

From: Anne Grey [REDACTED]
Sent: Friday, April 16, 2021 6:01:00 PM
To: Lindsay Lara <Lindsay.Lara@cityofsanrafael.org>
Cc: Jeff Wands [REDACTED]; Katalin Pesti [REDACTED]; Nancy Geisse [REDACTED]; Erick Villalobos [REDACTED]
Subject: Comments for April 19th City Council Meeting on Plans for Relocating the Bettini Transit Center

Vivalon is in favor of the plans which preserve the beloved Whistlestop (now Vivalon) building for use as part of the Transit Center so it continues to serve as a vibrant hub for the community once Vivalon moves to its new Healthy Aging Campus in Downtown San Rafael.

Please feel free to reach out to me if you need additional information.

Thank you so much.

Anne Grey
Chief Executive Officer

Whistlestop is now Vivalon!



930 Tamalpais Avenue San Rafael CA 94901
O: (415) 456-9062 x133
D: (415) 419-2604

www.vivalon.org



April 15, 2021

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

William Carney, President
Bob Spofford, Vice President
Greg Brockbank
Linda Jackson
Kay Karchevski
Kiki La Porta
Samantha Mericle
Sue Spofford
Stuart Siegel

415.457.7656

San Rafael City Council
1400 Fifth Avenue
San Rafael, CA 94901

RE: San Rafael Transit Center Preferred Alternative

Honorable Mayor and Council Members,
Sustainable San Rafael has carefully reviewed the current Transit Center concepts developed by the Golden Gate Bridge Transit District. We recommend that you support the 'Whistlestop Block' concept (including its 'Relocate Whistlestop Alternate') as the preferred alternative for the project EIR.

This alternative safely consolidates transit services on a single block, while returning the existing depot building to transit use. Per the current GGBTD analysis, the Whistlestop Concept results in "significant benefits to bus travel time and reliability" and reduces traffic delay. It has the potential to fulfill the key project objectives identified by the community, including those outlined in our previous letters:

- Serve passengers with efficient transit routes; convenient connections among buses and with other transportation modes; amenities like shelter, rest rooms and snacks; and clear orientation and signage.
- Provide easy, safe and pleasant access to and from the Transit Center via walking, bicycles, drop-off, and nearby parking areas.
- Improve traffic flow where possible.
- Create a gateway to San Rafael, celebrating the city, keeping historical buildings and facilitating future development opportunities.
- Celebrate and enhance the natural setting and restore the creek and improve pedestrian connections under the freeway.
- Recognize and respond to the reality of sea level rise.

'Whistlestop Block' Concept

This concept has the best 'place-making' possibilities, creating a central 'transit plaza' framed by 'gateway' development opportunity sites north and south, the Tamalpais bikeway to the west, and the chance to restore Irwin Creek and otherwise enliven the area under the freeway east of the site. In short, the concept would result in a welcoming and active entry to San Rafael, implementing the basic scheme first presented in the Downtown Station Area Plan.

An attractive feature of the 'Relocate Whistlestop Alternate' is that it allows both closer physical access and clear visual access among all connecting buses and trains. The easterly realignment of Tamalpais also makes good use of the sliver of the Bettini site south of 3rd Street and west of the rail tracks for a car and taxi drop-off zone, with wider bike and pedestrian access along the west side of Tamalpais. Enhanced intersection treatments for Tamalpais at both 3rd and 4th Streets would assure safe access to the project by cyclists, bus passengers and other pedestrians, activating a lively greenway along Tamalpais.

This concept also provides the greatest flexibility for future expansion and modifications of transit services, securing public ownership of the entire block between 3rd and 4th Streets, with the potential to retain public ownership of the Bettini site by ground-leasing development rights on its buildable eastern portion. This makes the scheme well adapted for likely future changes in transit technologies and services.

Public ownership and use of the depot building, with portions perhaps operated by private parties, offers a number of possibilities, including ample ground floor transit services and perhaps direct access to the west train platform. Marin-specific retail and cafes could open onto plazas at both ends of the building. The original arcade might be re-opened to engage such uses and invite in the public. Bike storage could also be accommodated inside.

The building would provide an iconic visual anchor for both the transit plaza block and the surrounding gateway district. Some of its architectural details, such as the repeating arches, might be echoed in contemporary elements of the bus plaza such as curved canopies over passenger waiting and loading areas, and elegant seating design.

The depot building together with the open transit uses would provide a visual commons at San Rafael's front door, which would help avoid the walling off of downtown as adjacent blocks are developed with taller buildings. This would also help preserve the view corridor along Tamalpais and the train tracks from 2nd Street to Mission, keeping the city's defining hillsides in view.

The car and taxi drop-off zones shown along Tamalpais north of 4th Street are important elements of this concept. They should be supplemented by the zone south of 3rd, as mentioned above, which would better serve drop-off traffic approaching from the west. Enhanced pedestrian pathways from the park-and-ride lots under the freeway should also be provided as part of this concept, improving usage of the lots and pedestrian access to the East End of 4th Street. Restoration of the creek would greatly enhance this experience.

The 'gateway' quality of the new transit center would also be heightened by planting large street trees (like the London Plane trees now thriving on 5th Avenue) along Hetherington, Irwin and Tamalpais, and within the transit plaza itself. The arrival into San Rafael would then feel like entering a vibrant downtown in a park-like setting.

'Under Freeway' Concept (south and north of 4th Street)

The under-the-freeway scheme would be far less pleasant for users and require crossing busy Hetherton and/or Fourth to reach the trains, other buses or downtown, as well as covering over portions of the creek and thereby sacrificing the amenity it could provide if properly restored. The noise and exhaust under the freeway make it an unpleasant and perhaps unhealthy place to wait,

'4th Street Gateway' Concept

Our chief concern with this concept is that the buses on both sides of 4th Street would interrupt enhanced pedestrian access to the East End. Maintaining an unencumbered sidewalk on the sunny north side of the street is essential to this goal. The concept also precludes development of a significant opportunity site at the northwest corner of 4th and Hetherton and sacrifices two Victorian buildings on 5th Avenue. The 'plazas' shown on Hetherton are too small, exposed, and uninviting to function as open space. The scheme also prohibits automobile turns onto 4th Street.

Sustainable San Rafael also endorses the City staff's recommendations to use the updated San Rafael Climate Change Action Plan and associated GHG Emissions Reduction Strategy in assessing the greenhouse gas impacts of the project, and to assess the risk associated with projected sea level rise in the station area.

Thank you for providing the opportunity for public discussion of this significant improvement. We look forward to a thoughtful public decision-making process.

Sincerely,

William Carney
President, Sustainable San Rafael

Copies:

Raymond Santiago, GGBTD
Jim Schutz
Bill Guerin
Paul Jensen
Danielle O'Leary
Cory Bytof

From: Dan Bell [REDACTED]
Sent: Saturday, April 17, 2021 8:09 AM
To: Distrib- City Clerk <City.Clerk@cityofsanrafael.org>
Subject: Downtown Transit Center Design

As a frequent transit user of SMART, Golden Gate Transit and Marin Transit, I believe the best design for the future Downtown Transit Center is the "Whistlestop Block (Alternate - Relocate Whistlestop)". It provides safer, more efficient transfers for transit users.

Additionally, only the "Whistlestop Block (Alternate - Relocate Whistlestop)" provides a protected, realistic and usable open space for outdoor dining along 4th Street that is not negatively impacted by bus loading and unloading activities.

A rebuilt version of the Whistlestop Building can be reconstructed properly on the east side of Tamalpais Avenue. Afterall, Bernard Maybeck's Palace of Fine Arts building in San Francisco was completely rebuilt after being demolished after the 1915 Panama-Pacific Exposition.

Regards, Dan Bell

-----Original Message-----

From: Johannes Bos [REDACTED]
Sent: Friday, April 16, 2021 4:09 PM
To: Distrib- City Clerk <City.Clerk@cityofsanrafael.org>
Subject: Agenda Item 7.A - San Rafael Transit Center

Dear Mayor and City Council Members,

I am writing to support the Whistlestop Block alternative for the San Rafael Transit Center. I believe this alternative would be the best for bicycle riders, pedestrians, and transit riders alike. The design integrates with Downtown San Rafael, allows transit riders to transfer between SMART and buses without crossing a street, and includes the Tamalpais Avenue bikeway as part of the north/south route through town.

However, I object to the use of the east side of Tamalpais Avenue north of 4th Street as pick-up/drop-off, which would significantly hamper bike riders traveling on the one safe north/south street in Downtown.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

—Hans Bos

From: Jennifer Malone [REDACTED]
Sent: Friday, April 16, 2021 3:02 PM
To: Distrib- City Clerk <City.Clerk@cityofsanrafael.org>
Subject: Agenda Item 7.A - San Rafael Transit Center

Mayor and City Council,

I am writing to support the Whistlestop Block alternative for the San Rafael Transit Center. I believe this alternative would be the best for bicycle riders, pedestrians, and transit riders alike. The design integrates with Downtown San Rafael, allows transit riders to transfer between SMART and buses without crossing a street, and includes the Tamalpais Avenue bikeway as part of the north/south route through town.

However, I object to the use of the east side of Tamalpais Avenue north of 4th Street as pick-up/drop-off, which would significantly hamper bike riders traveling on the one safe north/south street in Downtown.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

--

Jennifer



Mayor Kate Colin, City of San Rafael
Members, San Rafael City Council

Re: Community Engagement in the San Rafael Transportation Center

April 19, 2021
Via Electronic Mail

Dear Esteemed Leaders of the **San Rafael Transportation Center Project**:

On behalf of Canal Alliance and Voces del Canal, a Canal resident leadership group, we write to express our support for the **San Rafael Transportation Center** and for the many ways this project represents an opportunity not only for our city and our region, but especially for the low-income and Latino transit riders who make up the majority of the ridership. We also want to strongly recommend that there can be an opportunity for greater equity in the design, analysis, and implementation of the project.

We are aligned on what we believe are common goals across stakeholders and decision-makers. We also agree on the need for a transit center that not only meets current and near-future public transportation needs, but also anticipates the kind of growth we are working toward in the city and the region. In particular, to serve the long-term needs of our communities ensure that the environmentally-friendly public transportation system offers the best, easiest, most affordable, and reliable option for mobility, a transit center needs to plan for a rise in demand that will result from increased housing, both affordable and low-income housing options.

Recently, Canal Alliance had the opportunity to host a presentation of the various alternatives by the GGBHTD's staff for the leadership team of Voces del Canal. It was a great opportunity to learn more about the project and the details of the proposed alternatives. However, it also provided an overwhelming amount of information for our participants to process, let alone provide immediate feedback on.

As we look at your materials and timeline, we see that there is still some time for us to partner and develop a process that provides capacity-building for our community leaders to understand the project and to then provide more informed and helpful recommendations and a set of priorities that we believe should guide the development of the transit center. In the meantime, we wanted to share with you some initial thoughts and reflections based on many years of working with our community and our community leaders on what we know are critical priorities from prior community development and transportation issues discussions. Below is a preliminary list based on what we know about our community and from discussions we have had about the future of transit in the Canal neighborhood and surrounding areas:

- **Public Safety:** street lighting, transit center lighting, multilingual signage, way-finding.
- **Street Safety:** traffic calming, wider crosswalks, safety lights at crosswalks.
- **Wide Access:** multi-generation family groups walking together (parent, stroller, children, grandparent).

- Bicycle Infrastructure: safe, easy access, free, bike sharing for Canal-to-downtown mobility,
- Restrooms: clean and well stocked secure.
- Affordability: concerned for raising fare rates.
- Reliability: accountability and reporting on delays
- Capacity: concern for a full a bus passing-up a passenger trying to get to work or health appointments.

We welcome an opportunity to have more time for us to build capacity and implement a short process that would allow more community members provide direct input. Relative to other stakeholder groups, our communities require greater support to feel confident in offering informed feedback, considering all the project's factors, inputs, benefits, liabilities, and the short and long-term impacts on the community, the city, and the region. Many other key stakeholder groups already benefit from that knowledge and have organized advocacy infrastructure and expertise to effectively communicate their opinions.

We feel it is important for the whole process to be grounded in and guided by the reality that the majority of riders are Latinos and low-income essential workers whose contributions are necessary to holding up our economy and leading our recovery. An equitable approach would recognize that they are people who rely on transit, and that such access is an essential element to accessing employment and making a living. Such an approach would also allow for great opportunities and investment in incorporating community participation more strategically and would be responsive to the context and the barriers to engagement faced by this group.

In addition to the priorities listed above, we want to note that there are significant drawbacks and dangers to some of the alternatives, which we can share with you in more detail. However, the highest concerns are that a transit center that is separated into different stations increases danger for pedestrians, complicates transfers, and can be confusing to riders. The downtown traffic is already heavy, confusing, and dangerous; adding hurried riders racing to catch a bus will only make conditions worse. A single-site option works best for all riders, and as noted above, crosswalk safety measures are a priority for any alternative.

While we need a transit center that meets the public transportation needs of today and the near-future, we also need a transit center that strategically and inclusively anticipates, plans for, and accounts for the kind of growth we are working toward in the city and the region.

The future of mobility is sustainable, equitable, affordable public transit alongside infrastructure that invites and inspires non-car means including walkable streets and a working-people's biking network. We look forward to partnering with you to develop plans that include a vision for transit for future generations in our communities.

Sincerely,



Omar Carrera
Chief Executive Officer
Canal Alliance



Marina Palma

Community Leaders
Voces del Canal



Darlin Ruiz

From: Terry [REDACTED]
Sent: Friday, April 16, 2021 4:26 PM
To: Distrib- City Clerk <City.Clerk@cityofsanrafael.org>
Subject: Agenda Item 7.A - San Rafael Transit Center

Mayor and City Council,

I am writing to support the Whistlestop Block alternative for the San Rafael Transit Center. I believe this alternative would be the best for bicycle riders, pedestrians, and transit riders alike. The design integrates with Downtown San Rafael, allows transit riders to transfer between SMART and buses without crossing a street, and includes the Tamalpais Avenue bikeway as part of the north/south route through town.

However, I object to the use of the east side of Tamalpais Avenue north of 4th Street as pick-up/drop-off, which would significantly hamper bike riders traveling on the one safe north/south street in Downtown.

Thank you for your time and consideration.