



STAFF REPORT

City Council
Meeting Date:
Staff Report Number:

1/27/2026
26-010-CC

Study Session: **Provide direction on the City's Middle Avenue Pedestrian and Bicycle Rail Crossing project**

Recommendation

Staff recommends the City Council provide direction on the City's Middle Avenue Pedestrian and Bicycle Rail Crossing project (Project) based on the three options described below and summarized here:

- Finalize the design to be shovel ready while continuing to seek additional funding for the gap – this is staff's recommended option
- Phase the Project based on available funding
- Discontinue the Project

Policy Issues

The Project is consistent with policies stated in the 2016 General Plan Circulation Element, the El Camino Real and Downtown Specific Plan and is included in the City's capital improvement program (CIP). These policies seek to maintain a safe, efficient, attractive, user-friendly circulation system that promotes a healthy, safe and active community and quality of life throughout Menlo Park.

Background

The Project involves the design and construction of a new pedestrian and bicycle undercrossing of the Caltrain railroad in the vicinity of Middle Avenue. The Project provides a safer, more comfortable connection for residents, workers, and visitors connecting across the railroad tracks (Attachment A). On Jan. 13, staff provided an informational item to City Council on the status of the Project (Attachment B).

Analysis

The Project cost estimates have been updated several times. In response to the significant increase in total Project costs in 2024 from a range of \$23 and \$35 million to \$62 million, the City and Caltrain agreed to advance the preliminary engineering design and environmental clearance effort to obtain better cost certainty. Per the execution of the 2024 Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), staff and Caltrain obtained the services of TY Lin for the design and following a Construction Manager / General Contractor (CMGC) approach, obtained the services of the Myers and Sons contracting team for the design consultation. Per City Council's direction in 2024, staff would return to City Council for direction on the Project following the value engineering process and with the updated costs.

The value engineering workshop focused on optimizing constructability, minimizing the impacts on the operation of the rail during construction and cost reduction. The main cost drivers of the Project are the windows of construction set by Caltrain, the method of construction and utility relocations. Table 1 provides a summary of the estimated construction windows and methods, construction cost and duration. These

costs are preliminary and need further refinement. Option 4, which consists of one weekend shutdown with bus service provides the least expensive construction and shortest duration.

Construction window	Construction method	Estimated construction cost	Construction duration (months)
Option 1 - Short nightly closures (4 hours); 78 nightly shutdowns	Segmental Verona temporary bridge system	\$38 million	18
Option 2 - Longer nightly closures (8 hours) with single track operation; 53 nightly shutdowns	Segmental Verona temporary bridge system	\$35 million	14-16
Option 3 - Short nightly closures (4 hours) and single-track operation over four weekends; six nightly power shutdowns	Simple span pre-assembled temporary bridge system	\$33 million	14-16
Option 4 - One weekend shutdown (52 hour) and short nightly closures (4 to 6 hours)	Open excavation	\$30 million	13-16

Table 2 provides total Project costs that are based on the most up to date information for the work and includes the soft costs (design, environmental clearance, project / construction management, and ROW acquisition).

Item	Estimated cost (million) ¹
Construction costs total ²	\$30-\$38
Soft costs total	\$15
Design, environmental documentation, CM/GC and cost estimating ³	\$5.9
Caltrain project and construction management ⁴	\$8.6
City staff time	\$0.40
Subtotal	\$45-\$53
Contingency (15%)	\$7-8
ROW acquisition ⁵	\$4
Total Project cost – low	\$56
Total Project cost – high	\$65

Notes:

1. Total project costs are rounded up.
2. Construction costs based on estimates provided during the value engineering workshops and include the cost for modifications to the fiber optic costs. These estimates are preliminary and will be refined as the design progresses. The fiber optic costs are to be negotiated with Caltrain.
3. The design, environmental, CM/GC and independent cost estimator costs are based on approved scope of work.
4. Estimated Caltrain soft costs are based on project and construction management hours through closeout. Caltrain revenue

losses associated with the disruption to train services are not included.

5. ROW was acquired in 2024.

Project funding and shortfall

The Project has received over \$22 million in City and grant funding to support the design and construction of the undercrossing (Table 3), including federal funding from a member designated project nominated by Representative Eshoo in December 2022 (Federal omnibus budget bill) and a third cycle One Bay Area Grant (OBAG-3), also a federal funding source. Staff applied for Safe Streets and Roads for All funding in 2024 through the US Department of Transportation, but the effort was unsuccessful. Based on the current estimates, the funding shortfall is estimated to range between \$34 and \$43 million.

Table 3: Total Project funding

Funding	Source	Amount	Phase
Measure A/W Pedestrian/Bicycle Program	San Mateo County Transportation Authority	\$1,130,000	Design
Transportation impact fees	City of Menlo Park	\$5,658,334	Design and construction
Middle Plaza development agreement contribution	Private, Stanford University	\$6,000,000	Construction
Stanford recreational mitigation grant	Santa Clara County	\$1,000,000	Construction
One Bay Area Grant – Third Cycle	Metropolitan Transportation Commission	\$5,000,000	Construction
Federal omnibus budget bill	USDOT	\$4,000,000	Construction
Total		\$22,788,334	

City Council feedback and next steps

The following options are presented below for City Council's consideration:

- *Finalize the design* – The design is currently at 35%. City Council could consider amending the 2024 MOU with Caltrain to proceed with finalizing the design and completing the environmental documentation. With a shovel-ready design, the Project would be more competitive for grant funding opportunities to address the shortfall. Staff would recommend working with a transportation grant writer and Caltrain to assess funding opportunities at both the state and federal levels. Caltrain's recently released Draft Corridor Crossings Strategy (CCS) Program Initiation Report may provide some helpful ideas for closing the funding gap through the pursuit of corridor wide funding opportunities (Attachment C). Staff would also pursue funding through the San Mateo County Transportation Authority (SMCTA). The City and Caltrain would request extensions for the OBAG-3 grant and earmark funds awarded to the Project as other funding opportunities are pursued. The City would also have to re-evaluate extension of the Stanford University funding sources.

To proceed with the design, an amendment to the 2024 MOU with Caltrain would be required. The design and environmental documentation are estimated to cost \$7.4 million. Staff would continue to coordinate with Caltrain on revisions to the soft costs and return to City Council with an amendment to the MOU for the remaining funds needed to complete the design and be shovel ready. On the construction costs, staff would continue to work with Caltrain to support Option 4 (one weekend shutdown and short nightly closures) as the preferred operating construction window given the significant cost savings. Negotiations on the relocation of the fiber optic lines would continue to eliminate those

costs (approximately \$5 million).

- *Phase the Project* – City Council could consider directing staff to assess phasing the Project and using the available funding to build a portion. Staff would assess if the construction money available could be sufficient to build the tunnel portion of the Project only. Under this option, the tunnel would be built and closed while staff pursue additional funding for the ramps, lighting, and remaining infrastructure. Staff would assess redesigning a smaller Project and using the current available funds prior to their expiration, although also assessing a possible need for extensions. Phasing the Project would be more expensive due to additional mobilization and escalation over time. Completion of the Project would remain uncertain and depend on the availability of future funds.
- *Discontinue the Project* – Due to the funding gap, City Council could consider discontinuing the effort and forgoing the construction funding awarded to the Project. The SMCTA recently informed the City that there are no funds available for the design of the City's Grade Separation Project for Ravenswood, Oak Grove and Glenwood Avenues due to the increasing costs of grade separations and corridor wide funding gaps. With this Project discontinued and the corridor-wide grade separation challenges, the City would not have opportunities for a grade separation project until funding is secured.

Impact on City Resources

The impact to City resources is detailed in the Project funding shortfall section above.

Environmental Review

This action is not a project within the meaning of CEQA as it will not directly result in a change to the physical environment.

Public Notice

Public notification was achieved by posting the agenda, with the agenda items being listed, at least 72 hours prior to the meeting.

Attachments

- A. Hyperlink – Project latest concepts: www.menlopark.gov/Government/Departments/Public-Works/Capital-improvement-projects/Middle-Avenue-Caltrain-crossing
- B. Hyperlink – Jan. 13 Staff Report #26-003-CC: www.menlopark.gov/files/sharedassets/public/v1/agendas-and-minutes/city-council/2026-meetings/20260113/h2-20260113-cc-middle-caltrain-bike-and-ped-update.pdf
- C. Hyperlink – Draft Corridor Crossings Strategy (CCS) Program Initiation Report: caltrain.com/projects/ccs

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