



**DATE:** December 10, 2019

**CATEGORY:** Consent

**DEPT.:** Public Works

**TITLE:** **Mountain View Transit Center Grade Separation and Access Project – Mitigated Negative Declaration**

### **RECOMMENDATION**

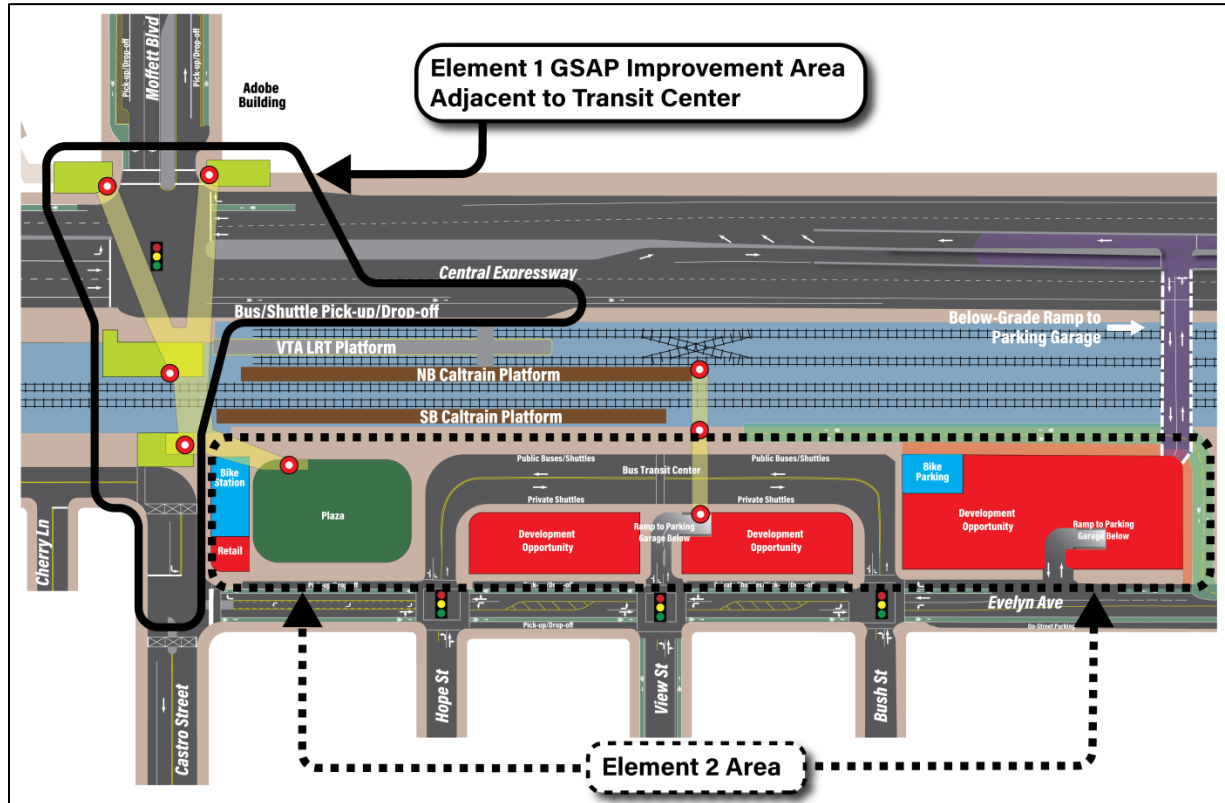
Approve a Mitigated Negative Declaration for the Mountain View Transit Center Grade Separation and Access Project (Attachment 1 to the Council report).

### **BACKGROUND**

On [November 10, 2015](#), the City Council authorized the development of a Transit Center Master Plan (Master Plan). Following analysis of alternative concepts and several community and stakeholder meetings, the Council approved the Master Plan on [May 23, 2017](#).

On [February 13, 2018](#), Council supported the concept of dividing the implementation of the Master Plan into two elements (Figure 1). The first element (Grade Separation and Access Project or GSAP), which is the focus of this item, is the Castro Street grade separation, including a ramp to Shoreline Boulevard at Evelyn Avenue and pedestrian/bicycle undercrossings of the tracks and Central Expressway. The second element is the redevelopment of the Transit Center itself, including improved on-site transit vehicle circulation to meet current and future demands, reconfiguration of Centennial Plaza, and a possible partnership between the City and Caltrain for a mixed-use development and underground parking. The second element is currently on hold and will proceed when the City and Caltrain are ready to undertake a land use planning effort.

Figure 1: Transit Center Master Plan Adopted May 2017



Further development of the GSAP began in 2018. The scope of work included preliminary engineering and environmental clearance in conformance with California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) guidelines. Staff and the consultant team have further developed project design elements and coordinated with key stakeholders and agency partners, including Caltrain, the Santa Clara Valley Transportation Authority (VTA), and County of Santa Clara.

On [March 19, 2019](#), key design elements were considered at a Council Study Session. Direction was provided allowing for preparation of the environmental document and additional progress on the project design. Completion of preliminary engineering is expected in early 2020.

Also, at the March 19, 2019 meeting, Council expressed interest in exploring a pedestrian plaza/mall at the end of Castro Street. On June 11, 2019, Council approved the Castro Pedestrian Mall Feasibility Study, Project 20-58, as part of the Fiscal Year 2019-20 Capital Improvement Program (CIP). A consultant agreement for the Castro Pedestrian Mall Feasibility Study is scheduled for Council consideration on this same

December 10, 2019, City Council Agenda (Consent Calendar). This Feasibility Study will consider various options for creating a pedestrian mall or plaza, including realigning Castro Street along Centennial Plaza, partial or full closure of Castro Street, and shared street strategies. These improvements relate directly to implementation of Element 2 of the Transit Center Master Plan, which includes a potential reconfiguration of Centennial Plaza. Some of the concepts to be studied may involve modifying the grand staircase off of Castro Street or lengthening the bicycle/pedestrian undercrossing further south. If one of these concepts were to be selected by the City Council for further development based on the result of the Castro Pedestrian Mall Feasibility Study, the staircase and/or undercrossing, as well as any reconfigurations of Castro Street south of the northern Evelyn Avenue intersection, would be pursued as a separate project from the GSAP and be subject to its own CEQA process.

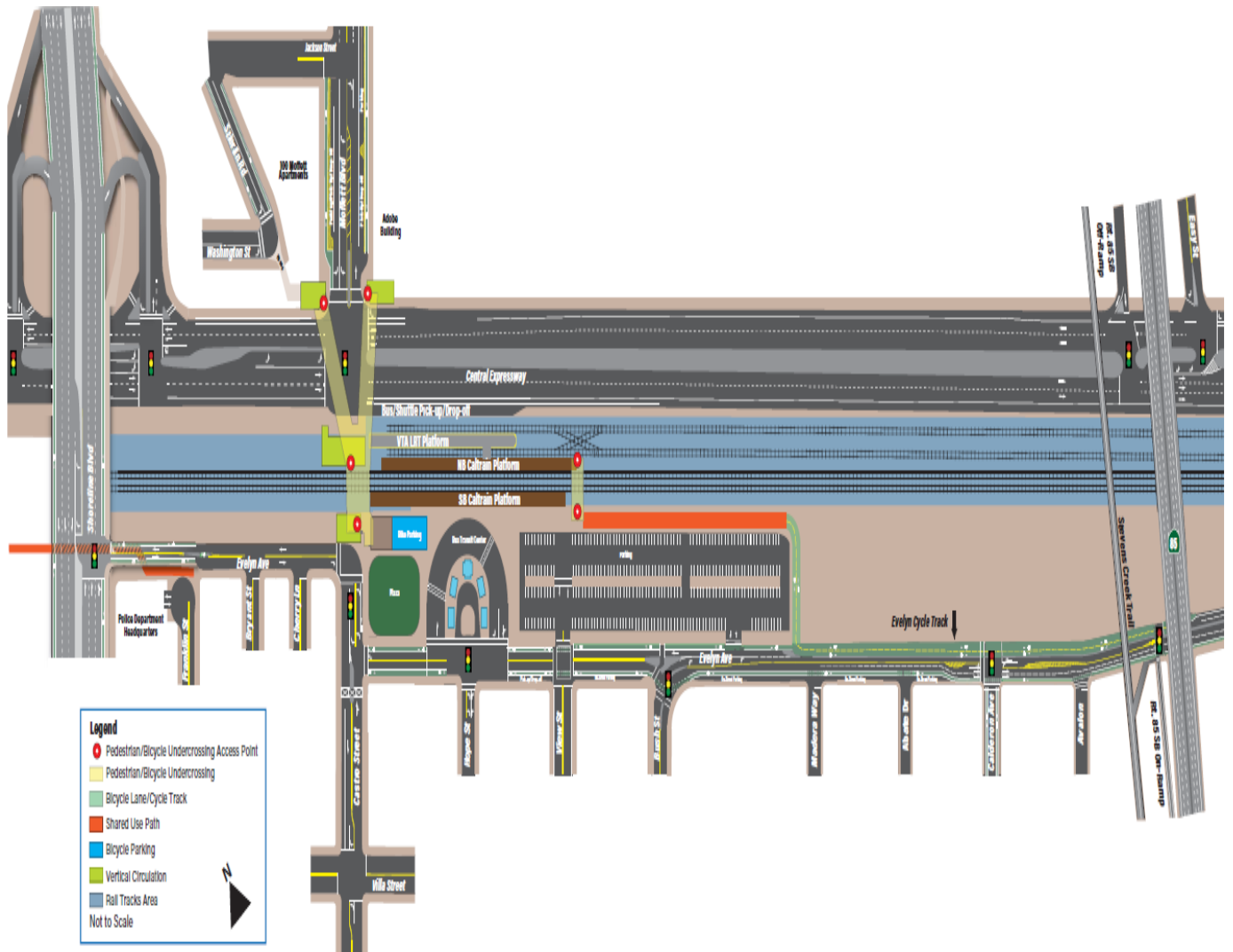
## **ANALYSIS**

### **Project Overview**

The GSAP is designed to improve safety, capacity, and multi-modal access in the area of the Transit Center. In particular, the project will replace the current at-grade rail crossing with alternative methods of access and will create a more walkable and bike-friendly environment. Project improvements, as shown in Figure 2, include:

- Construction of a new vehicle ramp from West Evelyn Avenue to Shoreline Boulevard to provide an alternate route for vehicles;
- Construction of undercrossings and vertical circulation for pedestrians and bicyclists to facilitate passage from the north side of Central Expressway and the Moffett Boulevard community to both the Transit Center and downtown;
- Establishment of areas for bus/shuttle pickup and drop-off on the north side of the tracks next to the Transit Center and on both sides of Moffett Boulevard near Central Expressway;
- An enhanced bicycle connection along West Evelyn Avenue between the Transit Center and the Stevens Creek Trail and other pedestrian and bicycle connections; and
- Designating the footprint for the extension of the Caltrain boarding platforms, which includes shifting them closer to Castro Street and replacing the at-grade pedestrian crossings of the tracks between platforms with undercrossings.

Figure 2: Project Improvements



### Project Phasing and Timing

Following approval of the Mitigated Negative Declaration (MND) and subsequent completion of preliminary engineering, the City, Caltrain, and VTA will enter into a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) for funding, final engineering, and eventual construction of the project. Preliminary discussions indicate that Caltrain will take the lead in final design and construction with VTA providing project oversight and Measure B sales tax grade separation program funding. The MOU will include delivery of the primary GSAP improvements: the ramp from West Evelyn Avenue to Shoreline Boulevard, the closure of Castro Street across the train tracks, the pedestrian/bicycle

undercrossing of Central Expressway and the train tracks, and related improvements on Moffett Boulevard and Central Expressway. However, two improvements will proceed as separate projects and will not be included in the MOU for final design and construction: (1) the cycle track on West Evelyn Avenue between the Transit Center and Stevens Creek Trail; and (2) the Caltrain station platform modifications. The enhanced bicycle connection on West Evelyn Avenue will be designed and constructed by the City when project funding has been secured. Caltrain will develop the modification and shift of Caltrain platforms, along with other station improvements, at a future time to be determined.

Development of the MOU is currently the subject of discussions between the City, Caltrain, and VTA. It is expected that the Council will consider execution of an MOU for the project in the first half of 2020.

### **Traffic Impacts**

A Traffic Impact Analysis was prepared to analyze the changes in traffic flow resulting from the GSAP roadway modifications. The GSAP analysis determined that, while some traffic will be diverted to the new Evelyn Avenue ramp connection and other downtown streets, the additional traffic would not result in any significant impacts based on the City's level-of-service standards.

This analysis was based on current traffic and Caltrain service levels, which includes frequent railroad gate interruptions that limit pedestrian, bicycle, and vehicle movements across the train tracks and Central Expressway. As Caltrain increases service levels, the railroad gates will be down for much longer periods of time, resulting in more diverted traffic onto downtown streets with or without the GSAP improvements.

### **Tree Removal**

A preliminary Arborist Report was prepared to account for the number of trees and tree types within the project area. The project site contains 452 trees. It is estimated that a total of 185 trees would be removed, of which 24 are Heritage trees. This is a conservative assessment based on preliminary engineering plans. As the project proceeds through final design, opportunities to reduce the number of trees impacted may be identified. The City's tree removal permit process will be followed prior to start of construction. Standard City mitigation requirements will apply in regard to tree removal and replacement trees.

## **Environmental Review**

An Initial Study and Draft MND were prepared for the proposed project in conformance with CEQA Guidelines. The environmental analysis determined that with implementation of the proposed mitigation measures, all impacts of the proposed project would be mitigated to a less than significant level (see Attachment 1 – Initial Study, Draft MND, and Mitigation Monitoring and Reporting Program). Mitigations identified include provisions to address general construction impacts related to air quality, cultural resources, and noise impacts that can be addressed by implementing best management practices during construction. Additional construction mitigations identified were related to monitoring measures to protect the Adobe Building, a historic resource.

The public review period for the Initial Study and Draft MND was from October 22, 2019 to November 21, 2019. The public was notified of the availability of the MND for comment by newspaper notifications (*Mercury News* and *Mountain View Voice*), e-mail notifications to the project subscription list and neighborhood associations, mailers to property owners within 750' of the project, City's social media notifications, and lawn signs posted at the Transit Center and El Camino Real/Castro Street intersection. Three public comments were received. None of the comments required changes to the MND. Responses to these comments are included in Attachment 1.

## **Next Steps**

The approved MND and preliminary engineering (35 percent design) will be provided to Caltrain and VTA to allow the project to proceed into final design. The proposed MOU with Caltrain and VTA establishing roles, responsibilities, and funding for the final design phase is expected to be ready for Council consideration in March 2020.

## **FISCAL IMPACT**

There is no direct fiscal impact with the approval of the MND. The consultant cost for the environmental clearance and preliminary engineering work totals \$1,565,000 and is funded from the Transit Center Master Plan Next Steps/Implementation Items, Project 18-65. Final design and construction costs for the GSAP will be funded through a combination of VTA Measure B Sales Tax funds and local matching funds. The matching funds are included in the planned 5-Year CIP for Fiscal Years 2019-20 through 2023-24.

## **CONCLUSION**

The GSAP will improve safety and access to the Mountain View Transit Center and to the downtown by eliminating the current Castro Street railroad grade crossing and providing alternate vehicle, pedestrian, and bicycle facilities. This is the first of two elements of the Transit Center Master Plan. Based on the Initial Study and MND, the project would not result in significant environmental impacts with implementation of the proposed mitigation measures and will not have a significant effect on the environment.

## **ALTERNATIVES**

1. Do not approve the MND and direct staff to conduct additional environmental review.
2. Provide other direction.

## **PUBLIC NOTICING**

The agenda was posted, notices were placed in the local newspapers (*San Jose Post* and *Mountain View Voice*), e-mail notifications were sent to neighborhood associations, the project subscription list, Caltrain, VTA, and County of Santa Clara, and mailers sent to property owners within a 750' radius.

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Attachment: 1. Initial Study and Mitigated Negative Declaration