



DATE: June 22, 2021

CATEGORY: Consent

DEPT.: Public Works

TITLE: **Charleston Transit Boulevard –
Temporary Bus Lanes**

RECOMMENDATION

Adopt a Resolution of the City Council of the City of Mountain View Temporarily Designating for Exclusive Use Bus-Only Lanes Along Charleston Road, from Landings Drive to Shoreline Boulevard, Pursuant to California Vehicle Code Section 21655.5, to be read in title only, further reading waived (Attachment 1 to the Council report).

BACKGROUND

The North Bayshore Precise Plan (NBPP), adopted in 2014 and amended in 2017, established street typologies (see Figure 1) to guide the planned development in North Bayshore. One designated typology is Transit Boulevard, which includes portions of Shoreline Boulevard and Charleston Road. For Charleston Road, the planned configuration includes one transit lane and one general traffic lane in each direction (see Figure 2).

Google substantially completed Phase 1 of the Charleston Transit Boulevard (from Shoreline Boulevard to Huff Avenue) in conjunction with the Charleston East development. However, the bus lane has not yet been formally marked and signed. Phases 2 and 3 of the project will extend the Transit Boulevard from Huff Avenue to Landings Drive. The project scope includes converting one travel lane in each direction into a bus lane along with adding protected bikeways, improved pedestrian facilities, and certain intersection improvements. Design is nearly complete for Phases 2 and 3, but funding for construction has not yet been secured.



Figure 1: North Bayshore Street Typologies



Figure 2: Charleston Transit Boulevard Typical Cross-Section

Many of the employers in North Bayshore are planning to bring their employees back to the office this summer in phases, with everyone back in the fall. Although it is anticipated that teleworking will continue to be used more extensively than in the past, most employers will have all employees working on-site a few days a week.

The Mountain View Transportation Management Association (TMA) is planning to reinstate the MVgo shuttle by September 2021, which provides fare-free public shuttle service during peak periods from the Mountain View Caltrain station into North Bayshore. In addition, Google, and potentially other employers, will be resuming their commuter bus services as they bring employees back on-site.

On May 27, 2021, the TMA submitted a letter requesting that the City designate temporary bus lanes on Charleston Road in North Bayshore in preparation for employees to return to offices (Attachment 2). Subsequently, on June 8, 2021, Google submitted a letter of support, stating Google's willingness to design and install the temporary bus lanes under a permit from the City (Attachment 3). The TMA and Google are concerned that returning employees will drive their own cars instead of returning to transit, which could lead to higher levels of traffic congestion.

ANALYSIS

Staff has reviewed the request and determined that temporary bus lanes on Charleston Road could be useful in addressing potential increases in traffic congestion as employees return to work sites. These lanes would be designated using interim measures, such as signage and bus stencils in the roadway. The users of the lane would be Santa Clara Valley Transportation Authority (VTA) buses, the TMA's MVgo shuttles, and employer buses.

California Vehicle Code (CVC) Section 21655.5 authorizes local authorities to permit exclusive or preferential use of highway lanes for high-occupancy vehicles (HOVs). Under the CVC, City streets are highways. Prior to establishing such lanes, engineering estimates on the effect of exclusive-use lanes on capacity, congestion, and safety must be prepared. Below is staff's engineering analysis of these factors related to the proposed temporary bus lanes on Charleston Road:

- **Capacity** – Charleston Road currently has four lanes, two lanes in each direction of travel. Converting one lane in each direction to bus lanes will not reduce the overall vehicular capacity of the roadway because the road will continue to have four lanes. Although the number of vehicles eligible to use the bus-only lane will be reduced, the overall person-carrying capacity of the roadway may increase as each bus in the bus lane may be carrying the same number of people as 20 or more single-occupant

vehicles. It is not anticipated that intersection operational changes will be needed that would affect capacity.

- **Congestion** – Charleston Road is a planned Transit Boulevard in the NBPP and the conversion of one lane in each direction into a bus lane is part of the Charleston Road Priority Transportation Improvements. The purpose of this Priority Transportation Improvement is to manage congestion and reduce vehicle trips by providing riders with a travel time savings by using transit.

It is difficult to estimate the potential congestion levels on Charleston Road in the near term as employees return to work sites. Many employees may continue to work from home two or three days a week, reducing the number of vehicles on Charleston Road during peak periods; however, employees may also be reluctant to return to transit and ridesharing, increasing the number of single-occupant vehicles over pre-COVID levels. The recommended temporary bus lanes can help manage a potential increase in congestion by encouraging more employees to use transit.

Staff will arrange for periodic monitoring of the congestion levels on Charleston Road during the pilot period to determine benefits and impacts on congestion.

- **Safety** – No adverse safety impacts are anticipated should the temporary bus lanes be installed. The pavement markings and signage plans will be reviewed and approved by traffic engineering as part of the permitting process. They will be designed to avoid conflicts for bicycle or pedestrian use of Charleston Road and to provide for safe turning movements for vehicles needing to cross into the bus lane to make right turns onto and from Charleston Road.

The City may define the types of HOVs allowed to use the lane, and staff recommends using the definition of a bus under CVC Section 233, which is:

- Any vehicle carrying more than 15 persons, including the driver;
- Any vehicle carrying more than 10 persons, including the driver, which is used to transport persons for compensation or profit or is used by a nonprofit organization or group; and
- A vanpool vehicle is not a bus.

This definition is broad enough to include VTA buses, MVgo shuttles, and employer commute buses.

Under CVC Section 21655.5, the following types of vehicles will also be allowed to use the recommended temporary bus lanes, unless specifically prohibited by signage or other traffic control devices: motorcycles, blood transport vehicles, and paratransit vehicles. Staff does not recommend prohibiting these vehicles from the bus lanes.

In addition, under CVC Section 21655.9, clear-air vehicles with valid stickers/decals issued by the Department of Motor Vehicles must be allowed to use the bus lanes regardless of vehicle occupancy. An exception may be made during periods of peak congestion if the bus lane exceeds certain congestion standards. Staff does not have enough data to justify excluding the clean-air vehicles from using the bus lanes; however, if the lanes are approved and installed, staff will rely on the periodic monitoring of congestion levels to determine if the clean-air vehicles should be excluded due to congestion in the bus lane.

Staff recommends that Council adopt the resolution (Attachment 1) temporarily designating bus lanes on Charleston Road, between Landings Drive and Shoreline Boulevard, for a one-year pilot period should they be installed by Google under a permit issued by the City.¹ As described below, the permit specifies Google's financial responsibility for installing and removing the signage and pavement markings. An additional permit condition will be for Google to provide the City with periodic monitoring reports of the bus lane operations and congestion levels using an independent traffic consultant.

The recommended resolution also delegates authority to the Public Works Director to temporarily suspend or terminate the bus lane designation should any issues arise related to congestion or safety that cannot be remedied. If the temporary bus lanes prove to operate well and be beneficial, staff could return to Council in spring 2022 to recommend extending the designation of temporary bus lanes until such time that the Charleston Transit Boulevard Phases 2 and 3 improvements start construction.

¹ The TMA requested the temporary bus lanes extend from Salado Drive to Shoreline Boulevard; however, the Charleston Transit Boulevard Phases 2 and 3 project does not include bus lanes between Salado Drive and Landings Drive. It would be too challenging to continue the bus lane through the Charleston Road/Rengstorff Avenue/Amphitheatre Parkway/Garcia Avenue intersection. Staff recommends that the temporary bus lane limits match those planned for the Charleston Transit Boulevard.

FISCAL IMPACT

The recommended action to approve the temporary bus lanes will have minimal fiscal impact. Google is proposing to design and install the temporary bus lanes under a permit from the City at no cost to the City. The permit conditions will include a requirement for Google to remove the signage and pavement markings at Google's expense at the end of the pilot program should it be discontinued.

ALTERNATIVES

1. Do not approve the temporary bus lanes.
2. Provide other direction.

PUBLIC NOTICING

In addition to the City's standard agenda posting requirements, notices were distributed to the persons and stakeholders interested in the North Bayshore Circulation Feasibility Study. A copy of the Council report was also provided to the TMA and Google.

Prepared by:

Dawn S. Cameron
Public Works Director

Approved by:

Audrey Seymour Ramberg
Assistant City Manager/
Chief Operating Officer

DSC/EP/1/CAM
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- Attachments:
1. Resolution for Temporary Bus Lanes along Charleston Road
 2. Mountain View TMA Letter, dated May 27, 2021
 3. Google Letter, dated June 8, 2021