

16. Caltrain/HSR

What is your view on Caltrain's electrification plans, High Speed Rail and grade separations?

Stewart Carl:

The increase in train traffic and infrastructure construction due to electrified Caltrain will put pressure on the quality of life in residential areas surrounding the tracks. Sound walls could psychologically and physically divide our community, and hamper automotive transportation. We need to find a way to put HSR underground. If we do not, the areas surrounding the tracks will become blighted. The noise vibration, and harshness generated by a vehicle of that size going 70-100+ mph will be difficult for most people to tolerate.

Leonard Ely III:

I support electrification of Caltrain, I far from an expert on High Speed rail but I think it is something that we will be happy to in 30 years, I don't see how you can have grade separation in Palo Alto.

Adrian Fine:

I support electrification because it will be more environmentally sustainable, will enable higher throughput, and because the funding can leveraged for grade separation/trenching. Electrification is vital to expanding Caltrain service and providing opportunities to reduce car commuting.

Grade separations are important for quality of life, safety, and efficiency.

High Speed Rail will be a financial boondoggle here in California, but it's also the will of the state's voters, and many places around the world have efficient and enjoyable high speed networks. If HSR does come through Palo Alto, it should at the very least be grade-separated, and ideally, trenched and covered through the city. This will be good for traffic circulation, the environment, safety, and will also provide land for parks, retail, or housing.

John Fredrich:

I'm against HSR and any new revenues for VTA until this is sorted out.

Arthur Keller:

I support Caltrain electrification. I support extension of Caltrain to the San Francisco Transbay Terminal.

We must have grade separations prior to Caltrain increasing service to 8 trains per rush hour per direction. I have supported a trench, covered where appropriate, since 2008. I called it "cut-and-cover" then. See <http://www.paloaltoonline.com/print/story/2008/09/26/tunnel-or-trench>

I want to explore dedicated funding for Caltrain, like BART has, instead of relying on funding from San Francisco, San Mateo, and Santa Clara Counties.

Those developments that claim reductions in parking because of proximity to Caltrain, can pay a “value capture” fee of the avoided parking cost to be used to pay for Palo Alto’s contribution to grade separation costs.

Palo Alto must ensure we get our fair share of Measure B funds for grade separations, and that it is not transferred to BART as other promised funds have been.

I do not support High Speed Rail. The latest business plan for High Speed Rail is not realistic, including cost and ridership projections. High Speed Rail would entail major impacts on the Peninsula without payment towards mitigations (such as grade separations).

I support studying Dumbarton Rail as a means for reducing traffic congestion across the Dumbarton Bridge. Regional Measure 2 in 2004 funding for Dumbarton Rail of \$91 million was allocated to the BART Warm Springs extension. However, any rebuilt Dumbarton Rail project should be sensitive to the tidal marshland it would cross. Unfortunately, when the Dumbarton Bridge was rebuilt in the 1980’s, no provision was made for mass transit or carpool lanes. “Regular “mixed-flow” lanes are never converted to carpool lanes.” See <http://www.dot.ca.gov/hq/paffairs/faq/faq79.htm>

Liz Kniss:

I believe the electrification of CalTrain is important. A bigger challenge will be to locate the funding for grade separations. The VTA ½ cent tax on the November ballot does include some funding for cities to use for grade separations. For the safety of our children and residents, it is essential to have grade separations.

Lydia Kou:

The biggest potential benefit of Caltrain electrification is allowing a significant increase in passenger capacity – the performance advantages (acceleration, deceleration) over the existing diesel-powered trains allows trains to be scheduled more closely together.

Definition: An at-grade crossing is where a street crosses directly over the tracks (the grade), rather than having an overpass or underpass. Consequently traffic on the cross street must be stopped whenever a train passes. Palo Alto has at-grade crossings at Alma (actually Palo Alto Avenue), Churchill Avenue, Meadow Drive, and Charleston Road

Definition: Grade separation involves converting an at-grade crossing to one where the traffic passes over or under the tracks and thus eliminating interaction with the passage of trains. Palo Alto has grade separation at University Avenue, Embarcadero Road, and Oregon Expressway

At-grade crossings—in Palo Alto and other cities—limit how much the Caltrain schedule can be increased because they create congestion on the crossing streets – not just from when the crossing gates are closed but from the decrease in efficiency of the adjacent intersections resulting from the de-synchronization of the traffic lights

Consequently, I view the issues of electrification and grade-separation as intimately intertwined

The current status of High Speed Rail is a blended system, but considerations seem to be inactive for the time being. However, planning and implementation of grade-separation should take into account the possibility of such a blended system.

The role of HSR for this region seems to have evolved into predominantly serving commuters, that is, making it easier for commuters from the Central Valley and East Bay (depending on route) to reach jobs in SF and the Peninsula. I think that encouraging more suburbanization of the Central Valley is bad policy, both for this region and California. Given HSR’s long history of bad

planning, bad management and misleading presentations, it is important that Council monitor developments and be prepared to respond.

Danielle Martell:

DID NOT RESPOND

Don McDougall:

- a) I support electrification of Caltrain and funding for grade separations and trenching where feasible. I favor electrification as part of the efforts to reduce SOV commuting and as the only practical way to get better service at the Cal Ave station area.
- b) High Speed Rail should be contingent on certain conditions including system engineering, design, technology and impact analysis which need to be fully addressed with sufficient community input.
- c) Grade separation should be considered as a part of an agreed commitment to HSR. Otherwise grade separation alternatives need to be reviewed in light of full cost/benefit analysis with full community participation.

Greer Stone:

Increasing public transportation is a key strategy in mitigating our traffic problems. Caltrain's electrification plans are not perfect, but they are a good step in the right direction. According to Palo Alto's recent TMA poll of downtown workers, 55 percent of employees drive to work in a single occupancy vehicle. Of that 55 percent, roughly half of drivers expressed interest in finding alternative means of travel. Amongst these concerns were reliability of train services.

Electrification will mean more service, more trains, less vehicles on the road, quieter, and environmentally sustainable trains. However, with the increase in service, there will be worst traffic congestion at grade crossings. I am interested in learning more about the viability of grade separations at major grade crossings in Palo Alto. I believe proper studies will be needed to determine the tradeoff on costs to the city and saved time at the crossings. Regarding, High Speed Rail, I believe it am opposed because I think it will bankrupt our State and would have negative impacts to our surrounding neighborhoods and environment if it were to cut through Palo Alto.

Greg Tanaka:

I support electrification of Caltrain, and the blended service on the Caltrain tracks with HSR. I support trenching the train beginning at University Avenue stations so that not just Meadow and Charleston crossing will be secure, but also redesign the failed grade separations at Embarcadero and Oregon Expressway. This will secure the Palo Alto rail experience for the next century, bring safe routes to school for Paly students and eliminate the flooding at the Oregon underpass.