

From: [Ross S. Heitkamp](#)
To: [Bodduna, Aruna](#)
Subject: Castro Pedestrian Mall: Mitigated negative declaration
Date: Tuesday, September 27, 2022 10:09:30 PM

CAUTION: EXTERNAL EMAIL - Ensure you trust this email before clicking on any links or attachments.

Regarding the Mitigated Negative Declaration, I would like to raise the following objections to the findings in the following sections:

- Air Quality: all sections say no impact however the use of stop signs, currently implemented as flashing red signals, has already resulted in much longer stop times for vehicles which increases the amount of pollutants being released.
- Air Quality: the traffic backups already taking place due to the flashing red signals is resulting in vehicles taking longer distance drives to try to get around these bottle necks.
- Energy: same as above air quality impacts, additional energy is consumed for these impacts but also extends to electric vehicles that navigate around the traffic backups.
- Greenhouse Gas Emissions: again, more idling and longer driving is more greenhouse gas emissions.
- Land Use/Planning: The initial proposal which citizens supported was to alleviate the loss of transit on Castro Street by maintaining full cross traffic such that the streets parallel to Castro on either side could absorb the displaced traffic. The use of stop signs with no guaranteed or designated cycle when vehicles are allowed to go has greatly interfered with the function of the cross streets. In addition to hampering the function of the downtown area as a whole, this also disrupts residents on each side from accessing services and ingress/egress routes on the other side.
- Transportation C: lack of dedicated crossing cycles for pedestrians and cars by use of stop signs creates an inherent hazard for pedestrians at night time when being seen against the backdrop of oncoming headlights prevents drivers from being reasonably able to determine whether the intersection is clear.

Next, why is there no section on SAFETY? Clearly a change that results in a more dangerous situation should be included in a report such as this. This is the flip side of the previous point - Transportation is impacted by being put into a new situation where drivers become more dangerous and pedestrian safety is impacted by that on the other side.

Finally, as an objective reader, I get very suspicious of the adequacy of a report such as this that fails to find ANY impacts at all due to such an extensive and involved change that it takes 3-5 years to implement. A thoroughly done report would find some impacts and then attempt to justify proceeding anyhow with mitigation measures. Is this because the analysis is done during a time when traffic remains well below the historical levels? And yet, observations are that the intersection configuration currently temporarily implemented and planned to be permanent is inadequate for even these reduced traffic volumes. Additionally, this analysis is performed AFTER the changes have already been made, so it becomes impossible discern the base level of operation.

My final comment is about the traffic circle at Castro and California streets. I'll say I am a

huge fan of roundabouts. This is not one of those. It is simply an obstacle that was placed in the middle of the intersection years ago to try to slow drivers entering what was already becoming a pedestrian-centric part of our downtown. As a 4-way signalized intersection with this large obstruction, one could daily witness confusion from many drivers, especially if one is turning left and they would slowly round the center island and confront a red light in front of them. With this intersection becoming only a 3 way, this obstacle only creates more havoc and it should be fully removed. And with this transition out of the pedestrian mall area, the need for signalized crossings for both cars and pedestrians here is more important than anywhere else.

Please don't accept this report as it currently stands. While I remain a firm supporter of the goal of establishing a permanent pedestrian mall here on Castro, doing it poorly and locking in place the failed portions of our 2 year trial would be folly. Visit Pearl Street in Boulder, CO and see for yourself what a properly done pedestrian mall can look like and how it operates. Don't fail to mimic success.

Ross Heitkamp



September 28, 2022

City of Mountain View
Public Works Department
Attention: Aruna Bodduna, Transportation Planner
500 Castro Street, P.O. Box 7540
Mountain View, CA 94039-7540

RE: Castro Street Pedestrian Mall Initial Study/Negative Declaration and Functional Plan and Interim Design Guidelines

Dear Aruna,

VTA appreciates the opportunity to comment on the Initial Study / Negative Declaration (IS/ND) for the Castro Pedestrian Mall Study, as well as the Functional Plan and Interim Design Guidelines (FP/IDG) document dated August 29, 2022. VTA has reviewed the IS/ND and FP/IDG document and has the following comments:

Effects of the Castro Pedestrian Mall Project on Planned VTA Transit Service

Although VTA bus routes that have always served bus stops along Castro Street have already been rerouted to accommodate the Castro StrEATs Program, this was done on a temporary basis as a response to the COVID-19 pandemic. VTA has since factored in this set of bus reroutes associated with the Castro Street closure into its official plans to recover to full transit service levels which will be adopted in its 2023 Transit Service Plan.

VTA and City staff have been discussing since August 2021 the City's potential plans to permanently close Castro Street from vehicular traffic, as well as possible longer-term options to reroute VTA bus service from Castro Street. Discussions have considered both the Castro Pedestrian Mall Project and subsequent City projects including the proposed Evelyn Avenue ramp and the Moffett Boulevard/Castro Street grade separation project.

VTA has reviewed the IS/ND and suggests that the following additions be considered to reflect the identified long-term effects on VTA bus service on Castro:

- Under the Environmental Issues Assessment for Greenhouse Gas Emissions (page 12), VTA suggests revising the Findings of Fact slightly to state that "Closing the street to vehicular traffic could conceivably result in more people shifting to low- or no-emission modes of travel such as walking, biking or riding nearby public transportation to access shops and businesses downtown thereby reducing car trips and associated car emissions." This

revision would highlight the role of other sustainable modes of transportation in addition to walking. VTA supports the inclusion of these travel modes in the plans and environmental documents to reflect how the Project can benefit all patrons and visitors getting to Castro Street.

- Under the Environmental Issues Assessment for Transportation (pages 18-19), VTA suggests revising the Findings of Fact to note that VTA bus service would need to be permanently shifted from Castro Street to instead operate on parallel nearby streets. This would be an accurate reflection of VTA and City staff discussions to-date about the effect that this project would have on VTA bus service along Castro Street, and the effect this would have on transit riders' access to downtown Mountain View. VTA recommends revising the Findings of Fact to add that "Bus route alternatives that minimize long-term effects on public transit rider access to downtown shops and businesses are being explored with local transit operator VTA" would reflect Kimley-Horn's transportation analysis recommendation to coordinate with VTA staff on permanent route adjustments (page 15 of the Traffic and Circulation Analysis Memo).
- Under the Environmental Issues Assessment for Transportation (page 19), VTA suggests revising the Findings of Fact to recognize that the Project's modifications to increase pedestrian safety at intersections should also accommodate bus operations. For any permanent bus reroutes to work at these intersections, the proposed roundabout at California Street and the proposed intersection improvements at Villa Street cannot be so narrow that it compromises safe turning movements for buses. VTA is open to continued design review support on these intersections.

Similarly, VTA has reviewed the FP/IDG document and generally recommends that it apply a public transportation lens in its interim design guidelines. VTA appreciates the Project's goals, one of which mentions to "invite users of all ages and abilities to comfortably and safely access and move on and along the street" (Page 26). With VTA bus and light rail, Caltrain, MV Community Shuttle and MV Go transit services all serving the nearby Mountain View Transit Center, public transportation is a major presence in Downtown Mountain View and continues to be a vital contributor to the area's vibrant pedestrian environment.

VTA encourages the City to acknowledge how the Project can integrate public transportation in the insights and recommendations the IDG document highlights, particularly in elements related to wayfinding, service stations, and intersection improvements.

- **Wayfinding:** We appreciate the City taking this lead on implementing wayfinding at key locations along Castro Street. With the Project being a catalyst for shifting VTA bus routes off Castro Street and onto adjacent and parallel streets, it will be important for the Project wayfinding to incorporate how Castro Street patrons can access bus stops along these streets and at the Mountain View Transit Center. Other City projects slated for the next five years, such as the Evelyn Avenue ramp and the Moffett Boulevard/Castro Street at-grade

crossing closure, will warrant other future reroutes. Laying the strong foundation for wayfinding for this Project now, including wayfinding to transit, will set up future Castro Street patrons who use transit for success as they navigate the evolving transportation system in the downtown area.

- **Service Stations:** VTA supports this creative idea to implement service stations that “center the basic, public amenities that visitors need” (Page 48), such as bike racks and repair stations, water fountains and information boards. VTA encourages the City to also highlight directions and locations to transit stops and stations in its in its downtown maps at these service stations and elsewhere, and looks forward to coordinating with staff in those future efforts.
- **Intersections:** As previously noted above regarding the Project’s IS/ND, the proposed intersection improvements on Castro, particularly at California Street and at Villa Street, are critical to operating safe, convenient, and accessible bus service in these Project conditions.

Thank you again for the opportunity to review this project. Please do not hesitate to contact Janice Soriano-Ramos, Senior Transportation Planner, at janice.soriano@vta.org or me at robert.swierk@vta.org to discuss any questions you may have on this letter.

Sincerely,

Robert Swierk

Robert Swierk, AICP
Principal Transportation Planner