



STAFF REPORT

City Council

Meeting Date:

7/14/2026

Staff Report Number:

26-119-CC

Study Session:

Provide direction on the Willow Road Bicycle and Pedestrian Safety Improvements Project

Recommendation

Staff recommends that the City Council provide direction on one of three following options for the Willow Road Bicycle and Pedestrian Safety Improvements project (Project):

- Option 1 – Continue current design and continue pursuing grant funding
- Option 2 – Pause design and wait for grant funding decision
- Option 3 – Revise Project scope and design for a lower cost alternative

Policy Issues

The Project is consistent with the 2016 General Plan goals and policies. These policies seek to maintain a safe, efficient, attractive, user-friendly circulation system that promotes a healthy, safe and active community and enhances quality of life throughout the City. The Project is also consistent with the City Council priority of safe routes. The Project is included in the City's Transportation Master Plan (TMP), Vision Zero Action Plan, the City's Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) and supports the City's Environmental Justice Element. In addition, the Project is identified in the Caltrans District 4 Bike Plan and the City/County Association of Governments (C/CAG)'s Countywide Comprehensive Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan.

Background

Willow Road is one of the City's major east-west arterials, connecting the City to U.S. 101 and Bayfront Expressway and carries approximately 30,000 to 50,000 vehicles per day. Between Chester Street and the Bayfront Expressway, Willow Road is State Route 114 and is managed by Caltrans. Bicycle infrastructure on Willow Road consists primarily of Class II bike lanes from Alma Street to the Bayfront Expressway, although not contiguous. Between Bay Road and O'Keefe Street, there are no separate bicycle facilities and cyclists need to share the travel lane with vehicles. As part of the U.S. 101 interchange improvements completed in 2019, both Class II bike lanes and Class IV bikeways (separated facilities with concrete barriers) were constructed on the overpass.

In 2018, Caltrans identified Class IV bikeways on Willow Road as part of their District 4 Bike Plan. Class IV bikeways on Willow Road were identified in the City's 2020 Transportation Master Plan and 2024 Vision Zero Action Plan. Class IV bikeways are facilities that are physically separated from vehicle traffic with posts, raised medians, or are raised in elevation from the road.

In 2021, the City and County Association of Governments (C/CAG) included Class IV bikeways in the San Mateo County Comprehensive Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan and identified Willow Road as a Tier 1 priority and part of the Countywide Backbone Bike Network, a regional system that links significant destinations across local jurisdictions with the goal of closing gaps between city boundaries and providing continuous, low-stress bikeways throughout San Mateo County.

In June 2022, the City submitted a grant application to the California Transportation Commission (CTC) Cycle 6 Active Transportation Program (ATP) for the design of an at-grade Class IV bikeway along Willow Road from Durham Street to Bayfront Expressway. This Project was proposed as providing a low-stress critical link to regional bicycling connections, such as the Bay Trail, Dumbarton Bridge Trail, and the Peninsula Bikeway. The application explained how connecting these regional trail systems can help encourage mode shifts from vehicles to bicycling and support bicycle-transit multimodal trips by expanding the low-stress network to serve more destinations. Although the grant application was not successful, the City was encouraged to apply in a future round (typically every other year).

On Dec. 13, 2022, the City Council approved the Willow Village development project. As part of that project, the frontage improvements included the design and construction of a raised Class IV bikeway along the one-quarter mile property frontage.

In April 2023, Caltrans completed resurfacing work along Willow Road that included the installation of high-visibility crosswalks, painted buffers to existing Class II bike lanes, and Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) upgrades to curb ramps.

In December 2023, the City was successful in receiving \$3.5 million in funding from the San Mateo County Transportation Authority (SMCTA) 2023 Measure A & W Highway Program for the design and construction of the Project. The grant application was based on the concept of a raised Class IV rather than an at-grade bike lane and received the highest ranking for that grant cycle. The change from at-grade to a raised Class IV system was based on feedback received from the previously unsuccessful 2022 ATP grant application. As part of the debrief in February 2023, CTC staff commented that an at-grade facility, a bicycle lane located in the road next to the vehicle lane, may not produce a truly low-stress environment for its users, particularly youth, older adults, and less confident cyclists, given the relatively high vehicle speeds along Willow Road. To increase the chances of success, staff proposed a raised system, with the bicycle facility design above the road level matching the elevation of the sidewalk. A raised Class IV enhanced the safety over an at-grade bike lane design. The Project also includes lighting improvements and pedestrian safety enhancements based on community feedback.

For Caltrans projects, the first step is the development of the Project Approval and Environmental Documentation (PA&ED). The PA&ED documents the alternatives under consideration including engineering reports and discloses environmental impacts and mitigation measures. City staff requested and received staff support from the SMCTA to lead the PA&ED effort through their consultant team.

In October 2024, the City entered into a cooperative agreement with the SMCTA and Caltrans for all phases of the project. The original Project focused mainly on the Caltrans portion of Willow Road from Bay Road to Bayfront Expressway. During the PA&ED phase and in consultation with Caltrans, the Project team extended the limits westward to include westbound Willow Road to Durham Road and eastbound

Willow Road from O’Keefe Street to Bay Road to fill in the bicycle gap and provide a more complete and continuous bike facility. As described further in the Analysis section, modifications to the U.S. 101 overpass to address queuing and merging issues for westbound Willow Road traffic accessing the northbound and southbound on-ramps were also added.

In October 2024, the City applied for the Metropolitan Transportation Commission (MTC) Safe Routes to Transit and Bay Trail Grant. While the City was unsuccessful in this effort, the Project scored high among the applications and was the highest-ranked project listed on the non-funded project list. MTC recently released the next round for this grant that is due in October.

In April 2025, the Complete Streets Commission (CSC) reviewed the Project and provided feedback on the proposed corridor improvements. The CSC expressed support for the raised Class IV bikeway concept, citing its potential to improve comfort and safety for bicyclists of all ages and abilities and to advance the City’s multimodal transportation goals.

In September 2025, staff applied for the SMCTA 2025 Measure A & W Highway Program to fully fund the design phase. The Project again received the highest ranking among the grant applications and was awarded funding to complete the design phase.

In June, staff submitted an application for CTC’s Cycle 8 ATP Call for Projects. Staff expects the Project to be more competitive with the upgrades to the design, including the raised Class IV facility and pedestrian safety improvements, and progress on the PA&ED.

Analysis

The Project goals included reducing high-stress bicycle conditions and improving pedestrian crossings on Willow Road to create a more accessible, comfortable, and lower-stress corridor for the residents, workers, visitors, and particularly youth and older adults in the Belle Haven neighborhood, and the surrounding areas in the City and East Palo Alto. However, the costs have increased significantly due to the changes in the scope of the Project and rising construction costs. The sections that follow present an overview of the updated design, cost estimate, funding strategy, alternative design options, and associated cost and schedule implications.

Current design

The Project limits extend from O’Keefe Street to Bayfront Expressway. The proposed design (Attachments A and B) includes raised Class IV bikeways in the westbound direction from Hamilton Avenue to Durham Road and in the eastbound direction from Chester Street to Ivy Drive, at-grade Class IV bikeways where there isn’t enough room to provide a raised system, a Class II bike lane from O’Keefe Street to Chester Street in the eastbound direction, narrower vehicle lanes to reduce speeds, in-lane transit boarding islands at Newbridge Street and Hamilton Avenue and pedestrian safety improvements including new crosswalks at O’Brien Drive and Bay Road. While the project proposes to maintain most of the existing medians, the median between Durham and Chester Streets would need to be removed along with the median trees to accommodate the new bike lane. In addition, the median on Bay Road would need to be modified to accommodate the Class IV bikeway and the crosswalk design and may result in removal of heritage trees. The number of heritage tree removals would be determined in the design phase.

At U.S. 101, the Project proposes to convert a westbound through lane to a second right-turn lane into the southbound on-ramp; widening westbound Willow Road at the northbound on-ramp to accommodate queuing and converting the third westbound lane on Willow Road at Bay Road to an exclusive right-turn lane to reduce queuing and merging issues. In addition, Project includes upgrades to the SamTrans, AC Transit (Dumbarton Express), and City shuttle stops along Willow Road based on the transit agencies' latest design standards for safe and efficient bus circulation. A link to the Project's webpage is included as Attachment C.

The PA&ED phase is nearing completion with project approval expected by Caltrans in July. Upon completion of this phase, the SMCTA will lead in managing the design / Plans, Specifications and Estimate (PS&E) phase with support from City staff. The SMCTA plans to issue a Request for Proposals to their consultant bench to ensure competitive proposals.

Current Project cost estimates

A total of \$1.9 million in Transportation Impact Fee funding has been appropriated in prior fiscal year budgets to support the Project, including completion of the PA&ED phase and early construction-related activities. As shown in the Table 1, the Project currently has funds to complete the design phase and some funds for construction from the SMCTA 2023 Measure A & W Highway Program grant. Matching funds for the construction would need to be appropriated through future budgets. With the matching commitment, there is an estimated \$7.3 million funding gap for the construction phase.

Table 1: Current cost estimate and funding				
Phase	Total cost	City funds	SMCTA award	Funding gap
PA&ED	\$914,800	\$914,800	N/A	N/A
Design (PS&E)	\$2,600,000	\$1,000,000	\$1,600,000	\$0
Right of way	\$50,000	\$25,000	\$25,000	\$0
Construction	\$12,716,000	\$2,425,000	\$3,025,000	\$7,266,000
Total	\$16,280,800	\$4,364,800	\$4,650,000	\$7,266,000

Note: City Construction matching funds will need to be appropriated through future budgets.

Current funding strategy

To address the construction funding shortfall, staff plans to continue to pursue grant funding. In June, staff applied for the CTC Cycle 8 ATP Call for Projects for the full amount of the construction funding gap (\$7.3 million). As part of the public outreach for the grant application, staff attended meetings at Gateway Rising (Mid-Pen development on Willow Road) and Belle Haven Neighborhood Association and had a table at the Belle Haven Community Resource Fair. The feedback received on the Project was overall positive, with residents unanimously expressing a preference for the raised Class IV bikeway over the existing buffered bike lanes and stated that they would be more likely to walk or bike along Willow Road upon Project completion to reach parks, schools, work, and other destinations.

Staff also plans to apply for the recently released round of MTC Safe Routes to Transit and Bay Trail grant, and staff anticipates the Project would be competitive for funding based on its design advancement

and prior grant performance. Another funding opportunity is the next cycle of the SMCTA Measure A & W Highway Program, for which the Project has received funding in the past two cycles.

Evaluation of design alternatives and cost implications

As part of the funding strategy, staff also evaluated several alternative designs to reduce the costs given the construction shortfall for City Council's consideration. The alternatives are summarized below in Table 2:

Table 2: Alternatives Summary	
Alternative	Elements Included
Current Design – Raised Class IV bikeway	• Raised Class IV bikeway • New crosswalks at O'Brien Drive and Bay Road • New refuge islands at Ivy Drive • Interchange improvements • Class II bike lanes and Class IV bikeway between O'Keefe Street and Bay Road • Narrow lane widths • In-lane transit boarding
Alternative 1 – At-grade Class IV bikeway with no pedestrian improvements	• At-grade Class IV bikeway (install posts or delineators in existing two-foot wide painted buffers)
Alternative 2 – Alternative 1 + Limited pedestrian improvements	• At-grade Class IV bikeway (install posts or delineators in existing two-foot wide painted buffers) • New crosswalk at O'Brien Drive • New refuge island at Ivy Drive
Alternative 3 – Alternative 2 + limited pedestrian improvements + Short segment of Class II bike lane	• At-grade Class IV bikeway (install posts or delineators in existing two-foot wide painted buffers) • New crosswalk at O'Brien Drive and Bay Road • New refuge island at Ivy Drive • Class II bike lanes between O'Keefe Street and Bay Road

These alternatives, including their benefits, considerations, and estimated costs are summarized in Table 3.

Table 3: Alternatives Comparison			
Alternative	Benefits	Considerations	Cost
Current design – Raised Class IV bikeway with pedestrian improvements	• Leverages grant funding • Low stress, for all ages and abilities bicycle facility • Includes multiple pedestrian improvements • Addresses weaving and queuing issues at the U.S. 101 interchange • Narrows travel lanes to support lower vehicle speeds	• High cost • Longer construction timeline • Requires PS&E • SMCTA Grant would end in July 2029	\$15.4 million (\$3.5 million funded by the City)

	Improves transit operations through in-lane transit boarding		
Alternative 1 – At-grade Class IV bikeway with no pedestrian improvements	- Lower-cost - Provides a separated bikeway	100% City funded - Not an all ages and abilities bicycle facility - No pedestrian improvements - Continued conflicts with weaving and queuing at the interchange - Continued bicycle gap between O’Keefe Street and Bay Road - Retains existing lane widths, limiting speed reduction benefits - Continued bus-bike conflicts due to lack of in-lane transit boarding - At-grade Class IV bikeway requires sweeping with smaller equipment - Caltrans Encroachment Permit required	\$650,000 (anticipated to be funded by the City)
Alternative 2 – Alternative 1 + Limited pedestrian improvements	- Lower cost - Provides a separated bikeway - Includes a new crosswalk at O’Brien Drive	100% City funded - Not all ages and abilities bicycle facility - Continued conflicts with weaving and queuing at the interchange - Continued bicycle gap between O’Keefe Street and Bay Road - Retains existing lane widths, limiting speed reduction benefits - Continued bus-bike conflicts due to lack of in-lane transit boarding - At-grade Class IV bikeway requires sweeping with smaller equipment - Minimal pedestrian improvements - Caltrans Encroachment Permit required	\$1.4 million (anticipated to be funded by the City)
Alternative 3 – Alternative 2 + limited pedestrian improvements + Short segment of Class II bike lane	- Provides a separated bikeway - Includes two new crosswalks, one at O’Brien Drive and one at Bay Road - Closes bicycle gap between O’Keefe Street and Bay Road	100% City funded - Not all ages and abilities bicycle facility - Continued conflicts with weaving and queuing at the interchange - Retains existing lane widths, limiting speed reduction benefits - Continued bus-bike conflicts due to no in-lane transit boarding - At-grade Class IV bikeway requires sweeping with smaller equipment - Caltrans Encroachment Permit required	\$3.1 million (anticipated to be funded by the City)

Note: Costs are estimated for the design and construction phases and would need to be refined if one of the alternatives is

selected to move forward.

Delivery strategy

Staff has evaluated several delivery strategies, including funding considerations, project schedule, and overall project impacts. The following options are available for City Council's consideration:

Option 1: Continue current design and advance PS&E

The City has already allocated funding in prior fiscal year budgets to advance the preparation of the PS&E while awaiting the outcome of its application for ATP funding, with award announcements anticipated in December 2026. As mentioned above, the Safe Routes to Transit and Bay Trail grant is expected to be released in July, and this Project was ranked in the most recent cycle as a runner-up for funding under that grant program. This option maintains project momentum, positions the Project to compete for available funding opportunities, and preserves the work completed to date.

Option 2: Pause design phase pending ATP funding decision

Pausing design development until the ATP funding award announcements are made would cause significant Project delays, as the SMCTA was ready to begin since April. This would require coordination with the SMCTA and would disrupt the planned staffing approach and delivery schedule and would likely require a grant extension. The current grants require that all grant funds for both design and construction be expended by July 31, 2029.

Option 3: Revise project scope and design with a lower cost alternative

Revising the Project design to a lower-cost alternative would require revising portions of the PA&ED phase, which will result in additional costs. This could affect the competitiveness for, or eligibility under existing and future grant funding opportunities, potentially resulting in the need to return previously awarded grant funds. This will forfeit some of the progress achieved to date and delay Project implementation.

Next steps

Staff seeks feedback on the Project design alternatives and options.

Impact on City Resources

If the City Council directs staff to modify the project, staff will return with a detailed assessment of the costs associated with redesign and re-scoping efforts, as well as an evaluation of potential impacts on existing and anticipated grant funding.

The City currently has budgeted \$1.9 million in the CIP to complete the design phase and preliminary construction efforts. An additional \$1.7 million would need to be funded in future fiscal years to meet the match requirements for the SMCTA Highway grants. The Transportation Impact Fee was originally identified as the source for the local match, however that fund currently has a projected shortfall. If new TIF funds are not sufficient, the City would need to identify alternate funding sources, such as Measure A, Bayfront Mitigation Fund and/or General Capital Fund. In addition, if the City is successful in obtaining future grants to fund the construction gap, the City would need to identify funds for construction as these

grant programs are reimbursement funds.

Environmental Review

The Project is statutorily exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) under State Public Resources Code Sections 21080.25 (b)(1) and (b)(3) for improvements to pedestrian and bicycle facilities and transit prioritization within the public right-of-way.

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. Project layout
- B. Visual rendering
- C. Hyperlink: www.menlopark.gov/Government/Departments/Public-Works/Capital-improvement-projects/Willow-Road-Pedestrian-and-Bicycle-Safety-project

Report prepared by:
Kristiann Choy, Senior Transportation Engineer

Report reviewed by:
Azalea Mitch, Public Works Director



