

14. Traffic/Commuters

With so much traffic spreading into many neighborhoods, and with a lack of regional transportation plans, what do you propose Palo Alto should do to address employee traffic into town? How do you propose to ease the congestion on our arterial streets — especially during the rush hours — so fewer commuters will try to take unsafe short cuts through our residential neighborhood streets?

Stewart Carl:

Palo Alto can have a small but useful impact on traffic by encouraging walking, bicycle use, shuttle buses, and transportation demand programs but a real solution requires Palo Alto to reduce the number of employees commuting to Palo Alto by sharing jobs with neighboring cities with lower housing costs. Many of the types of employees commuting to Palo Alto could telecommute. Telecommuting should be a major part of any employer's transportation demand management program.

Leonard Ely III:

Jam Wase? I believe that we can make some changes to our current commute patterns and signals.

Adrian Fine:

First, we have to invest in sustainable transportation systems of the 21st century. This means electrifying Caltrain, expanding our shuttle network, partnering with rideshare companies, and leveraging autonomous vehicles. We also have to provide much better information to employees who work here so they can make safer and more efficient transportation choices. This could be through the TMA, or it could be a requirement of new business licensing.

Signals on county expressways and Caltrans highways need to be better coordinated with local arterials. This will prevent backups, particularly during school hours at intersections like Oregon and Middlefield.

In College Terrace, the neighborhood championed a series of traffic calming measures such as bollards, circles, and 4-way stops. This is a great model for other neighborhoods.

John Fredrich:

Enforce all traffic laws.

Arthur Keller:

Clogged arterial streets encourage drivers to divert to and speed in local neighborhoods. This is unsafe and reduces neighborhood livability. One proposal I've made is to tie future growth of the Stanford Research Park to achieving binding targets for reducing traffic congestion on access streets.

A transportation impact fee could be used to promote traffic reduction efforts, with potential credits for those companies that demonstrate that they have taken successful measures on their own.

The Stanford Research Park and Downtown Transportation Management Association should each obtain from each of their employers a census of all employees by residence zip code and working hours. The City can then lobby the VTA to increase Express Bus service from those residence zip codes with a large number of employees within Santa Clara County. Stanford University has done that successfully for matching carpooling (but not getting VTA Express Bus service). Credit on the transportation impact fees for measures taken can be dependent on participating in providing employee census data to the TMA confidentially.

Liz Kniss:

We have three ways we are addressing this.

The first is the Transportation Demand Management Association (TDM). Even getting the TMA-going which provides alternative.

Stanford Park Research Park working group.

City shuttles including the Margarite, Standford's shuttle and safe routes to school to reducing parents driving.

Lydia Kou:

How do you "put the genie back into the bottle"? First, the alternatives to single-occupancy vehicles is limited. Caltrain reports that it is near/at capacity during peak hours. VTA has a pattern of reducing bus service to us and other peripheral areas of the County. Large companies already have Transportation Demand Management (TDM) programs. The City is subsidizing the creation of a TDM association (TMA) for smaller business

However, skepticism of TDM claims is important. Part of our traffic and parking problems are the result of the City approving projects based on assumptions that many of the employees would use transit. But these claims were simply "aspirational" - there was no enforcement mechanism and thus the landlord and occupant put little if any effort into promoting transit.

As to cut-through traffic on residential streets, the first priority is to keep from making the situation worse. For example, the idea of putting bicycle lanes on Alma will push traffic onto the nearby residential streets, including the Bryant Street Bike Boulevard. What is the sense of making Alma safer for the few bike commuters who would prefer to use it at the cost of decreased safety of cyclists and pedestrians on all those other streets?

The City needs to include in its assessments of traffic changes that there are apps such as Waze that not only make it easier for commuters to cut through residential neighborhoods to avoid congestion, and by doing so, the City is actually encouraging traffic cut through neighborhoods

Danielle Martell:

DID NOT RESPOND

Don McDougall:

My goal is provide real alternatives to driving downtown. This must be done through the TMA, new public transit options, increased bike and pedestrian infrastructure and the increased use of services like Lyft and Uber. I support providing positive options to reducing parking congestion. BIKES AND WALKWAYS!

Greer Stone:

There is almost nothing that inhibits our quality of life more than traffic on our clogged streets.

Not only is traffic congestion an inconvenience, it also creates a danger. When our major thoroughfares become gridlocked, more and more commuters will use residential streets as shortcuts around the traffic. These commuters fly through the streets, breeze through stop signs, and create a very dangerous environment for kids biking home, senior citizens walking the neighborhood, and families walking their dogs. High traffic also wrecks havoc on our environment; exhaust from vehicles make up 60 percent of all greenhouse gases emitted in Palo Alto. Reduced traffic equals safer streets, reduced travel time, and a more environmentally sustainable city.

In order to address these concerns, Palo Alto must adopt a holistic approach with all solutions on the table. First, no new developments in Palo Alto should be approved without an aggressive Traffic Demand Management plan in place. Currently, Palo Alto's TDM policies lack actual enforcement, and developers have been allowed to make empty promises without fear of reprisal.

My proposal would condition new development on the developer's ability to create a traffic plan that will reduce the impact of anticipated traffic by 30 percent. The developer would then have to come back to council within a year after the project is completed to prove their plan has worked. Any amount of traffic impact over 30 percent would be assessed a penalty. The fees collected by the city for noncompliance could be invested in citywide traffic decongestion projects.

In addition to these transportation demand management requirements, the city must invest in a wide variety of solutions to get people out of single occupancy vehicles. We must expand our city shuttle, and promote new technologies such as ride-sharing apps like Scoop or Chariot, and encourage employee carpools. This also includes a more walk-able and bike friendly city. We must invest in more bike racks on public property, additional express bike lanes, and an underpass at Loma Verde to connect both sides of Palo Alto.

Greg Tanaka:

Do you have any idea how many employees now take public transportation compared to 5 years ago? Use this as an opportunity to show how much has been done then add what other things you propose like electrification of Caltrain that will carry more commuters, and the city will increase shuttles too.

Palo Alto has created a quality of life that give residents close proximity to professional jobs—its historic. From driveway to driveway, just like Los Angeles. These means that we have compounded historic underdevelopment of public transit opportunities, unlike other areas of the bay area that are designed around transit like Marin County which was built as a true suburb to San Francisco. This means that we need to be aggressive, and reverse the Los Angeles "I love my car" commuting norm.

Palo Alto should be a leader in reducing solo occupancy vehicles with aggressive transit management options and expand our shuttle so that they work for students and commuters, electrify Caltrain which will increase service which carries about 50% more commuters than 5 years ago when ridership was around 40,000 per day, and champion ride-share opportunities.

We also need to ensure that we hire capable staff that can address neighborhood cut-through traffic, restrict neighborhood commuter parking around shuttle stops, and reduce traffic by working with our regional partners of other Peninsula cities.