



STAFF REPORT

DISCUSSION AND DIRECTION REGARDING APPLICATION FOR PLANNING GRANT - "TRANSPORTATION FOR LIVABLE COMMUNITIES"

Honorable Mayor and Council members:

Summary

The Metropolitan Transportation Commission has issued a "call for projects" for transportation-related planning and capital grants. The Transportation for Livable Communities (TLC) program is an annual program which had been suspended for the past couple of years, but which has been reinitiated for 2005. Grants of up to \$75,000 are available to prepare plans and specifications for street improvements and other projects that help relieve traffic congestion through alternative transportation / transit options. In addition, the City has been contacted by CalTrain / SamTrans about submitting a multi-jurisdictional application with Belmont, Redwood City, San Carlos and the transit agency. Staff is seeking the Council's direction for making application to this program, which has an application deadline of July 16, 2004.

Background – The TLC Planning Grant

The attached information from MTC describes the TLC planning grant program and procedures. In summary, the Community Design Planning Program is defined as follows:

Purpose:

Create pedestrian, bicycle and transit friendly environments through retrofit of existing neighborhoods, downtowns and transit stations.

Short-term Objective:

Prepare concept plans, streetscape plans, drawings, cost estimates and implementation plans for capital projects

Long-term Objective:

Develop capital projects that can compete for funding and be constructed.

Qualified Applicants:

Local government, transportation agencies and community-based non-profits

Funds Available:

Up to \$75,000 per application. A 20% local match is required.

Evaluation Criteria:

- Need for Study
- Fulfillment of program goals (see Purpose, above)
- Scope of Project
- Administrative of Project
- Other Factors (innovation, land use links, local match, low-income community)

It should be noted that this grant application is for planning only and not construction. A separate capital projects grant program is being run by MTC. (A resolution is under consideration by the Council for a capital projects grant application for the Bike / Ped Bridge.)

Belmont TLC Projects

Staff has reviewed the MTC application requirements and believes that the TLC planning grant could fund plans for pedestrian-friendly improvements to the El Camino Real / Ralston Avenue / Old County Road intersections around the CalTrain station. The Council may recall that such improvements were studied last year as part of a Peninsula Corridor Plan for the area. This plan was prepared by Project for Public Spaces (PPS) for Belmont, Samceda / P3, Sam Trans and the County of San Mateo. The City's Urban Design Committee played an important part in providing local input to the plan's ideas and recommendations:

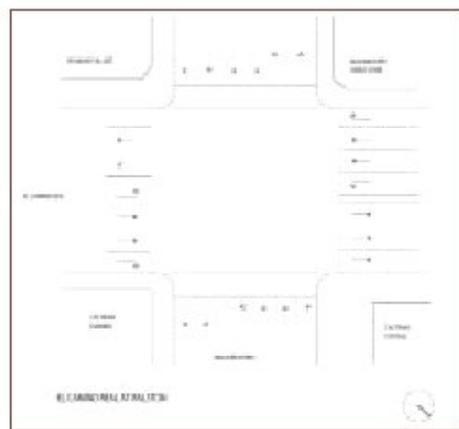
- Downtown gateways
- Widened sidewalks
- Narrowing traffic lanes
- Street / station landscaping and furniture
- Textured crosswalks
- Street / station lighting and signage

Here is a sample concept from the PPS plan for the Ralston Ave. / El Camino Real intersection (the Council has previously received a copy of this plan):

PROPOSED RECONFIGURATION
PLAN



EXISTING CONDITIONS



The TLC grant would provide the funds to take these conceptual ideas to the next level: Feasible plans.

SamTran's Joint Application Proposal

The City of Belmont may apply directly to the MTC for a planning grant. We have also received an alternative option from SamTrans / CalTrain in which we would join with them and the Cities of Redwood City and San Carlos in a multi-jurisdictional application. SamTrans believes that the similarities of the three CalTrain stations (immediately along El Camino Real among other factors) create several important opportunities:

- Improve the chances of receiving an MTC grant,
- Improve the three CalTrain stations, and
- Enhance local pedestrian / bicycle / bus access to the train stations from the surrounding areas.

They have indicated that the PPS plan for each city would form the basis of their application's approach to area improvements, with further refinements to reflect local desires and engineering feasibility. In addition, SamTrans has initiated discussions with Caltrans to establish a set of design criteria and review procedures that would transform El Camino Real (State Highway 82) into a street that respects local needs and concerns.

Finally, SamTrans has indicated a willingness to provide a portion of the grant's required 20% funding match. However, it must be noted that grant applications that have a local match greater than 20% are scored more favorably; the City must consider the possibility of contributing additional funds, which could be provided by the Belmont RDA.

In meeting with the SamTrans representatives, City staff expressed our concerns about preserving Belmont's character and identity in any program involving other cities or the transit agency. SamTrans stated its commitment to following local direction on improvements so long as they contributed to the overall goal of enhancing access to the SamTrans bus stop and CalTrain station. Staff has concluded that there appears to be a high correlation between SamTrans's goals and the City's desire to make El Camino Real, Ralston Avenue and Old County Road more amenable to pedestrian activity. Consequently, we believe that it could be in Belmont's interest to join the other cities and transit agency in the grant process.

If the City chooses to join the multi-jurisdictional application, SamTrans / CalTrain would be the lead applicant. City staff would provide some background materials (copies of plans, institutional uses, special events calendars and the like) and review the draft application. It is anticipated that a total of ten to fifteen hours of City staff time would be needed to help prepare the grant for submission by the deadline of July 16, 2004. If the City wished to apply on its own, a commitment of approximately thirty to forty hours would be required.

Fiscal Impact

None at this time. The City Council is being asked to provide direction on a possible grant application that may require expenditures from the RDA. If the Council elects to participate, an application will be prepared. If a grant is awarded to Belmont, a matching amount will be required at such time as the grant is accepted by the City.

Recommendation

Staff recommends the Council provide direction regarding the MTC's TLC planning grant. The options are:

1. Decline to participate in any application.
2. Direct staff to prepare and submit an application, not to exceed forty hours of staff time.
3. Direct staff to work with SamTrans / CalTrain on a multi-jurisdictional planning application, not to exceed fifteen hours of staff time.

Staff believes Option 2 would be difficult to implement, as we are concerned about the level of staff time needed to prepare a 'stand-alone' application for the July 16, 2004 deadline. (The Council may consider waiting one or more years before seeking planning funds from the MTC, or prepare improvement plans with local funds only.)

If the Council adopts Option Three, SamTrans / CalTrain will prepare the application and forward a draft letter of support for Council approval at the next regular meeting.

Attachments

- I. MTC Call for Projects – Community Design Planning Program, Cycle 1, FY 2004-05

Respectfully submitted,

Craig A. Ewing, AICP
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