

Summary Title: Concept Plans for Quarry Road Transit Connection to the Palo Alto Transit Center

Title: Review of Concept Plans for Quarry Road Transit Connection to the Palo Alto Transit Center and Partial Parkland Discontinuance Within El Camino Park

From: Philip Kamhi, Chief Transportation Official

Lead Department: Office of Transportation

Recommendation

Staff recommends that the Parks and Recreation Commission review and provide input on concept plans for the proposed Quarry Road Transit Connection and parkland discontinuance of a portion of El Camino Park.

Background

Transit and Shuttle Service at the Palo Alto Transit Center

The Palo Alto Transit Center (PATC) is the mobility hub of Palo Alto and has the second highest Caltrain ridership on the corridor. SamTrans, Santa Clara Valley Transit Authority (VTA), and Dumbarton Express all run buses to the PATC to complement Caltrain service and connect Palo Alto to San Mateo County, Santa Clara County, and the East Bay, respectively. Additionally, Stanford’s Marguerite shuttle service and other private shuttles provide last-mile connections from the PATC to campus facilities for employees and visitors.

In total, roughly 600 buses serve the transit center daily; roughly half are Marguerite shuttles. Transfers from Marguerite shuttles account for approximately 40 percent of Caltrain daily boardings at the transit center.

Bus and shuttle services use a combination of 10 bus bays and curbside space at the PATC, including in University Circle. Public transit service is restricted to the use of bus bays – bays are assigned to specific operators and lines – and shuttles use stops along the curb of University Circle. Employer and Stanford Health Care shuttles pick-up and drop-off in a parking area on the Palo Alto side of the station along Alma Street. The station area also accommodates layovers for bus and shuttle service.

Caltrain electrification is currently scheduled to begin in fall 2024. Electrification will increase train service from five to six trains per hour per direction during peak periods and from one to two trains per hour per direction during off peak periods, including weekends. Bus and shuttle services are likely to increase to align with Caltrain service.

The station is also a significant source for bicycle trips on Caltrain. Bicycle equipped passengers at the PATC are estimated to be between 750-800 per day, pre-COVID. Palo Alto is the second highest bicycle ridership stop along the Caltrain corridor at roughly 14 percent of all bicycle boardings and alightings, second only to 4th/King in San Francisco. Assuming 10 percent of daily passengers travel in the peak hour, the Palo Alto Transit Center serves roughly 75-80 Caltrain bicycle passengers/hour during the peak hour.

The Proposed Quarry Road Transit Connection

As envisioned in the Palo Alto Comprehensive Plan as Program T3.10.4 (2017), the proposed Quarry Road Transit Connection project would create a direct transit connection between the transit center bus bays and El Camino Real at the Quarry Road traffic signal, through an underused, passive portion of El Camino Park (see **Attachment A**). The proposed project would allow buses that use the bus terminal to exit via Quarry Road to El Camino Real rather than to circle back through University Avenue. The bus operators have estimated savings of approximately 5-8 minutes per trip could be achieved by avoiding University Circle and directly connecting with Quarry Road at El Camino Real.

The bus route reorganization would have secondary benefits to the University Avenue and University Circle area by eliminating the need for some buses to make constrained turning movements in the corridor. Articulated buses require additional turning radii to access the transit center from University Avenue which regularly causes congestion and delays for vehicular traffic and creates additional conflict points for bicycles and pedestrians at the gateway to Downtown Palo Alto.

The project would also include multiple pedestrian and bicycle improvements within El Camino Park adjacent to or near the proposed transit connection and at the intersection of Quarry Road and El Camino Real. Specifically, the proposed project would:

- Upgrade the crossing of El Camino Real to accommodate pedestrians and cyclists on both sides of Quarry Road, which would reduce crossing time; and
- Add safety and accessibility measures at the intersection of Quarry Road and El Camino Real (e.g., curb extensions and tighter turning radii, new pedestrian/bicycle ramps, pedestrian and bicycle refuge islands, and high visibility bicycle markings are currently being considered).

Through the above improvements, there would be enhanced visibility of the existing multi-modal path to the transit center and its connections to the existing Class 1 multi-modal path that connects to El Camino Park and into Menlo Park, through the PATC to the Embarcadero Bike Path, and to the Stanford Perimeter Trail. These connectivity improvements would also make the active park facilities in El Camino Park more accessible for bikes, pedestrians and transit riders.

Designs for the transit connection are in the early stages, but all feasible options are under consideration, ranging from a new connection providing full access to buses between the transit center and El Camino Real to an outbound-only transit lane. The conceptual design under consideration is illustrated in **Attachment B**. The preliminary concept design includes 12.5 foot wide inbound and outbound transit travel lanes (188 feet and 163 feet in length, respectively), with six-inch curbs, separated by a landscaped median that ranges in width between 18-33 feet that would house existing utilities.¹ The utilities accommodated in the median are illustrated in **Attachment C**.

The projected area needed to implement this extension is approximately 0.24 acres, including 0.10 acres of a landscaped median that, although part of the project area, would remain in its current state. Voter approval would be requested to discontinue use for park purposes of a slightly larger area—approximately 0.33 acres total—as minor shifts in the location of the proposed project may be required as project plans are finalized, to better meet access, circulation, and other goals. The additional 0.09-acre area represents a ten-foot-wide buffer

¹ Existing utilities on the parcel include water (SFPUC and City), communications (Qwest, Level3, etc.), electric (City), gas (City), and a traffic signal (Caltrans).

around the projected location of the improvements at the current conceptual design stage (see **Attachment D**). Following completion of project construction, the City would anticipate re-dedicating for park purposes the portion of the discontinued area that was not needed for the project.

The proposed project could require the removal of approximately 15 trees, and there are an additional three trees in the project buffer area. The project could include lighting, benches, signage and low level, drought tolerant landscape planting, mulch, and additional tree planting. Any lighting and planting would be harmonious and compatible with the existing conditions in El Camino Park.

Other modifications and improvements could include, but are not limited to, wayfinding signs, additional striping and green bike lanes to help identify buffered lanes and highlight any potential conflict areas between buses, transit and bicyclists in the corridor, crosswalk striping, and refuge islands.

Discussion

El Camino Park consists of approximately 10.75 acres of land and is leased by Stanford to the City under a 1915 lease that currently is set to expire in 2042. The Park has been dedicated by the City by ordinance for recreational and conservation purposes. Palo Alto Ordinance No. 2252 (Sept. 13, 1965); Palo Alto Municipal Code § 22.08.230 & Ex. A-19.

The proposed project would develop a strip of the underused, passive portion of El Camino Park to provide a direct transit connection to the transit center, where bike and pedestrian access are currently occurring. This area of the park does not have playing fields but does provide circulation throughput that serves the park. The project is akin to a park improvement project in that it improves multi-modal movement to and through the park. The proposed transit connection would enhance the use and enjoyment of El Camino Park and the recreational amenities provided to the residents of Palo Alto and the surrounding communities.

The Transit Connection project would:

- Add to the Park’s recreational facilities by enhancing the connections to the Class 1 path through the Park for pedestrians and bicycles;
- Better connect the Park to the regional pedestrian and bicycle network, including the Stanford Perimeter Trail, by enhancing the crossing and safety at El Camino Real;
- Improve the visual and physical connectivity to the Park and the transit center from El Camino Real for pedestrians, cyclists, and transit users;
- Reduce traffic congestion in the immediate vicinity of the Park by creating a more efficient traffic flow for buses, which also would serve to reduce emissions of air pollutants and noise from vehicular traffic;
- Reduce bus traffic and turnarounds at the transit center, which similarly would serve to reduce air emissions and noise from buses and also would improve the pedestrian and bicycle circulation environment;
- Activate an inactive area of the Park through functional design, which would provide a safety benefit;
- Improve the functionality of the transit center for those who use public transportation, including those who use public transportation to get to and from the Park; and
- Improve access to the Park and connectivity with surrounding properties, both for pedestrians and cyclists who use the sections of the path to the north and south of the Park and for people traveling by public transportation.

Discontinuance of Parkland Use

Article VIII of the Palo Alto City Charter governs dedicated parklands and states as follows:

All lands owned or controlled by the city which are or will be used for park, playground, recreation or conservation purposes shall be dedicated for such purposes by ordinance.

No land heretofore or hereafter dedicated for such purposes shall be sold or otherwise disposed of, nor shall its use be abandoned or discontinued except pursuant to majority vote of the electorate. Any election and related procedures under Article VIII shall conform to the provisions set forth in general law as it existed January 1, 1965, except that the council may call such election by majority vote.

No substantial building, construction, reconstruction or development upon or with respect to any lands so dedicated shall be made except pursuant to ordinance subject to referendum.

Given that El Camino Park has been dedicated by the City for recreational and conservation purposes, a majority vote of the electorate is necessary to discontinue from park use the portion of El Camino Park that would be used to facilitate transit circulation.

Preliminary design concept alternatives have estimated that up to 0.24 acres of parkland would be required to accommodate the proposed transit connection, with an additional 0.09 acres of buffer for project design that would be rededicated for park use after project construction.

Timeline

In the coming months, the Palo Alto City Council is expected to consider placing the proposed parkland discontinuance on the ballot for the Fall 2024 election. If the ballot measure passes, the City and Stanford will work with the transit agency stakeholders and Caltrans to further develop construction plans and apply for necessary permits.

Resource Impact

The preliminary cost estimate for constructing the proposed project is estimated to be between \$3-3.5M but is dependent on ultimate design. These costs will be updated as the design is advanced and construction documents are prepared. Funding is being pursued through MTC but may not be identified until after the ballot measure is considered by voters.

Policy Implications

The proposed Quarry Road Transit Connection Project would advance numerous Comprehensive Plan policies and programs, as follows:

Policy T-1.11 Encourage continued enhancement of the Caltrain stations as important transportation nodes for the city.

Program T1.11.1 Collaborate with Stanford University, VTA, Caltrain and other agencies to pursue improvements to the Palo Alto Transit Center area aimed at enhancing the pedestrian experience and improving circulation and access for all modes, including direct access to El Camino Real for transit vehicles.

Program T3.10.3 Provide safe, convenient pedestrian, bicycle and transit connections between the Stanford Shopping Center/Medical Center areas and housing along the Sand Hill Road/Quarry Road corridors to Palo Alto Transit Center, Downtown Palo Alto and other primary destinations.

Program T3.10.4 Pursue extension of Quarry Road for transit, pedestrians and bicyclists to access the Palo Alto Transit Center from El Camino Real. Also study the feasibility of another pedestrian and bicycle underpass of Caltrain at Everett Street.

Policy T-8.2 Coordinate with local and regional agencies and Caltrans to maintain and improve transportation infrastructure in Palo Alto, including the Multi-Modal Transit Center.

Environmental Review

The proposed project is exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). The proposed project comes within the statutory exemption for “facility extensions not to exceed four miles in length which are required for the transfer of passengers from or to exclusive public mass transit guideway or busway public transit services.” Pub. Res. Code § 21080(b)(12). Due to its fixed location, Caltrain qualifies as an “exclusive public mass transit guideway” service. The proposed project would extend the existing transit center facility by approximately 210 feet, through the intersection of Quarry Road and El Camino Real, to facilitate the transfer of passengers to Caltrain, among other public transit services. Staff continues to investigate whether any additional CEQA exemptions also may apply to the proposed project.

Attachments

Attachment A: Transit and Multi-model Connections

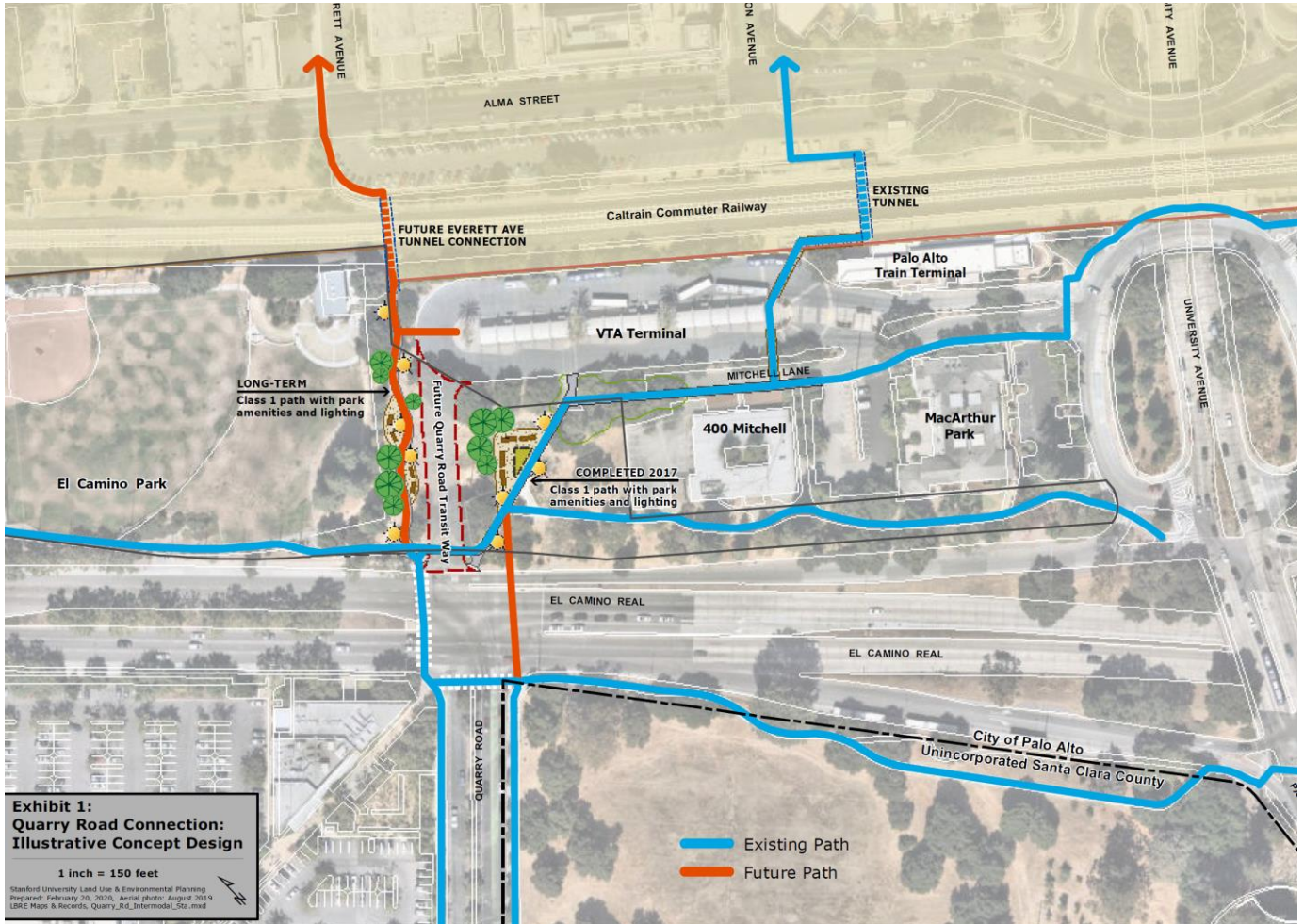
Attachment B: Conceptual Site Plan

Attachment C: Utilities in the Landscaped Median

Attachment D: Project Buffer

Approved By: Philip Kamhi, Chief Transportation Official

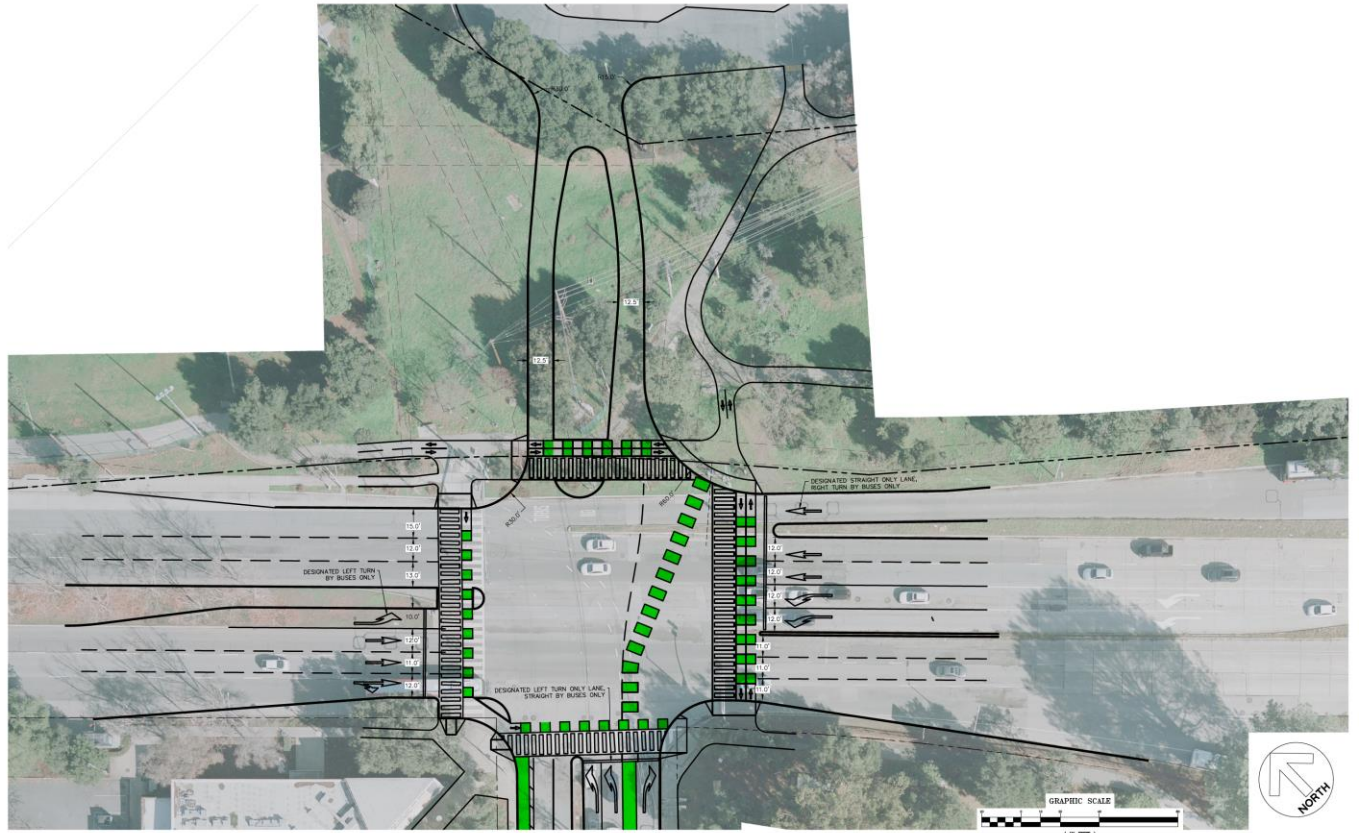
Attachment A: Transit and Multi-model Connections



The proposed project includes the improvements shown conceptually above as “Future Quarry Road Transit Way” and the pedestrian/bike crossing on the southern leg of El Camino Real at Quarry Road. The figure above is not intended to identify the exact proposed location of these improvements.

Other potential improvements depicted above as “Future Path” and “Long-Term,” including the “Future Everett Ave. Tunnel Connection,” are not part of the proposed project and are illustrated here only for context.

Attachment B: Conceptual Site Plan

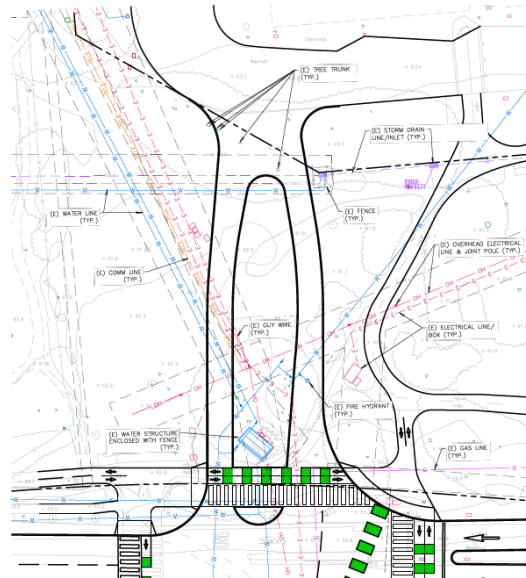


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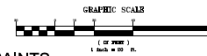
PALO ALTO TRANSIT CENTER - QUARRY ROAD EXTENSION
PALO ALTO, CA

03/14/2024
FIG-2

Attachment C: Utilities in the Landscaped Median



PALO ALTO TRANSIT CENTER - QUARRY ROAD EXTENSION: SITE CONSTRAINTS
PALO ALTO, CA



03/14/2024
FIG-3

Attachment D: Project Buffer

A 10-foot-wide project buffer is illustrated in red.

