



**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 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 feedback to TAM.

**BACKGROUND:** 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 exit at the Bellam Boulevard offramp in San Rafael and cross through the traffic signal at Bellam 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.

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.

---

**FOR CITY CLERK ONLY**

**Council Meeting:**

**Disposition:**

## **SAN RAFAEL CITY COUNCIL AGENDA REPORT / Page: 2**

**ANALYSIS:** There are eight alternatives under consideration that would construct the connector in San Rafael:

Two of the alternatives (1A and 1B) would exit Highway 101 at the top of Cal Park Hill, run along the hillside above Highway 580, and connect to 580 near the Richmond San Rafael Bridge. These are considered “freeway speed” connectors because vehicles would be able to maintain speeds of 50+ miles per hour on the connector. These are the most expensive alignments to construct (\$325 to \$450 million) and would require the purchase of private open space above Andersen Drive.

Three alternatives (2, 5, and 6) would exit Highway 101 midway down the bridge structure between the top of Cal Park Hill and the Bellam Boulevard offramp, fly over parts of the Bellam corridor between 580 and Andersen Drive and connect to Highway 580 south of the current Bellam onramp. These are “medium speed” connectors because the required connector radius would only allow speeds of 40-45 miles per hour through the connector. These alternatives cost between \$175 to \$215 Million and would require the purchase of multiple businesses and right of way along the Bellam corridor.

Two alternatives would closely follow the existing Bellam Boulevard offramp alignment and traffic could either exit the freeway at Bellam or continue on a direct connector to Highway 580. These are considered “low speed” connectors because the connector radius would only allow speeds of 30-35 miles per hour through the connector. These alternatives cost between \$105 to \$130 million and would necessitate the purchase of a few businesses and some right of way behind the Marin Square shopping center.

One alternative (alternative 4) would use existing right of way to connect the two freeways on a large bridge structure that exits Highway 101 midway down the hill, flies above southern central San Rafael, crosses Highway 101 and connects to Highway 580 near the Bellam Boulevard northbound on-ramp. This too is considered “low speed” connector with speeds of 35 miles per hour through the connector. The cost of this alternative is approximately \$215 million and would require the purchase of right of way only.

All of the alternatives would replace the older Highway 580 bridge structure above Bellam Boulevard to allow for the widening of the Bellam corridor to create safe bicycle pathways under the freeway.

Alternatives Numbering	Naming	Design Speed (mph)	Descriptions
1A	Hillside A	50	-West of Central Marin Sanitation Agency -Lower profile -Impacts along Jacoby St
1B	Hillside B	50	-East of Central Marin Sanitation Agency -Higher profile -More environmental impacts
2	Simms St	45	-Alignment passes through Simms St -High profile
3A	Low Speed A	35	-Alignment goes over existing Bellam Blvd Off-Ramp -Alignment west of Marin Square Shopping Center -580 off-ramp to Bellam remains open
3B	Low Speed B	35	-Alignment west of Marin Square Shopping Center -Close EB 580-Bellam Blvd Off-Ramp -Modifies SB 101/EB 580 off-ramp to Francisco Blvd
4	Swing Out	35	-Alignment flies over US101, Cal Park Hill Pathway, Francisco Blvd W and again over US101, then NB 101-Bellam Off-Ramp before it merges to EB 580. - High Profile
5	Medium Speed	40	-Alignment passes through Marin Square Shopping Center -Alignment west of Bellam Blvd

Each of the possible alignments impact the residents of San Rafael in different ways. Staff presented “guiding principles” at the [July 6, 2021 Council Meeting](#) to help define the needs and desires of the residents and businesses in San Rafael regarding the selection of alignments that will move forward for further review in the environmental process. The Council provided feedback and staff refined the Guiding Principles (see attachment A) to help inform decision making.

TAM will soon begin the environmental analysis of alternatives. TAM is seeking input from stakeholders on the various alignments so that TAM can eliminate the least desirable alternatives and study the most feasible in its environmental analysis. Input from the San Rafael City Council and the public will help to refine the alignments to be considered 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:** There is no fiscal impact associated with the acceptance of this informational report.

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

1. Accept the informational report as presented and provide feedback to TAM regarding the various alignments
2. Do not accept the informational report.

**The San Rafael City Council has endorsed the following Guiding Principles for the Director Connector project. A more detailed description of each is included as an Attachment.**

**The Connector project should follow these seven guiding principles:**

1. Reduce travel delays and increase transportation choices for all travelers
2. Support future economic investment and development
3. Improve safety
4. Fit in with the local setting and be aesthetically pleasing
5. Minimize impacts on the environment
6. Design for the future—not the past
7. Build the project in an efficient, timely way

The purpose of these seven principles is to express the City of San Rafael's vision for how a direct connector can benefit our community. The City recognizes that the connector is a regional project, intended to provide regional benefits. However, the project also presents opportunities for local benefits and should provide such benefits to offset local impacts. The City encourages TAM to consider these opportunities as it develops alternatives and selects a preferred alternative. The project should provide a net benefit for the City of San Rafael as well as Marin County and the Bay Area as a whole.

The attached detail elaborates on how a direct connector can benefit San Rafael. For each principle, the text identifies expected regional outcomes and desired local outcomes. The discussion is not intended to provide commentary or direction on any one alternative. Likewise, the principles are not intended as measurable evaluation criteria, or a ranking of priorities. Rather they express values that are important to San Rafael. Any future alternative(s) should be generally consistent with and not preclude achievement of these principles.

## **Attachment – Additional information on each of the seven Guiding Principles**

### **1. The Connector project should reduce travel delays and increase transportation choices for all travelers.**

**Regional:** *Reduce travel time and delays for motorists transitioning from northbound 101 to eastbound 580.*

- Local:**
- (a) Improve traffic flow on Bellam Boulevard and other local streets in and around the interchange*
  - (b) Improve local pedestrian and bicycle access on surface streets around the interchange and establish better connections between the Canal and Downtown.*
  - (c) Maintain the capacity of Sir Francis Drake Boulevard as a thoroughfare connecting US 101 and I-580.*

### **2. The Connector project should support future economic investment and development.**

**Regional:** *Support the economic vitality of the Bay Area, including anticipated job growth, commute patterns, and commercial goods movement.*

- Local:**
- (a) Improve visibility and access to businesses in Southeast San Rafael, including access improvements for customers, employers, and suppliers.*
  - (b) Minimize the direct displacement of businesses resulting from the project, as well as indirect impacts resulting from construction or changes to local streets and driveways.*

### **3. The Connector project should improve the safety of all travelers.**

**Regional:** *Reduce collision hazards and improve sight lines for vehicles using the interchanges*

- Local:**
- (a) Reduce collision hazards on surface streets in the project vicinity.*
  - (b) Improve pedestrian and bicycle safety along Bellam Boulevard and cross-streets.*

### **4. The Connector project should fit in with its setting and be aesthetically pleasing.**

**Regional:** *Blend in with the Marin County/North Bay context.*

- Local:**
- (a) Consider the height and bulk with associated flyover ramps, viaducts, and other project components.*
  - (b) Minimize loss of open space, large-scale tree removal, and grading scars.*
  - (c) Provide for streetscape improvements on local streets affected by the project.*

**5. The Connector project should minimize impacts on the environment.**

**Regional:** *Improve regional air and water quality and support statewide greenhouse gas reduction goals.*

**Local:** (a) *Consider social equity including environmental issues: Minimize the noise, air quality, and other environmental impacts of the project on nearby San Rafael neighborhoods and businesses.*  
(b) *Evaluate localized air quality impacts as part of environmental review and avoid impacts that may affect the health and wellness of residents in the project vicinity.*

**6. Design for the future—not the past.**

**Regional:** *Consider the long-term effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on travel and commuting patterns, and plan for future changes in technology, vehicle design, and regional conditions.*

**Local:** (a) *Select alternatives that do not preclude future improvements to ingress or egress to/from Southeast San Rafael neighborhoods, including a future westbound 580 to southbound 101 connector.*  
(b) *Consider long-term impacts related to sea level rise adaptation planning.*

**7. Build the project in an efficient, timely way.**

**Regional:** *Balance the relative costs of each alternative against the improvements to travel time, and traffic volumes, it provides. Coordinate the project with other efforts to enhance conditions on the I-580 and US-101 Corridors, including the Richmond-San Rafael Bridge.*

**Local:** (a) *Minimize the need for additional right-of-way in San Rafael.*  
(b) *Provide an inclusive planning process that engages San Rafael businesses and residents who use the interchange, including non-English speaking residents.*  
(c) *Provide travel demand data demonstrating the need to locate the project at the selected alternative.*