



STAFF REPORT

DISCUSSION AND DIRECTION ON PLANNING PROGRAM FOR GRAND BOULEVARD / MTC-SAMTRANS GRANT

Honorable Chair and Board Members:

Summary

As previously reported, SamTrans has been awarded a grant from the Metropolitan Transportation Commission (MTC) to prepare plans for street improvements and other projects. The grant is to be split among the three CalTrain stations and surrounding areas in Redwood City, San Carlos and Belmont. This memo summarizes the proposed work schedule and seeks guidance from the RDA Board on how to provide local community input into the design work.

Background

Following completion of the 2003 Peninsula Corridor Plan / Belmont Station Area, SamTrans pursued the concept of transforming El Camino Real into a “Grand Boulevard” and making its CalTrain Stations more accessible to pedestrians, bicyclists and users of other transit, particularly buses. In late 2004, SamTrans secured a planning grant from the MTC to develop more detailed plans for street and other improvements that would help fulfill the vision expressed in the 2003 plan. SamTrans’ grant request was a multi-jurisdictional effort, including the Cities of Belmont, Redwood City and San Carlos, with the anticipated future involvement of CalTrans. Belmont reviewed the grant application on June 22, 2004 and submitted a letter in support of the application. (A copy of the grant application is attached as Exhibit A.)

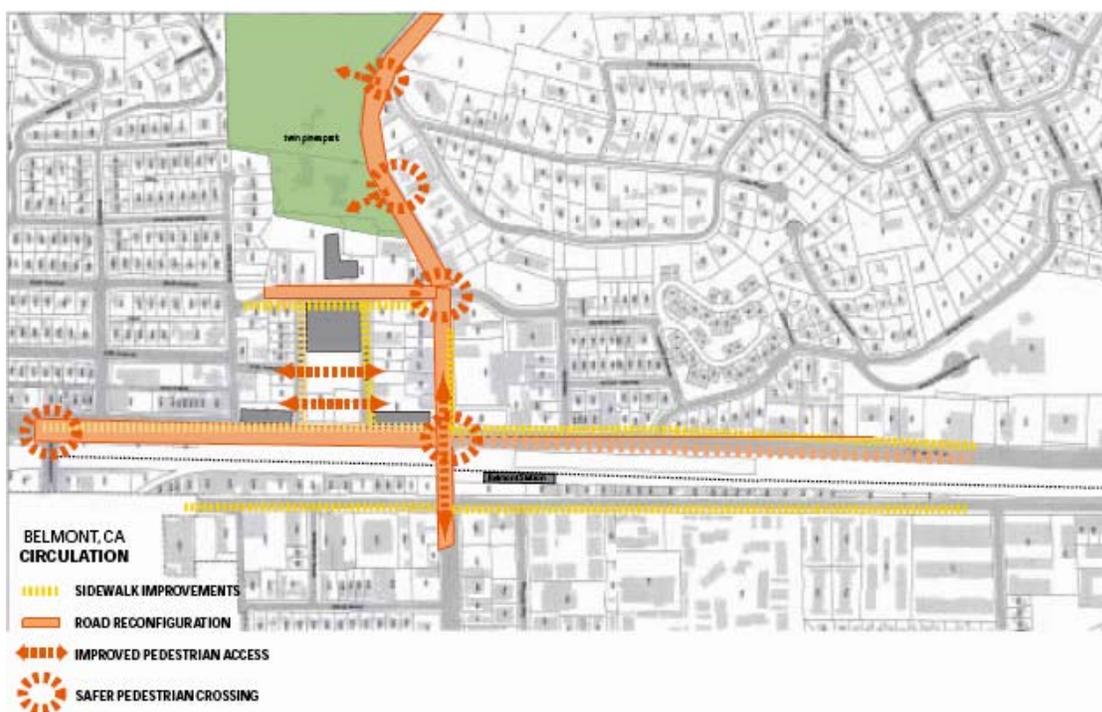
The specific purpose of the SamTrans’ program is to “Create pedestrian, bicycle and transit friendly environments through retrofit of existing neighborhoods, downtowns and transit stations.” The program is not intended to fund capital improvements, but to prepare the plans, drawings and estimates for future improvements.¹ The successful application by SamTrans, Belmont, Redwood City and San Carlos yielded the maximum award of \$75,000. SamTrans expected the multi-agency effort to cost \$90,000 and has committed its own funds to bridge the difference between the grant and the budget – there is no financial obligation to the City of Belmont.

¹ MTC also operates a capital projects grant program, and the City has applied for an award on behalf of the Bike / Pedestrian Bridge.

Belmont’s portion of the SamTrans grant application addresses 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 in 2003 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, including:

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

An example of their work output is the following graphic that describes areas where future street improvements would be desirable:



One of the intended outcomes of this program is to develop a set of improvement plans that have a high likelihood of being implemented, including being competitive for capital improvements grants from MTC and other sources.

Discussion

Since receiving confirmation of the MTC award, SamTrans has contacted staff to develop a detailed project description and schedule, and staff is seeking the RDA Board’s guidance on several points detailed below. Staff believes there are three issues that the Agency may wish to address as part of this project:

1. Project Description and Schedule
2. Selection of Consultant
3. Community Involvement

Staff is seeking specific direction from the Board so that the project may move forward within the next several weeks.

Project Description and Schedule.

A draft project description and schedule has been developed by SamTrans based on the proposal previously reviewed by the City council and submitted with the MTC grant application (attachment B). The project calls for the preparation of the following “deliverables”:

- *Improvements Concept Plan* - Concept diagram(s) prepared with aerial photo underlay. Symbols and annotations will be used to indicate location and type of recommended study area improvements; e.g. curbs / gutters / sidewalks, improved crosswalks, street trees, lights, furniture, etc. Display size approximately 1"=100'.
- *Improved Plan and Cross Section Option Diagram* - To-scale plan and cross section drawings illustrating options for improving street and frontage sidewalk conditions on / near El Camino Real. These will be companion illustrations to products listed above. Display size approximately 1"=10'.
- *Refined Cost Estimate* - Per revised layout plan(s).
- *Summary Memo Report/Template* - Prepare brief text description of work process, findings, and improvement recommendations for subsequent public hearings and grant applications, incorporate graphics and photos. Common format for three cities will be determined with Technical Steering Committee.
- *Display Graphics* - Mount and or reformat graphics as needed for public hearings and board presentations.

The tentative schedule indicates that the project would begin in June and be completed in the early months of 2006. Staff believes that the project description and schedule would be adequate for the scope of the project and that the deliverables, including a cost estimate, would be useful in applying for future capital improvement grants.

Selection of Consultant

SamTrans has proposed Terry Bottomley as the design consultant to work with the three cities. Mr. Bottomley has worked with Redwood City on several urban design projects, and a summary of his background is attached to this memo (attachment C). SamTrans has indicated that it is open to working with the Belmont RDA to identify a design professional acceptable to the City and Agency. Based on the information we have received to date, staff believes that Mr. Bottomley is qualified to do the design work and also has local experience needed to appreciate the character and expectations of the Belmont community. If the Board has any concerns or other thoughts about SamTrans consultant on the project, staff can convey them to SamTrans.

Community Involvement

As noted in the draft project description, three community meetings are planned to be held with the design consultant, as follows:

1. Review prior plans and existing conditions; identify special issues / concerns
2. Review draft improvement concepts and plans
3. Review final improvement concepts and plans

The Board needs to identify what kind of citizen input should be used for these meetings. Staff believes there are several options:

| Options | Pros | Cons |
|---|---|--|
| <p>1. Use the Planning Commission as the citizen committee, with notice to neighbors surrounding the project area.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Experienced citizens with understanding of city issues - No additional Brown Act req'ts | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - May crowd other agenda items. (Commission could hold special meetings.) |
| <p>2. Appoint a separate citizen committee. This could be accomplished one of two ways:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Use Urban Design Sub-committee from 2003 Visioning Project. - Appoint new committee of eight to twelve residents, decision makers and others. <p>Provide notice to surrounding neighbors.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Group can focus on down-town design - Opportunity for new involvement by residents | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Committee subject to Brown Act; logistical costs - Some members of 2003 Urban Design Sub-Committee already on Permit Task Force |
| <p>3. Do not use a designated group of citizens; conduct the meetings as public workshops with notice to surrounding neighbors.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Open-ended involvement by all affected / interested residents - No Brown Act requirements. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Second / third meetings may have new citizens; potential for revisiting settled issues. |

Staff has no specific preference regarding how to involve the community in the project. While a separate citizen committee might be preferred, it would require a commitment of staff resources

to provide an agenda and minutes as now required by the Brown Act. The Planning Commission could hold additional meetings on this project in order to avoid impacting the backlog of current planning cases. Staff has not polled the Commission to determine its willingness to conduct extra meetings. The third option – public workshops – would be the easiest to administer, but risk going over settled issues at the second and third meeting should people miss earlier meetings. Staff believes that the Planning Commission is best qualified and most efficient source of community input on the project at this time.

Fiscal Impact

None at this time.

Public Contact

Posting of RDA Board Agenda. Notice of this item was e-mailed to the presidents of Homeowners Associations near the CalTrain Station.

Recommendation

Based on the above discussion, staff seeks direction from the Board, and offers the following recommendations:

1. Accept the draft project description and schedule.
2. Accept Bottomley Planning and Design as the design consultant for the project
3. Direct the staff regarding how community input is provided to the project, using one of the alternatives outlined in this memo.

Attachments

- A. Application for MTC Grant file by SamTrans, July 2004
- B. Draft Project Description and Schedule
- C. Background Information on Bottomley Planning and Design

Respectfully submitted,

Craig A. Ewing, AICP
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