require temporary night-time and weekend closures of I-80 during false work erection, temporary ramp closures, and temporary mainline traffic shifts onto the shoulders. Traffic detours are anticipated during these closure periods to direct motorists to the nearest interchanges at Powell Street and University Avenue. The realignment and reconstruction of West Frontage Road will also require temporary closure of West Frontage Road between University Ave. and Powell St. Efforts will be made to maintain existing connections and provide detours where possible during construction to minimize impacts to traffic.

Implementation of the new Bay Street connector and realigned West Frontage Road will require design variances related to non-standard intersection spacing with local intersections. The on-ramp lane drop tapers are also nonstandard to maximize queue storage capacity. Enhanced lighting, advanced warning signage, and enhanced thermoplastic striping will be implemented to offset the effect of these nonstandard features.”

FISCAL IMPACT

The Metropolitan Transportation Commission (“MTC”) is the regional transportation planning agency in the San Francisco Bay Area and is the Metropolitan Planning Organization for the nine county Bay Area. MTC is responsible for updating the Regional Transportation Plan (“RTP”), which is a comprehensive blueprint for the development of mass transit, highway, freight, and bicycle and pedestrian facilities. MTC and the Association of Bay Area Governments (“ABAG”) program San Francisco Bay Area projects in the RTP Plan Bay Area 2050. The proposed project is included in the RTP under reference number ID 17-01-0037.

The proposed project is also included in the MTC 2019 Transportation Improvement Program (“TIP”) under reference number ID ALA170002. MTC adopted the TIP on May 17, 2021. FHWA approved and incorporated the TIP into the Federal Statewide Transportation Improvement Program (“FSTIP”) on July 16, 2021.

The Project is eligible for federal, state, and regional funding. Beginning in March 2022, ACTC plans to submit for various grant sources for the Construction Phase of the Project. The letter of support from City of Emeryville, if approved, will be used to help strengthen grant applications.

There is no fiscal impact to the City of Emeryville at this time.

STAFF COMMUNICATION WITH THE PUBLIC

The Project team has been engaging with the general public and the bicycle and pedestrian advocacy groups during the project development and scoping throughout the current PA&ED (environmental study) phase. Caltrans (in cooperation with Alameda CTC and the Cities) will lead the outreach efforts during the 45-day DED review and comment period. Alameda CTC and other stakeholders, including the City staff, will work with Caltrans to accommodate local community/stakeholder needs.

City staff attends regular meetings for the Project to ensure the City's interests are addressed.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

N/A

CONCLUSION

Staff recommends that the Council receive a status update on the Interstate 80 (I-80)/Ashby Avenue (Route 13) Interchange Improvements Project ("Project"). Additionally, staff recommends that the Council reviews the Draft Environmental Document ("DED"), provides comments, and authorizes Mayor Bauters to sign a letter of support for the Project incorporating Council's DED comments.

PREPARED BY: Ryan O'Connell, Senior Civil Engineer and Mohamed Alaoui, Public Works Director

APPROVED AND FORWARDED TO THE CITY COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF EMERYVILLE:



Christine Daniel, City Manager

ATTACHMENTS

1. Exhibit A – Project Information and Map
2. Exhibit B – Draft Environmental Document for Project (Dec 15, 2021)
3. Exhibit C – Draft Environment Document Appendices (Dec 15, 2021)
4. Draft Letter of Support