

Workshop Summary Report

Downtown San Rafael Station Area Plan – Community Visioning Workshop



*Wednesday, June 15th, 2011
Whistlestop, 930 Tamalpais Avenue*



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To retrieve a copy of this report, visit www.cityofsanrafael.org/stationareaplans or contact Rebecca Woodbury at planning.coordinator@cityofsanrafael.org or 415-485-3076.

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Introduction

The Downtown San Rafael Station Area Plan effort, funded by a \$528,000 grant from the Metropolitan Transportation Commission (MTC), is one of two station area plans being created by the City of San Rafael. These plans for the neighborhoods around San Rafael's two new Sonoma Marin Area Rail Transit (SMART) rail stations will set the stage to create vibrant, mixed-use, livable areas supported by a mix of transit opportunities, including passenger rail service. The Station Area Plans are a multi-agency collaborative planning effort between the City of San Rafael, Sonoma Marin Area Rail Transit (SMART), Golden Gate Bridge Highway and Transportation District (GGBHTD), Marin Transit, the San Rafael Redevelopment Agency, the County of Marin, and the Transportation Authority of Marin (TAM). As a partner in MTC's grant program, the Association of Bay Area Governments is also involved in the planning project.

The effort includes two public workshops, the first of which occurred on Tuesday, November 9, 2010 at the San Rafael Corporate Center. The second workshop was Wednesday, June 15, 2011. This workshop was open and advertised to the public and project stakeholders, and attended by approximately 37 members of the public. The open-house style workshop included six themed stations facilitated by members of the consultant team, City staff, and members of the multi-agency project team. The stations were:

- West Tamalpais Avenue
- Fourth Street
- Pedestrian and Bicycle Access
- Transit Center
- Parking
- Building Design

Outreach Efforts

Prior to the first workshop, extensive outreach efforts were conducted through various outlets to maximize public awareness of and involvement in the planning process. These efforts included:

- Email notification to various stakeholder groups and their constituents
- A write-up in *Snapshot*, the newsletter of the San Rafael City Manager
- A press release to local newspapers
- A posting on the City of San Rafael's homepage
- A mailing to all businesses in the plan area and commercial property owners within ½ mile of the station
- A mailing to key stakeholders and nonprofit organizations in the area

As a result, 37 members of the public representing a diverse group of interests engaged in the 2-hour open house, providing valuable input and insight as the community plans for the future of San Rafael's downtown station area.

Draft Vision Statement

After the first workshop, the Redevelopment Citizens Advisory Committee reviewed a draft vision statement that was presented at the second workshop:

The Downtown San Rafael Station Area is at the crossroads of Marin, where people travel north/south through the County, and east/west to shops, neighborhoods, and treasured open spaces. Some of San Rafael's most vibrant neighborhoods are just a short walk from the Downtown San Rafael transit complex: Downtown, Montecito/Happy Valley, Francisco Boulevard West and the Canal neighborhoods. At the heart of this area is a regional transit center that fits into the context of the surrounding neighborhoods and connects people to destinations throughout San Rafael, Marin and the greater Bay Area.

In 2035, the Downtown San Rafael Station Area is a place people can easily reach by walking, biking, or using transit. On arriving at the transit center, people feel a strong sense of welcome to Downtown San Rafael. The area is an attractive gateway to downtown and the vibrancy of Fourth Street.

The transit center is a busy, regional hub for train, bus, shuttle, taxi, and other transit services. People are safe and comfortable walking as they transfer easily from one mode to another, and there are clear, safe and pleasant connections between the transit center and the surrounding neighborhoods. It is safe for pedestrians and bicyclists to get to, around and through this area.

The area immediately around the transit center reflects and enhances the surrounding neighborhoods. New buildings form a strong sense of place, reflecting the community's focus on creating an exciting and friendly edge to downtown. Although development has changed and the appearance of the area has improved, the charming character of nearby neighborhoods remains the same. Every day a comfortable and reliable commuter rail service brings hundreds of people to San Rafael to work, and shops in the area that is thriving.

People who live in the area enjoy safe, pedestrian-friendly streets and access to reliable transit service. The buildings around the transit center have a mix of uses and give the place an urban feel. Residents like being able to walk to the movies, restaurants, shops and nightlife. Close-by neighborhoods have a variety of housing types where families with children, students, young professionals, and seniors live, and all enjoy the benefits of living close to the Downtown San Rafael transit center.

Workshop Highlights

The following presents a summary of each display station and the comments, including both a summary of comments as well as more specific and detailed notes. Displays and materials presented at each station are also included.

Station A: West Tamalpais Avenue

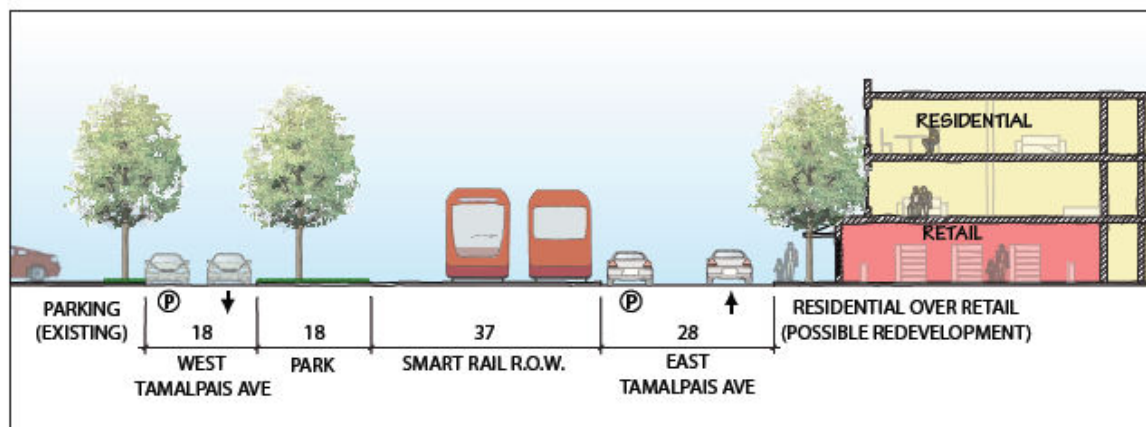
At this station, participants were shown possible roadway and streetscape improvements for West Tamalpais Avenue, from Mission Avenue to Second Street. Ideas for potential improvements came from desires expressed at the first community workshop for a better pedestrian and bicycle environment and more green space. Staff worked with consultants to develop a “green” and “complete” street concept for West Tamalpais that includes a variety of potential improvements to make the street more pedestrian and bicycle-friendly, including:

- Bidirectional bike lanes
- Widened sidewalks
- One-way northbound travel between Second and Fourth Streets
- One-way southbound travel between Mission Avenue and Fourth Street
- At-grade planters to provide additional stormwater management capacity
- 18-feet of green space between railroad tracks and street between Mission Avenue and Fourth Street
- Permeable paving



East & West Couplet “Green Street” Concept

Looking North



Participants were generally excited about the possible greening improvements to Tamalpais between Mission Avenue and Fourth Street. Stormwater planters, rain gardens in the landscaped median, more trees and native vegetation were all well received. There were mixed feelings about whether bike lanes or sharrows/shared street configurations were preferable, and some people were unsure why bulb-out curbs were necessary, but they were not generally opposed to them. Some participants had concerns about fencing along the rail right-of-way.

South of Fourth Street, participants thought a plaza at the north end of Whistlestop should have more public amenities, including perhaps a coffee shop, fountain, landscaping and possible gateway features. Some had some concerns about the location of kiss-n-ride, with some thinking that it should wrap around onto Fourth Street as well as the East curb along the side of Whistlestop.



***West Tamalpais Avenue
looking south towards
Fourth Street – Existing
Conditions***



***West Tamalpais Avenue
looking south towards
Fourth Street - Possible
improvements include
“Green Street” features
designed to capture
rainwater and beautify
the streetscape such as
a grassy median strip
lined with trees,
pervious pavers in the
parking lane, and
stormwater planters in
the sidewalks along the
curb.***

Display board comments from public:

- Residential over retail should be affordable housing.
- Couplet needs to be a grand public 'commons' with train as centerpiece. How will it be activated and attract people?
- What are the ground plane materials to tie the space together? Plants, ballast, etc?
- By not showing whether or not the tracks will be fenced, one cannot get a feel of the future design.
- Don't fence the trains in – too much like a prison!
- Corner of 4th & Tamalpais is difficult as it 'jogs' over when Tamalpais crosses 4th Street. Put in a traffic light?
- Center median/linear park train noise (every half hour) will prohibit use.
- This plan is NOT what the voters approved. Put to a vote now as 'modified.' This plan would not be approved by 'we the people.'



POTENTIAL STREET IMPROVEMENTS

16 SURVEYS TOTAL COUNTED



✓ 9
✗ 0

Accessible Curb-Cuts



✓ 8
✗ 0

Median Refuges



✓ 12
✗ 0

Stormwater Planters



✓ 6
✗ 1

Curb Bulb-Outs at Crossings



✓ 5
✗ 2

Traffic Calming



✓ 5
✗ 1

Rainwater Swales



✓ 9
✗ 2

Bike Lanes



✓ 3
✗ 5

Shared Lanes



✓ 11
✗ 0

Native Plants & Trees



✓ 11
✗ 0

Linear Parks



✓ 8
✗ 1

Vegetated Swale



✓ 10
✗ 0

Permeable Paving

Station B: Fourth Street

This station focused on possible improvements that could be made to Fourth Street to enhance the east-west connection underneath the freeway. At the first community workshop, some participants expressed a desire for a public plaza near the station. Staff and consultants identified a potential location at the north end of the Whistlestop building at Fourth Street and Tamalpais Avenue. Participants at this workshop were asked to respond to a variety of public plaza concepts as well as potential improvements for underneath the freeway.



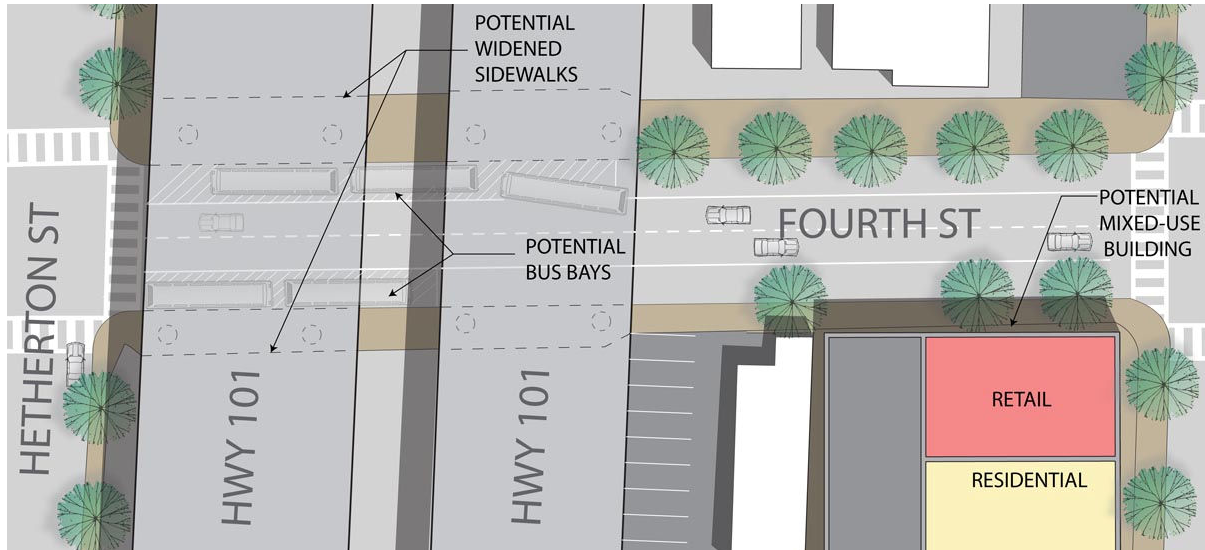
Fourth Street looking west toward US101 - Existing Conditions



Fourth Street looking west toward US101 - Possible improvements includes painting the US101 underpass structure, adding lighting, and widening the sidewalks and a mixed-use building on Fourth and Irwin.

The participants were very pleased to see the Fourth Street frontage as a topic area for comment on the Area Plan. Most enjoyed the sample photographs of plaza types and various ways the area under US-101 could be improved and used. For the most part, all supported the concept of a plaza north of the existing Whistlestop facility, but wanted this plaza to be planned wisely for best use next to the SMART station. For this area, bicycle parking was not viewed to be the best use for this plaza. There were positive comments

and reaction to the various concepts for improvements under the freeway. Many commented that improvements under the freeway need to: a) draw one toward Downtown; b) include public art such as murals; b) be open and well lit (not dark) so that it is safe; and d) consider some limited use for public transit.



Fourth Street Improvements

Display board comments from public:

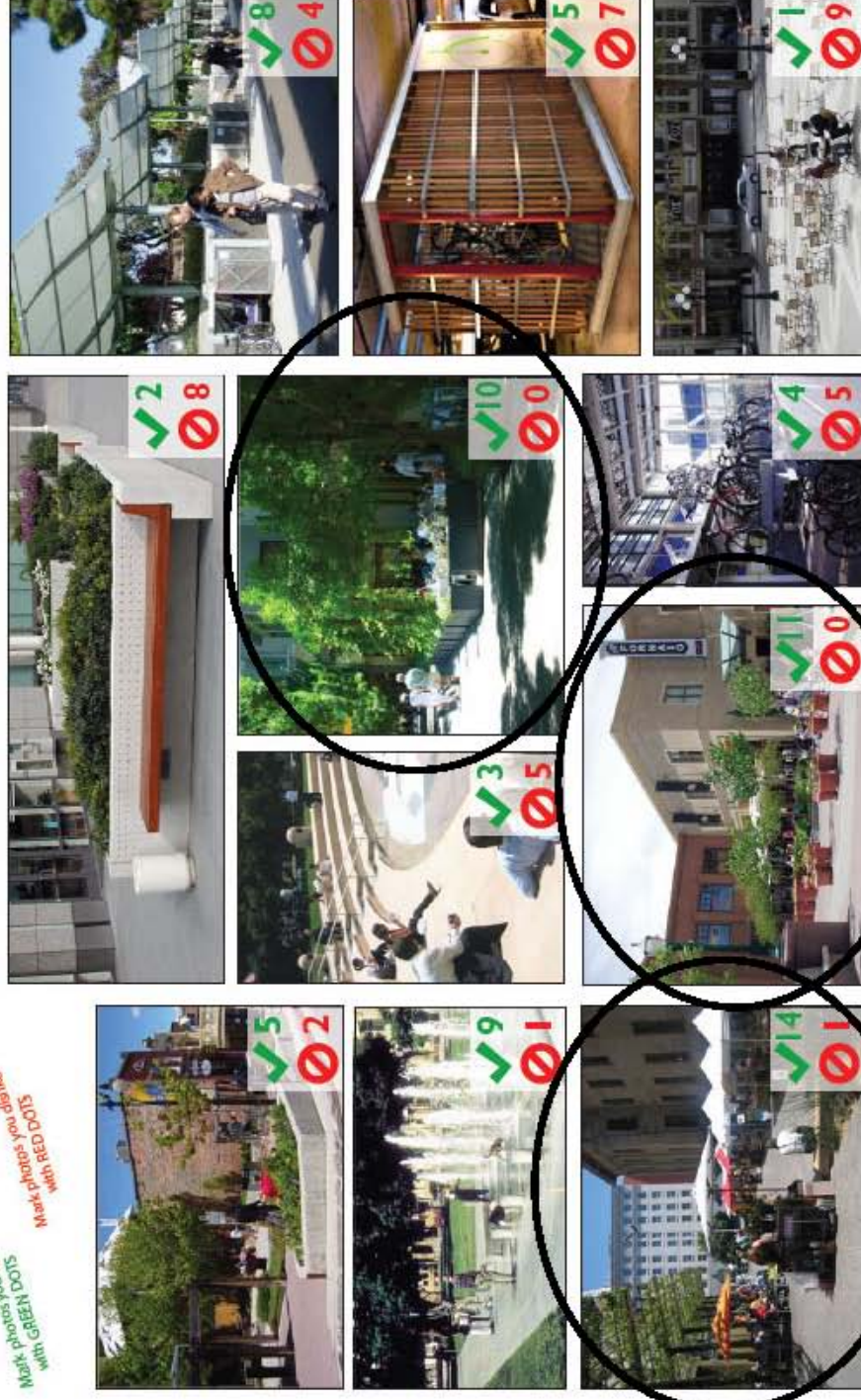
- Plaza
 - o Proposed Plaza is not a high priority. Use this space for a transit center.
- Who will come here? How many Sonoma residents commute to downtown San Rafael? The term 'if you build it, they will come' is not a reality.
- Underpass
 - o Public art a high priority (mural, sculpture, mosaics).
 - o Could be OK for buses *if* combined with active retail/cafes to help extend 4th Street.
- Bike signage with mileage and time-to-destinations a must.

Workshop 2: Implementing a Vision

Station B: Fourth Street - Public Plazas

Mark photos you like
with GREEN DOTS

Mark photos you did like
with RED DOTS



Downtown San Rafael Station Area Plan



Community Design + Architecture • Arup • Strategic Economics

Workshop 2: Implementing a Vision

Station B: Fourth Street: US101 Underpass

Mark photos you like
with GREEN DOT'S

Mark photos you dislike
with RED DOT'S

Underpass Improvement Concepts



Great treatment for Malibu Creek under freeway



Visual connection under freeway



Downtown San Rafael Station Area Plan

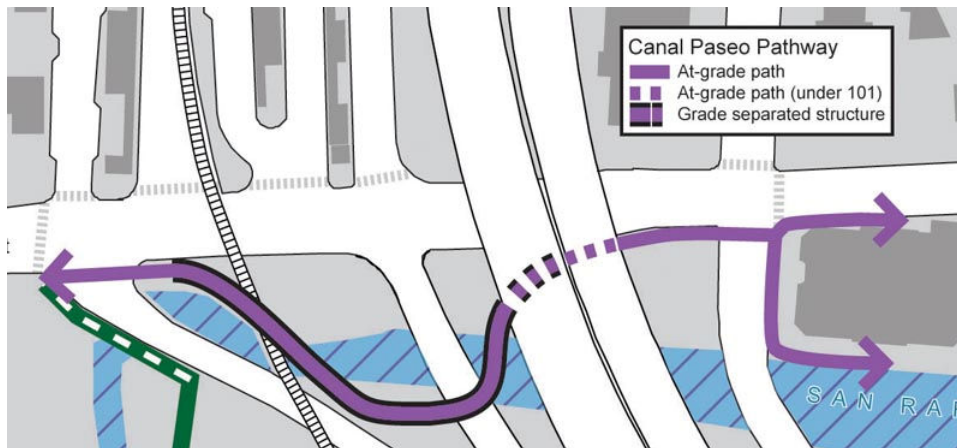


Community Design + Architecture • Arup • Strategic Economics

Station C: Bicycle and Pedestrian Access

This station focused on pedestrian and bicycle accessibility to the station to and from the various neighborhoods and destinations. Participants were asked to rate the current conditions as well as to describe how important various routes and amenities are to them.

This station also showed a concept from the Canalfront Conceptual Plan that may improve the connectivity of the Canal neighborhood, which has a high proportion of transit riders. This long-range concept would take trail users under US 101 south of Second Street, above the southbound US 1-1 on-ramp, canal and railroad tracks, and back to grade at the northeast corner of Second Street and Francisco Boulevard. From here, pedestrians and trail users would cross Francisco and cross Second Street to reach Tamalpais Avenue.



Possible Canalfront Paseo Pathway

Display board comments from public:

- Mission at Nye Street intersection is dangerous for pedestrians (no stop sign).
- Entry Marker needed 4th Street at Lincoln Avenue (westbound).
- Entry Marker needed 2nd Street at Ritter Street convergence.
- No pedestrians currently use Francisco Blvd at 2nd Street, so no need for a pedestrian gateway.
- Vegetated gateway should include flowering plants.
- Bike use would help activate Tamalpais concept on both sides of the tracks.
- East Tamalpais to North Mission sidewalk connection needed.
- Mission at Heatherton Street is a scary corner. Improve visibility.
- Add pedestrian/bike refuge island(s) in Fifth Ave at Tamalpais intersection. Currently impossible to cross safely. Auto traffic dominates pedestrian realm.
- Need separate bike and right turn signaling (Fifth at Heatherton)

- Possible route through park n' ride (Heatherton mid-block)
- 4th Street from Heatherton to Tamalpais needs a much wider sidewalk on the south side for bikes.
- Tamalpais from 2nd to 4th should become a bike boulevard to discourage vehicles.
- Canalfront Path Concept
 - o Try to connect with Mahon Creek Path.
 - o Multiple routes, not just one.
 - o Extend path north along and under freeway.
 - o A dedicated bike path also?
 - o Water access? Lock?
 - o Underpass lighting is important.



How would you rate
CURRENT BICYCLING CONDITIONS
in the Plan Area?

Mark an "X" on each line

2nd and 3rd Streets, east of Tamalpais

4th Street through Downtown

5th Avenue through Downtown

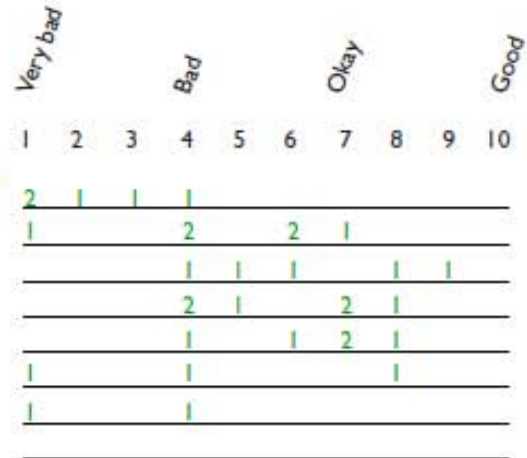
Tamalpais Avenue

Bike signage with routes and destinations

Bike parking at the Transit Center

Self-service bike lockers

Other:



How important to you are the
following **BICYCLING** issues?

Mark an "X" on each line

Bike lanes on 2nd and 3rd Streets, east of Tamalpais

Bike lanes on 5th Avenue through Downtown

Bikeway(s) along Tamalpais Avenue

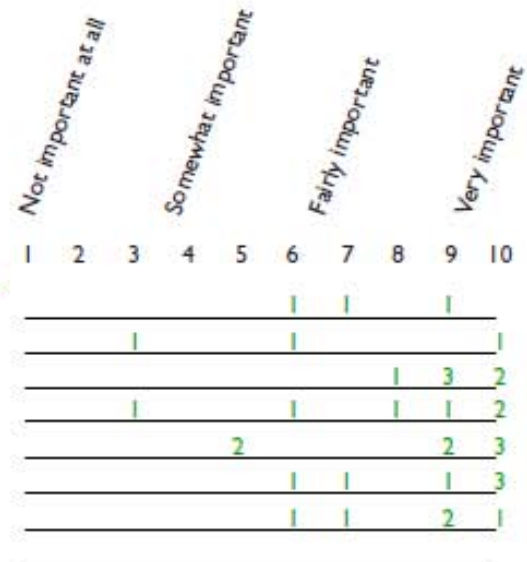
Bike connection from Transit Center to Canal Path

Signs with bike routes and destinations

Bike parking at the Transit Center

Self-service bike lockers

Other:





How would you rate
CURRENT PEDESTRIAN CONDITIONS
in the Plan Area?

Mark an "X" on each line

2nd and 3rd Streets, east of Tamalpais
4th Street through Downtown
5th Avenue through Downtown
Tamalpais Avenue
Street crossing safety
Sidewalk conditions
Other: Make Fourth Street from Irwin to D a pedestrian zone. Cities all over Europe have done this and more people come, stay longer, and spend more money.

Very bad				Bad				Okay				Good
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10			
		2	4		1	4						
			1			3	2	1	3			
			2	1		3	1	1	2			
			2	3		3						
	1	1	3	1	1	2						1
				3	1	4						

How important to you are the
following **PEDESTRIAN** issues?

Mark an "X" on each line

Freeway underpass – 5th Avenue
Freeway underpass – 4th Street
Pedestrian access to the Transit Center
Tamalpais Avenue streetscape
Sidewalks along 2nd Street
Wayfinding signs
Plaza at SMART station Across Tamalpais
Other: Connection along Mahon Creek to canal, greenery, trees, seating & security.

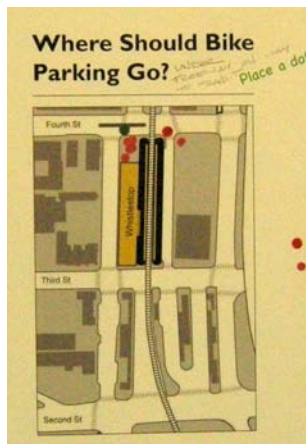
Not important at all				Somewhat important				Fairly important				Very important
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10			
		1	4			1		2	3			
		1	1			3			5			
						2		1	8			
1			1			3	1		5			
		1	3		1	1	1	2	1			
1			3		2	4			2			
			2			1		4	3			
									2			



Station D: Transit Center

This station explored potential improvements for various components of the transit center, including the location of kiss 'n ride and taxi activities, bicycle parking, and bus circulation. The most significant potential change is the relocation of bus operations to the Citibank site, creating a unified transit block with the train station. Participants were asked to comment on this relocation concept as well as the location of other transit center components.

Participants were also able to see the VISSIM traffic model showing peak hour conditions if bus operations moved to the Citibank site.



Most participants indicated that bike parking should be located north of the Whistlestop building. One indicated locating bike parking at the southeast corner of East Tamalpais at Fourth Street and one indicated locating bike parking under the freeway on the way to the transit center.

Participants commented that adding buses and bikes and kiss 'n ride to Tamalpais Avenue will make that street less useful for traffic circulation around the station. Some said there is a need for a parking lot for SMART train users, while others said there should be no parking for cars at the station and people should take buses.

Possible Transit Center Locations:

(A) Reconfiguration of current transit center: One participant commented that modifying Platform D to make it work for Airporter buses is more cost-effective than relocating to Citibank and Fourth Street. Some participants questioned how people would cross Third Street from the train to the bus station. One person said that moving taxis out of the current transit center would not be a problem. Other suggestions for this concept included:



- East Tamalpais between 3rd & 4th Street – Locate feeder buses here (more train to bus transfers).
- Tamalpais between 2nd & 3rd Street – Rebuild 1/3 of block for airporter, etc. instead of under freeway.
- Existing Bettini Transit Center – Locate commute buses here (fewer train to bus transfers).

(B) Relocation of bus operations: There was general consensus that moving buses to the Citibank site is good for reducing walking distance between buses and trains. Some participants commented that getting buses in and out of the new site looks problematic and there was some concern about traffic congestion on Fourth Street. One participant wondered if there is enough space on Fourth Street for buses without blocking retail properties between the freeway and Irwin Street. There were also questions about what could be built on a redeveloped Bettini site. One participant wondered why the bus station would be moved if capacity did not increase. Other suggestions for this concept included:

- This could further deaden 4th Street. Develop north end as well.
- Keep Bettini Transit Center area clear for transit expansion.
- Current transit area could be parking structure.
- Parking above street level, with taxi stand/office at street level.
- Avoid building parking structure altogether.

Many participants were curious about what would happen to the Whistlestop building. Some said the top floor should be kept for office uses, but the bottom floor could be integrated into the train station and have a similar feel to the ferry building in San Francisco. Some wondered where the parking would be located.

Display board comments from public:

- Redevelop the site of Bettini Transit Center
- Provide auto parking
- Move [bus operations] because its closer to trains
- Move [bus operations] because its better for pedestrians
- [If bus operations move] bus movements to 101 could be bad
- Parking Garage should be located west side of Tamalpais between Second and Third Streets.
- Extend Bettini Transit Center north across Third Street, but don't sacrifice any existing architecture.
- Don't sacrifice existing Bettini architecture.
- Possible long-term conditions MUCH preferred to existing conditions.

Station E: Parking

At this station, participants were asked to provide feedback on various parking management strategies, including short-term parking zones, appropriate pricing and easy payment programs, signage, and a new parking district.

This station also showed two locations for a potential municipal parking structure. One option is on Third Street between Lincoln and Cijos with 413 spaces, and another option is the block bound by Second and Third Streets and Lincoln and Tamalpais Avenues, providing 500 spaces.



Participants were asked to write their input up on the wall. These comments included:

- Work out a deal with city vendors to issue vouchers for parking.
- No permit parking—it's a hassle for owners and guests.
- Commuters are mostly training in—they don't need much parking. But if you build attractions like parks and restaurants, you'd better have ample parking.
- How many people will need to go to Sonoma County regularly? Determine this before you create parking for mythical people.
- Allow higher density housing while limiting parking for that housing to encourage public transit.
- Neighborhood residential + employer parking permits
- The above commenter emphasized the importance of building a new parking structure that served both SMART and the eastern downtown.
- Market-rate parking, also limit amount of new parking-encourages persons to live, walk and bike to area (Donald Shoup, "High Cost of Free Parking")
- A parking district alone would not be appropriate. We have a lot of parking already. Housing near transit is key.
- Let's move into the 21st century and not add more parking – sustainability.
- Want to encourage a mode change with SMART, so don't provide a parking structure for SMART that encourages driving.
- Make parking garages aesthetically appealing (see new parking structure in L.A.)
- Move Bettini-put parking structure there. Develop other lot with retail/residential.
- Rebuild parking lot #3 to five stories.

Additional display board comments from public:

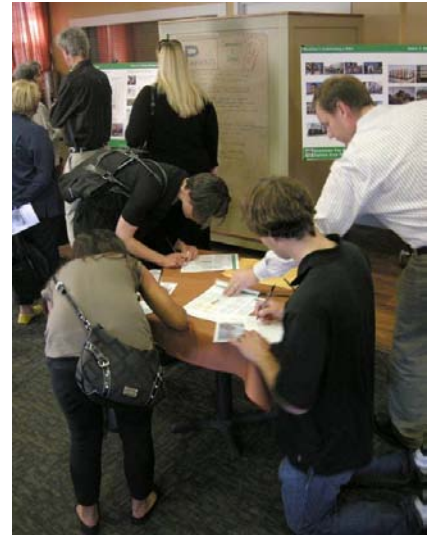
- Not all existing parking shown on map. (2nd Street between Lindero and A Street, and Lincoln at 2nd Street back by canal)
- Would prefer proposed parking between 3rd and 2nd street at Lincoln to be used for housing/retail instead.

Station F: Building Design

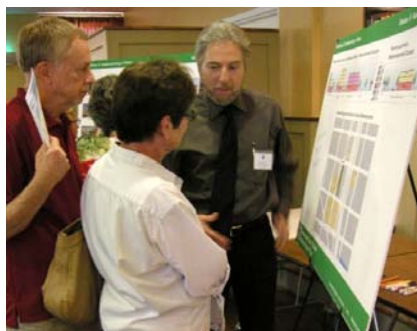
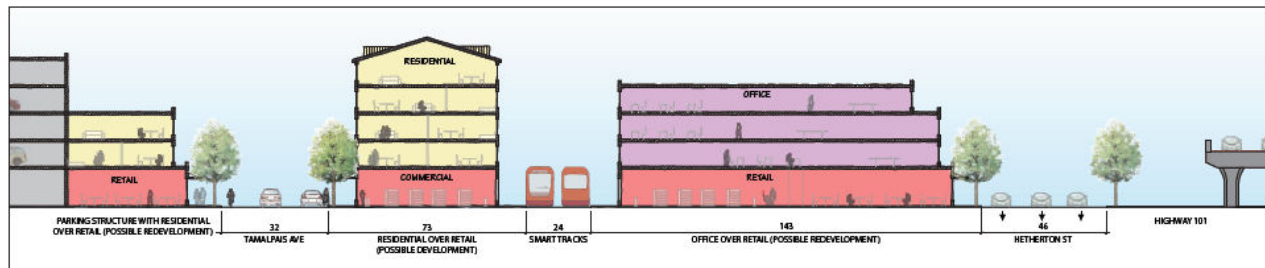
At this station, participants were asked to fill out a survey regarding a variety of building designs. They were asked to comment on height, massing, and architectural style. They were also asked to comment on what buildings would be appropriate for different sites in the Plan Area. The results of the surveys are shown on the following two pages.

People were shown the following concepts for new development:

Fourth and Irwin - Redevelopment Concept



Bettini Transit Center and Adjacent Blocks - Redevelopment Concepts



Generally speaking, people felt comfortable with taller heights in the areas adjacent to the station. They thought mixed-use buildings were appropriate for the area and that encouraging housing would bolster transit use. Some expressed a desire for more affordable housing in the area.



What do you like about the buildings shown?
(Top 5 Workshop Participants' vote selections shown)

Height (number of stories)



Massing (building shape)



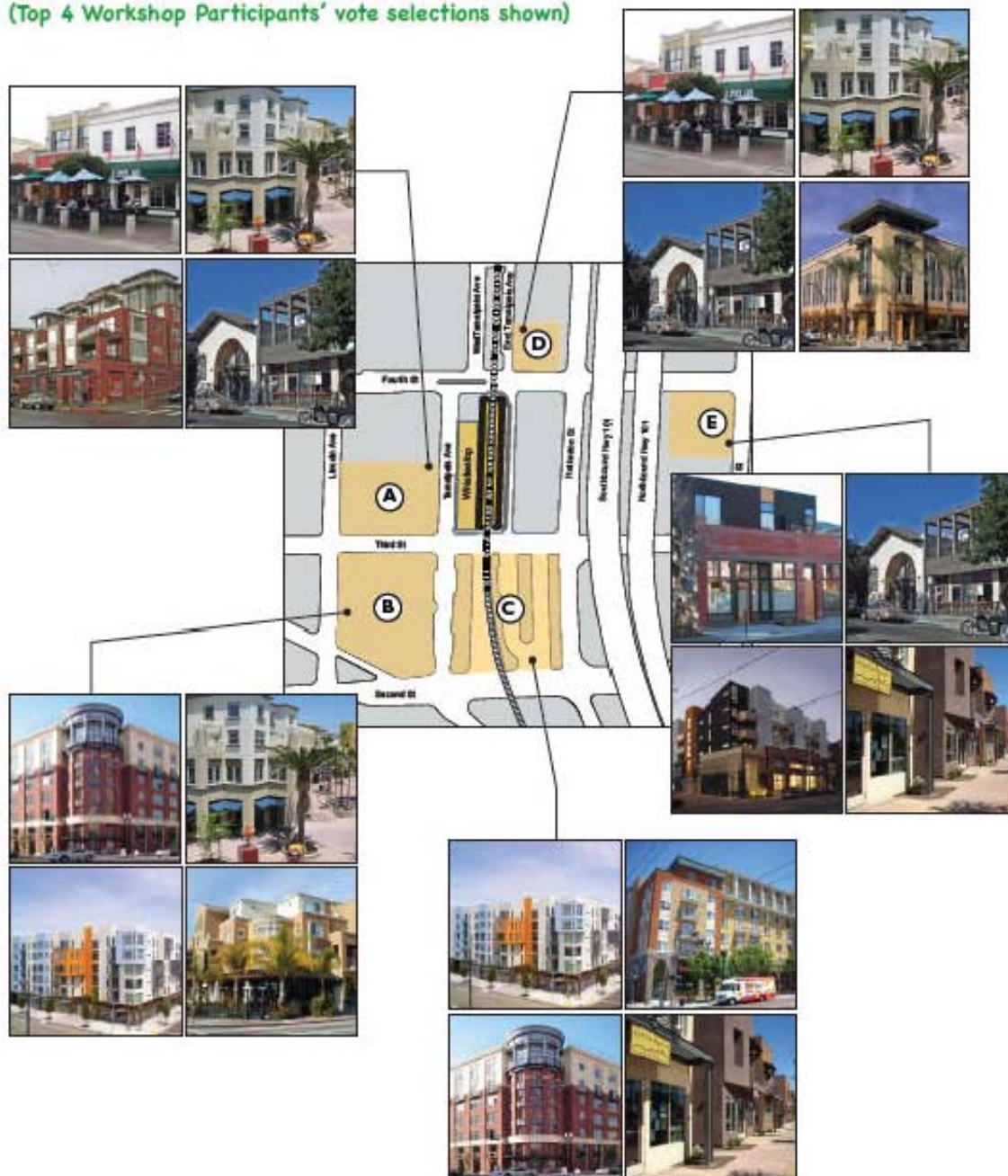
Style (materials & architecture)





Which building is best for each opportunity site?

(Top 4 Workshop Participants' vote selections shown)



Wrap Up

Upon leaving, participants were asked to write any final thoughts.

