



SAN RAFAEL CITY COUNCIL AGENDA REPORT

Department: Public Works

Prepared by: Bill Guerin,
Director of Public Works

City Manager Approval: _____

TOPIC: HIGHWAY 101 TO INTERSTATE 580 CONNECTOR PROJECT

SUBJECT: PRESENTATION OF POTENTIAL GUIDING PRINCIPLES REPRESENTING SAN RAFAEL'S INTERESTS IN THE TRANSPORTATION AUTHORITY OF MARIN'S (TAM) STUDY OF ALTERNATIVE ALIGNMENTS FOR THE 101 TO 580 CONNECTOR PROJECT

RECOMMENDATION: Staff recommends that the City Council accept the informational report and provide direction to staff.

BACKGROUND: Currently, drivers who wish to access the Richmond-San Rafael Bridge (Interstate 580) via northbound US Highway 101 (Highway 101) must exit the freeway and travel on East Sir Francis Drake Boulevard or across Bellam Boulevard to get to the bridge. Having to drive on local streets causes congestion and traffic delays on northbound Highway 101 and on local streets, including Sir Francis Drake Boulevard and Bellam Boulevard. The Transportation Authority of Marin (TAM) has been evaluating a direct connection from Highway 101 to Interstate 580 (I-580) for several years. TAM sought and received voter support for funding a freeway-to-freeway connector between Highway 101 and Interstate 580 in the local [Marin Transportation Sales Tax Measure AA](#), approved in November 2018. TAM also advocated for this project to be included in [Regional Measure 3](#), which was approved in June 2018. The proposed project will allow vehicles to continue along Highway 101 northbound onto a new highway connector and merge directly onto I-580 eastbound toward the Richmond-San Rafael Bridge.

In years past, TAM has studied alignments through the Sir Francis Drake Boulevard corridor in Larkspur and various alignments that transit through southern San Rafael. With the approval of funding to support this direct connection, TAM reinvigorated their corridor evaluation in spring of 2019 with the intention of refining the various corridor alignments and creating a subset that will be further evaluated as a part of the Environmental Impact analysis required.

ANALYSIS: If the project is eventually built in San Rafael, the new corridor will change traffic patterns, impact local businesses, and change the way residents and businesses in Southeast San Rafael (such as the Canal, Spinnaker, Baypoint Lagoons, and Bahia neighborhoods) get to and from this vital area of the City.

Each of the possible alignments impact the residents of San Rafael in different ways so it is important to capture "guiding principles" that will help to define the needs and desires of the

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Council Meeting:

Disposition:

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residents and businesses in San Rafael regarding the selection of alignments that will move forward for further review in the environmental process. To that end, staff interviewed Councilmembers and others to create a draft Guiding Principles document for consideration and input from the City Council and public.

The Guiding Principles are captured under eight broad categories including: 1. The connector project should be a net benefit to the adjacent San Rafael neighborhoods; 2. Reduce delays and increase choices for all travelers; 3. Improve the local traffic flow to allow for future economic investment and development in Southeast San Rafael; 4. Improve the safety of all travelers in the project area; 5. Create a project that “fits in” with its setting and is aesthetically pleasing; 6. Minimize impacts on open space and natural resources; 7. Design for the future – not the past; and 8. Build the project in an efficient and timely way.

Staff is seeking feedback from the City Council and public on the Guiding Principles so that TAM will be aware of the City’s aspirations and concerns as the alignments are refined and consolidated for further study, ultimately resulting in a preferred alternative in the Environmental Impact Report.

PUBLIC OUTREACH: TAM has conducted a series of meetings with stakeholder groups to gain feedback and insight as they develop the various alternatives for consideration. In addition to these meetings, TAM has maintained an updated project website to keep interested parties apprised as the analysis is developed.

FISCAL IMPACT: As an informational report, there is no fiscal impact associated with this action.

OPTIONS: The City Council has the following options to consider relating to this matter:

1. Accept the informational report as presented and provide direction to staff to finalize or modify the Guiding Principles.
2. Do not accept the informational report.

RECOMMENDATION: Accept the report.

City of San Rafael

Draft Guiding Principles for the Northbound US-101 to Eastbound I-580 Direct Connector

The following guiding principles are intended to express the City's vision for how a direct connector should function and benefit the community. The below is not intended to be commentary or direction on any one alternative. Instead, any future selected alternative(s) should be generally consistent with, and not preclude, these principles.

1. Connector project should be a net benefit to the adjacent San Rafael neighborhoods.

- Include benefits for San Rafael residents and businesses in alternatives that directly impact San Rafael. The project should be a net benefit to San Rafael and improve the adjacent neighborhoods.
- Maintain direct on- and off-ramp access from the freeways to Bellam Boulevard.
- Consider commute times for the Southeast San Rafael neighborhoods and ensure the project does not further divide the area from the rest of the city.
- When evaluating project alternatives, analyze improvements to traffic operations on local streets in Larkspur as well as San Rafael. The intent is not to move congestion from one location to another, but to reduce congestion overall.
- When evaluating project alternatives, consider a data-driven analysis to provide quality information on positive and negative impacts to the area.

2. Reduce delays and increase choices for all travelers.

- Reduce travel delays for northbound 101 motorists transitioning to eastbound I-580 and the Richmond-San Rafael Bridge.
- Reduce surface street congestion in the vicinity of the 101/580 interchange through signal changes and design changes. This should make it quicker and easier to get to Southeast San Rafael from other parts of San Rafael and Marin County.
- Improve bicycle and pedestrian connections along Bellam Boulevard between Kerner Boulevard and Andersen Drive, including new sidewalks and crosswalks, and dedicated bike lanes or a cycle track/ buffered bike lane.
- Provide a safe pedestrian and bicycle connection from the Canal neighborhood to the SMART/Cal Park Hill path, making it easier to get from the neighborhood to Davidson Middle School and the Downtown Core.

3. Improve local traffic flow to allow for future economic investment and development in Southeast San Rafael.

- Consider business access and visibility for customers, employees, and suppliers with any new structure proposed.
- Minimize direct displacement of businesses, and indirect displacement due to changes in access.
- Minimize project construction impacts to area businesses.
- Reduce delays and commute times for those who use local surface streets to travel to and from work.

4. Improve the safety of all travelers in the project area.

- Reduce collision hazards for all modes of travel, including bicycles, pedestrians, and transit users on surface streets as well as motorists on the freeways.
- Maintain, or improve if possible, emergency vehicle access to Southeast San Rafael with improved local traffic flow.

5. Create a project that “fits in” with its setting and is aesthetically pleasing.

- Consider the impact of flyover ramps and elevated viaducts. Incorporate infrastructure that blends with the local context as much as possible. Consider noise impacts and reduce the feeling of height and bulk of any new infrastructure.
- Leverage the project to create gateway improvements on local streets where highway traffic enters San Rafael, especially along Bellam Boulevard between Andersen Drive and East Francisco Boulevard.
- Consider positive and negative impacts on social equity when planning for issues such as: bicycle and pedestrian safety measures, mobility improvements, the feeling of height and bulk, future economic investment, etc.
- Avoid grading scars and large-scale tree removal.

6. Minimize impacts on open space and natural resources,

- Explore opportunities to improve recreational access to open space where possible given agreements between the City and property owners.
- Consider project impacts to natural resources.
- Minimize the impacts on areas near the interchange, especially on residential areas, in terms of air quality, noise, garbage, or other negative impacts.

7. Design for the future—not the past.

- Consider long-term impacts of COVID-19 on travel demand, commute patterns, projected volumes, trip origins and destinations, and transit use, per the current standards of practice required by Caltrans and the approving agencies.
- Consider possible future changes in vehicle mix and technology, including autonomous vehicles, in an attempt to better understand future usage patterns.
- Maintain flexibility to provide a future direct ramp from westbound I-580 to southbound US-101.
- Consider sea level rise adaptation planning in the design of the new freeway connection.
- Select alternatives that do not preclude future circulation improvements to improve ingress or egress to/from the neighborhoods.

8. Build the project in an efficient, timely way,

- Provide an inclusive planning process that engages local businesses and residents who use the interchange, including non-English speaking residents.
- Balance the relative costs of each alternative against the improvements to travel time, and traffic volumes, it provides.
- Work to minimize the need to acquire significant additional right-of-way.
- Consider factors other than speed when evaluating project benefits. Encourage Caltrans to allow design exceptions if the result is a more efficient, superior, and cost-effective project.
- Coordinate with other efforts to improve the Richmond-San Rafael Bridge and enhance conditions on the I-580 and US-101 Corridors.