



March 4, 2024

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

Mayor Kate Colin
Vice Mayor Eli Hill
Councilmember Maika Gulati
Councilmember Maribeth Bushey
Councilmember Rachel Kertz

RE: March 4, 2024 City Council Meeting Agenda Item 5.A

Dear San Rafael City Council,

The Canal Alliance's mission is to break the generational cycle of poverty for Latino immigrants and their families by lifting barriers to their success. Our programs champion affordable housing, tenants' rights, workforce training, English education, and transportation equity, all with the goal of educating, empowering, supporting Canal residents and their families to best meet all their unique needs.

Transportation is one of our Canal residents' greatest needs. The Canal neighborhood was developed on former tidal lands adjoining San Rafael Creek and the San Francisco Bay. It is cut-off and isolated from the rest of San Rafael and the rest of the Marin County by Interstate 580 and US Highway 101, which act as major barriers. According to the American Community Survey, 7% of Canal households have 0 private vehicles, and another 38% have just 1 private vehicle. Since many Canal households have more than 1 worker, this means that many workers who live in the Canal do not have access to a private vehicle with which to commute to their jobs. Even those who do have a vehicle face burdensome gas and maintenance costs, which means that transit, walking, or bicycling is often the transportation mode of choice for Canal workers. According to the Healthy Places index, 28% of workers in the Canal neighborhood commute by transit, walking or cycling, which is higher than in 94% of California census tracts.

Needless to say, Canal residents are a major user of the San Rafael Transit Center. We are very appreciative that the Golden Gate Bridge, Highway, and Transportation District is undertaking this project to improve the safety, usability, and efficiency of the Transit Center. We know that our constituents in the Canal will reap the benefits of this project. However, the connection between the Canal neighborhood and the Transit Center as it presently stands has room for improvement. The same is true for the connection between the Canal neighborhood and other transportation facilities that share the Transit Center location, such as SMART and the North – South Greenway multi-use path.

At the SMART Board of Directors meeting on February 21, 2024, the Transit Center project designer spoke of the importance of San Rafael's Canal neighborhood as an origin and destination for Transit Center users. The shortest route between the Canal neighborhood and the future Transit Center is along

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East Francisco Boulevard, Grand Avenue, and Third Street. Since Third Street is a heavy-volume busy arterial, and the location of numerous collisions resulting in serious injuries and death to pedestrians, a slightly longer route along Fourth Street is preferable to Third Street.

Most of the above route has been recently improved thanks to San Rafael Public Works Department projects. In 2021, the San Rafael DPW widened the sidewalks on East Francisco Boulevard to 10 feet and the City Council passed an ordinance making them bicycle legal. This way, Canal residents can walk or bicycle north on Grand Avenue from the Canal somewhere other than on the freeway frontage road sharing the lane with speeding cars and trucks. The route continues north on Grand Avenue, on the multi-use pathway bridge across San Rafael Canal completed by DPW in 2019. Immediately north of the Grand Avenue bridge, DPW is currently finishing construction of the Grand Avenue Cycle Track, a two-way Class IV facility between Second Street and Fourth Street.

The final gap between facilities that the San Rafael DPW has built or will soon have built and the new Transit Center is along Fourth Street. Though safer than Third Street, Fourth Street between Grand Avenue and the future Transit Center is still not an ideal corridor for pedestrians and people on bicycles. Pedestrians experience narrow sidewalks with uneven pavement. People on bicycles experience a Class III shared route, where cyclists are expected to “take the lane” and share it with vehicle traffic, because there is no space set aside as a “bike lane.” Class III facilities are sufficient for confident and experienced cyclists, but they are anathema to “all ages and abilities” bicycle users, a broad-based spectrum of users that includes children and senior citizens.

San Rafael and the residents of the Canal neighborhood need safer facilities for both walking and riding a bicycle on Fourth Street from Grand Avenue to the new Transit Center. We recommend Class IV cycle tracks on each side of Fourth Street, next to sidewalks for pedestrians. In San Rafael’s case, this would not require “re-inventing the wheel.” The City is already building a Class IV cycle track on Grand Avenue. This would merely extend this existing cycle track the rest of the way to the Transit Center.

Class IV cycle tracks provide benefits to both pedestrians and people on bicycles. Cycle tracks, or protected bike lanes, create an additional buffer between pedestrians on sidewalks and cars in the street. They also improve pedestrian safety on sidewalks by giving people on bicycles a designated place to ride, separated from cars. In this way, people on bicycles are separated from both cars and pedestrians on the sidewalk, improving safety for all modal users.

In addition to improving pedestrian and bicycle safety on Fourth Street, we also strongly support two other projects that will similarly improve access and connectivity between the

Canal neighborhood and the new San Rafael Transit Center. The first of these projects is the City’s pedestrian and bicycle safety improvements along Bellam Boulevard between Kerner Boulevard and Andersen Drive and the North – South Greenway. For residents in the eastern portion of the Canal



neighborhood, this may be the preferable route to the new Transit Center. The North – South Greenway between Andersen Drive and Second Street, completed by the City of San Rafael in 2020, already provides a safe, high-quality pedestrian and bicycle route on the west side of Highway 101. Improving Bellam Boulevard will complete the gap between the Canal neighborhood and the North – South Greenway, as well as improving Safe Routes to School access for Canal residents to Davidson Middle School. We understand that the City is working hard to advance this project sooner than the timeline originally laid out by TAM, and we offer our full support for these efforts.

The second additional project with implications for Canal-Transit Center connectivity is the planned Swing Bridge across the San Rafael Canal between Canal Street and Second Street in the vicinity of Montecito Plaza and San Rafael High School. When complete, this Swing Bridge is poised to become the superior pedestrian and bicycle route between the Canal neighborhood and the new Transit Center, providing an attractive and safe alternative to the current route along the East Francisco Boulevard sidewalks, which pass by numerous automobile dealerships. Although the timeline for the Swing Bridge project is much longer, we wish to express our full support for its timely development.

Thank you for your consideration.
Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Omar", is positioned below the typed name.

Omar Carrera
Chief Executive Officer
Canal Alliance

From: David Seltzer [REDACTED]
Sent: Monday, March 4, 2024 6:52 PM
To: Distrib- City Clerk <city.clerk@cityofsanrafael.org>
Subject: San Rafael City Council – Monday March 4th - Transit Terminal

This is probably too late to add my written comment to the actual meeting, but I just wanted to voice some thoughts on the new transit center to the San Rafael City Council, so hopefully the council members at least will be able to read/hear this comment at some point.

I just wanted to give a comment that I think transit really goes hand in hand with walking and biking. That many folks coming and going from the Transit center will be arriving by foot or bike. This means safe routes directing pedestrians and bike riders to and from the transit center site is a critical part of this project and its ultimate success. The more people that feel safe and comfortable walking and biking to the transit center, the better utilized this important infrastructure investment will be. This is particularly important because the transit center itself is adjacent to such large volumes of often very fast and high volume motor vehicle traffic. One only has to look at the data for pedestrian/cyclist deaths and injuries for San Rafael, and they are dotted all around this area unfortunately.

So please, please don't overlook the access to this wonderful new transit center. Think about and address how people are able to safely walk and bike to the transit center to then catch their bus or train to cities and destinations beyond. This is critical! I live on Lincoln Ave. and I'm so grateful for the bike path I have and can use that runs so close to where I live. However, this great north south path after it runs into Mission really becomes a disaster. Running parallel with Hetherton is terrible, traffic making right turns often do not follow the "no turn" signals, it feels really dangerous and unpleasant to ride there on the "official" path so I usually have to try and make my own way on Tamalpais. Which is very frustrating in its own right with no specific path or signal buttons or sensors so I then have to try and dash across streets when there are gaps in traffic which is awful. We need to do better than this, we need real safe walking and biking connections to the new transit center. Not just north and south, but east and west too!

Thank you for your time and reading my comment

-David Seltzer