



PUBLIC WORKS DEPARTMENT

Council Meeting Date: September 25, 2007

Staff Report #: 07-165

Agenda Item #: D2

CONSENT: Approval of the Revised Comment Letter on the Draft Program Environmental Impact Report/Environmental Impact Statement (EIR/EIS) for the Central Valley to Bay Area Segment of the California High Speed Rail Project.

RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends that the City Council approve the revised comment letter (included as Attachment A) on the draft Program Environmental Impact Report/Environmental Impact Statement (EIR/EIS) for the Central Valley to Bay Area Segment of the California High Speed Rail Project.

BACKGROUND

The Council considered a draft comment letter on the California High Speed Rail Central Valley to Bay Area program level EIR/EIS on September 18, 2007. The Council provided comments on the draft letter and requested that a final draft incorporating the comments be brought back to Council for final approval. The letter has been redrafted and is included as Attachment A.

ANALYSIS

The Council requested several modifications to the draft prior to being returned to Council for approval. The comments included a wide range of issues to strengthen certain points within the letter and reduce language related to position statements on the project.

One of the main points that Council requested to include in the revised letter centered on reorganizing the seven points listed in the letter to better prioritize the issues of concern for the community. Another requested modification included the inclusion of the community's concerns related to the impact on the character and neighborhood feel of the City with the introduction of the High Speed Train. Additional modification requests included:

- Strengthening the reasons that freight traffic is an area of concern
- Adding a request to analyze additional alternatives including using the I-280 corridor or undergrounding the system with air rights being used for a potential funding source
- Specifically stating that a raised track system to complete grade separations creates a "wall effect" and increases noise impacts within the City
- Modifying the Electrification section to be consistent with the High Speed Train proposal

- Stating that more detailed project level EIR/EIS's need to be prepared to clearly address the impacts of grade separation including the economic impacts prior to placing a funding measure on the ballot

The items listed above have all been incorporated into the revised draft letter in Attachment A.

IMPACT ON CITY RESOURCES

The HST project involves no direct commitments of City resources.

POLICY ISSUES

There are no policy issues as a result of this action.

Chip Taylor
Transportation Manager

Kent Steffens
Director of Public Works

PUBLIC NOTICE: Public Notification was achieved by posting the agenda, with this agenda item being listed, at least 72 hours prior to the meeting.

ATTACHMENTS: A. City of Menlo Park draft comment letter on the Central Valley to Bay Area High Speed Rail Program EIR/EIS

ATTACHMENT A

KELLY FERGUSSON
MAYOR

ANDREW COHEN
MAYOR PRO TEM

JOHN BOYLE
COUNCIL MEMBER

RICHARD CLINE
COUNCIL MEMBER

HEYWARD ROBINSON
COUNCIL MEMBER



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DRAFT

September 25, 2007

California High Speed Rail Authority
Attn: California High Speed Train
Central Valley to Bay Area High Speed Rail Program EIR/EIS
925 L Street, Suite 1425
Sacramento, CA 95814

Subject: City of Menlo Park Comments on the Central Valley to Bay
Area High Speed Rail Program EIR/EIS

Members of the Authority:

Thank you for the opportunity to review and comment on the EIR/EIS for the Central Valley to Bay Area segment of the High Speed Train (HST) system.

The City of Menlo Park appreciates the Authority's efforts to analyze alternate routes and/or methods in order to avoid significant adverse impacts to the Peninsula area from the alignment of the HST.

The City of Menlo Park would, however, be directly affected by several of the alternatives, whether through the Caltrain mainline or the Dumbarton Rail Corridor. Menlo Park previously has expressed its concerns related to new rail activity on either of the two rail lines and reiterates here that the following issues need to be addressed when determining the most appropriate route:

1. Alternatives – The Authority should continue to further analyze terminating the HST project in either San Jose or Union City and connecting to existing systems with time-coordinated connections, etc. Also, two additional alternatives should be carefully studied and included in the document. First, a route generally along the I-280 corridor from San Jose to San Francisco should be included. This route would have reduced impacts to many of the communities on the peninsula and should be carefully addressed. Second, construct the system underground through the peninsula. This would significantly reduce many of the impacts associated with the system. Also, the air rights above the system could be leased to offset the cost of the system with this alternative.

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2. Grade Separation -- The Program EIR/EIS provided little information regarding grade separations within Menlo Park. Grade separations on the Caltrain mainline will create impacts because of the constrained nature of the development in Menlo Park as well as the presence of a historical structure. One likely alternative for grade separation would include raising the tracks. This particular alternative has another unique issue of creating a "wall effect" within the community and dividing the City. A trench alternative would lessen the impacts in the City, similar to the undergrounding alternative described in item # 1 above. The City would also expect that any project level EIR/EIS's would address and mitigate all the impacts of grade separation including, but not limited to, the economic impacts.

3. Electrification --The appearance of overhead electric power supply for the trains, including the wires, supporting poles, mast arms and insulations, is a matter of significant concern. Also, the electrification system should also be compatible with the proposed Caltrain electrification such that two systems do not need to be constructed and maintained.

4. Noise and vibration mitigation -- The additional noise and vibration caused by the HST needs to be clearly stated and addressed. Any noise and/or vibration impacts need to be mitigated as part of the project. Such measures should be included as integral components of the project. These measures should not create other impacts such as construction of a sound wall that might divide the City and affect the neighborhood feel of the community.

5. Freight -- Menlo Park is concerned about freight traffic using either the Caltrain mainline or the Dumbarton Rail line and its impact on residents and traffic in the area. Since the rail lines will be grade separated, which allows for faster trains times and reduced vehicular and pedestrian conflicts, the lines would be more easily suited for freight traffic. This may lead to increased freight traffic on rail lines that currently have minimal freight traffic. A new San Francisco Bay crossing along the Dumbarton alignment may open this corridor up to freight traffic, which could substantially increase impacts to adjacent residential neighborhoods in Menlo Park.

6. Funding -- The project intends to use State General Obligation bonds to fund the project. This funding method would create a long-term

financial obligation that could impact existing State programs. A detailed cost/benefit and fiscal impact analysis should be provided for the project, so voters can make an informed decision. Also, additional funding sources should be sought to share the costs of the project.

7. Other Environmental Impacts – The HST project will require the removal of trees, affect view corridors and grade separation will significantly impact local traffic circulation. The HST would also change the close neighborhood character of Menlo Park by introducing a train system that would not fit within the community. These issues need to be clearly understood prior to making a final decision on the best alignment for the project. The current program level EIR/EIS is not sufficiently detailed to allow those affected to understand the potential impacts before they are asked to vote on funding for the project. A project specific EIR/EIS should be completed for work on the San Francisco peninsula before the HST project appears on the ballot due to the higher level of likely environmental impacts as compared with other parts of the HST project.

Attached to this letter are Menlo Park's previous comment letters for other rail projects on the same rail corridors. The issues related to HST are very similar to the issues raised in those comment letters. The City of Menlo Park would expect the Authority to consider all of these comments when evaluating the City's responses to the draft EIR/EIS.

Finally, the City of Menlo Park appreciates the opportunity to provide input on the High Speed Rail Program EIR/EIS. The City looks forward to participating in the EIR/EIS process to review any impacts and proposed mitigation measures within Menlo Park. As previously noted, the City of Menlo Park cannot declare itself in support of the project until the issues described above have been carefully evaluated and addressed through the evaluation and design process.

Sincerely,

Glen Rojas
City Manager

Cc: Members of the City Council
Quentin Kopp, High Speed Rail Authority Board Chairperson
Fran Florez, High Speed Rail Authority Board Vice-Chairperson

Donna Andrews, High Speed Rail Authority Board Member
David Crane, High Speed Rail Authority Board Member
Rod Diridon, High Speed Rail Authority Board Member
Kirk Lindsey, High Speed Rail Authority Board Member
Curt Pringle, High Speed Rail Authority Board Member
Lynn Schenk, High Speed Rail Authority Board Member
Tom Stapleton, High Speed Rail Authority Board Member
City Attorney
Director of Public Works

Attachments:

- A. City of Menlo Park comments and resolution on the first California High Speed Rail Program EIR/EIS dated August 26, 2004.
- B. City of Menlo Park comments on the Caltrain Electrification EIR/EIS dated May 24, 2004.
- C. City of Menlo Park comments on the Dumbarton Rail Corridor Project dated July 23, 2007.
- D. City of Menlo Park comments on the San Francisco Bay Area Regional Rail Plan dated August 29, 2007.