




COUNTY OF SAN MATEO
Inter-Departmental Correspondence
Planning and Building Department



DATE: May 24, 2010
BOARD MEETING DATE: June 8, 2010
SPECIAL NOTICE/HEARING: 10-Day Notice
VOTE REQUIRED: None

TO: Honorable Board of Supervisors

FROM: Jim Eggemeyer, Interim Director of Community Development 

SUBJECT: Background report for the public workshop on the California High-Speed Rail Project, Environmental Review, and Alternatives Analysis Report for the unincorporated North Fair Oaks segment in San Mateo County

RECOMMENDATION

Conduct a public workshop and provide direction to County staff on how to proceed with comments on the EIR.

BACKGROUND

Report Prepared By: Will Gibson, Telephone 650/363-1816

Location: The unincorporated North Fair Oaks area

Sphere-of-Influence: The North Fair Oaks unincorporated area is within the Redwood City Sphere-of-Influence

HISTORY

In 1996, the California High-Speed Rail (HSR) Authority was formed, with the mission of providing a rail solution to address future growth in intercity travel demand within California. To meet current and future demand, existing infrastructure for intercity travel, such as highway and airports, would require significant expansion. High-speed rail has been proposed as an alternative to help meet this demand.

In 2002, the California High-Speed Rail Plan was developed. The Plan proposed an 800-mile intercity, high-speed rail service throughout California. The proposed system would connect the major metropolitan centers of Sacramento and the San Francisco Bay area in the north, through the Central Valley, to Los Angeles and San Diego in the south. The initial core system would be San Francisco to Los Angeles, followed by expansions to Sacramento and San Diego.

During the development of the route and implementation plan, the California High-Speed Rail Authority and Caltrain formed a shared corridor partnership, the Peninsula Rail Program. This program jointly coordinates and facilitates improvements identified in Caltrain's modernization program, Caltrain 2025, while preparing to bring high-speed train service through the Peninsula area of the San Francisco Bay area.

In November 2008, California voters approved Proposition 1A (Safe, Reliable High-Speed Passenger Train Bond Act for the 21st Century). Proposition 1A allocated funds for the California High-Speed Rail Authority to use for construction of the core segment (Phase 1) of the project, with the stipulation that a transit time of 2 hours, 40 minutes not be exceeded between San Francisco and Los Angeles.

ENVIRONMENTAL EVALUATION

In July 2008, the HSR Authority certified the Final Bay Area to Central Valley Program Environmental Impact Report (EIR) as complying with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). The Pacheco Pass alignment (passing over the Pacheco Pass and through Gilroy to San Jose) was identified as the preferred approach into the San Francisco Bay area, the Caltrain corridor from San Jose to San Francisco (see Map 1) was identified as the preferred alignment along the Peninsula, and several preferred station locations were identified for further study in a forthcoming project level EIR. Train routes along the US-101/Bayshore Freeway and Interstate 280 corridors were also considered in the EIR, but rejected.

In August 2008, the Town of Atherton, the City of Menlo Park, the Planning and Conservation League, the Transportation Solutions Defense and Education Fund, the California Rail Foundation, and the Bay Rail Alliance filed a lawsuit in Superior Court challenging the California High-Speed Rail Authority's certification of the Final Program EIR (Town of Atherton, et al., v. California High-Speed Rail Authority). The Court ruled that the HSR Authority's 2008 Final Program EIR failed to comply with CEQA with respect to adequacy of the project description and land use impact along the Peninsula. A subsequent revised Draft Program EIR (DEIR) was released on March 11, 2010 for public review. The required 45-day public comment period for the DEIR ended on April 26, 2010. The proposed HST route described in the revised DEIR follows the existing Caltrain alignment between San Jose and San Francisco.

The High-Speed Rail Authority is now circulating the "Preliminary Alternatives Analysis Report for the San Francisco to San Jose Section," which describes various vertical alignment options for the HST along the Peninsula, and establishes parameters for the next level of design and environmental review as part of the forthcoming project level EIR. This circulation is an ongoing public outreach effort to engage communities on discussions regarding the various alternatives. The feedback received on the alternatives analysis report will aid in the development of the project level Draft EIR, scheduled for release in December 2010.

TECHNOLOGY AND VERTICAL ALIGNMENT ALTERNATIVES

The High-Speed Train (HST) system is an electrically powered, high-speed, steel-wheel-on-steel-rail technology. Trains will be capable of speeds up to 220 miles per hour on a

fully grade-separated, dedicated track alignment. Expected trip time between Los Angeles and San Francisco will be approximately 2 hours and 40 minutes. In urbanized sections between San Francisco and San Jose, trains will not exceed the design speed of 125 miles per hour along a proposed shared use corridor with Caltrain.

There are four proposed vertical alignment options for a dedicated HST track right-of-way. There is an "at-grade" option for areas where level topography allows the track to be at surface level. Below-grade options include an open "trench," which depresses the HST tracks to eliminate them from view at surface level. Subterranean options include a cut and cover trench/tunnel option and a bored deep tunnel option. Above-grade options include either an aerial viaduct, or a berm. All of these options have been proposed at various locations along the Caltrain Peninsula corridor, depending on right-of-way constraints, construction costs, and other factors. The Preliminary Alternatives Analysis Report discusses the vertical alignment options for each location along the proposed HST route in detail.

NORTH FAIR OAKS ALIGNMENT

The proposed High-Speed Train line will enter unincorporated North Fair Oaks, following the current Caltrain alignment, at Charter Street, and exit at Wilburn Avenue at the border of Atherton (see Map 2). This is the only portion of the HST, as currently proposed, that will pass through the unincorporated County. The County has begun an area planning effort in North Fair Oaks, and HST is a significant topic of interest and concern.

In North Fair Oaks (NFO), the primary proposal and apparent preference of the HSR Authority is that the HST will be at grade. While the alternatives analysis for the adjacent communities of Redwood City and Atherton include elevated, at-grade, below-grade, and deep tunnel, for the North Fair Oaks segment only at-grade and deep tunnel alternatives are considered (see Map 3). An at-grade HST line in North Fair Oaks would be constructed mainly within the existing Caltrain right-of-way (ROW), which is between 70 and 79 feet wide from Charter Street to just south of Dumbarton Avenue, and between 80 and 89 feet from south of Dumbarton to the Atherton border (see Maps 4A and 4B).

The at-grade alternative would result in a potential 20 to 24 combined trips by Caltrain and HST through North Fair Oaks per hour, or approximately one train every 3 minutes. The increase in noise and vibration (and to a lesser extent emissions) from these additional trips, and from the HST in particular, could be significant. The maximum speed of high-speed trains in North Fair Oaks would be 125 miles per hour.

The deep tunnel alternative would require significant temporary impacts during the construction, but would minimize long-term noise, vibration, and other impacts of the project. The deep tunnel alternative is intended to be only for HST and the current Caltrain line would remain above ground.

NORTH FAIR OAKS ISSUES AND CONCERNS

The following issues and concerns have been raised by North Fair Oaks residents:

1. Disparate impact on North Fair Oaks, compared to other communities.

While analysis of alternatives for adjacent communities includes four alternatives, only two alternatives are analyzed in North Fair Oaks, the at-grade and deep tunnel alternatives. Community members have expressed a desire that analysis should consider all the alternatives examined for immediately adjacent communities, not only in fairness to the community, but also because of the infeasibility of transitioning from one alternative to another in the short distance between North Fair Oaks and adjacent communities. The community has particularly expressed a preference for consideration of additional underground alternatives.

2. Potential impacts of both final HST configuration, and temporary impacts of construction, on adjacent properties.

The Alternatives Analysis states that the ideal ROW width for joint at-grade use by HST and Caltrain is 96 feet, while the existing ROW in North Fair Oaks is between 70 and 90 feet wide. While the preferred at-grade configuration for the shared Caltrain and HST alignment is four tracks, it is unclear whether the alignment throughout North Fair Oaks would have four tracks, whether all tracks would be within the existing ROW in North Fair Oaks, and whether adjacent properties would be impacted either during construction or after completion. Because project-level details on the alignment are not yet available, the nature and extent of these impacts remains uncertain.

3. Connection with, or crossing of Dumbarton Rail and cumulative impacts of HST and the Dumbarton commuter rail proposed.

The proposed Dumbarton commuter rail project will potentially add rail service from the East Bay to the existing Dumbarton rail spur, connecting with the existing Caltrain line at some point north of North Fair Oaks. It is unclear how any HST alternative might connect with or cross the Dumbarton rail line, and it is unclear how the HST addresses the cumulative impacts of both rail projects on North Fair Oaks.

4. Location of a potential Redwood City station, and access by North Fair Oaks residents.

Although Caltrain passes directly through North Fair Oaks, there are no stations within walking distance of the community. A potential Redwood City HST station, which is one option under consideration, could help redress or exacerbate this issue, depending on the station location. NFO residents would like any project to enhance the area's access to rail service.

5. Mitigation measures and community benefits.

If the current HST proposal in North Fair Oaks is pursued, the community members would like to see a number of measures to mitigate future impacts, and to address current issues with the existing Caltrain rail line that would be perpetuated and exacerbated by the proposed HST. These measures include:

Noise and Vibration. Given the proposed increase in frequency and speed of train trips through NFO, it is unclear whether mitigation measures will sufficiently address additional noise and vibration. The community has expressed a desire for additional vegetation and tree planting along the ROW to absorb noise and vibration.

Connectivity Issues. The current Caltrain alignment bisects the community and limits connectivity across the rail tracks. The current rail line can only be crossed at one location (see Map 5), at Fifth Avenue. The community would benefit from at least one additional multi-modal crossing, potentially in the general vicinity of Pacific/Dumbarton/Berkshire Avenues, accommodating cars, pedestrians, and bicycles, and would also benefit from additional bicycle and pedestrian crossing(s) (walking and biking bridges, for example). Members of the community have expressed a desire that, as part of any future project, the HST should commit to these improvements. The ongoing North Fair Oaks Community Plan update will identify the community's preferred connectivity improvements, and the HSR Authority should work to accommodate the findings and recommendations of the Community Plan update.

The community has also expressed dissatisfaction with noticing and community outreach efforts by the HSR Authority. Many community members feel that outreach efforts have been inadequate, that insufficient information has been provided, that the overall process has been opaque, and that procedures for public comment and input have been unclear.

NEXT STEPS

The HSR Authority will be reviewing comments from San Mateo County along with comments from other interested jurisdictions and agencies this summer. Staff has included a draft comment letter at the end of this staff report. Staff is soliciting direction from the Board on the County's commenting and approach to the HST proposal. There will be additional opportunity to comment on construction-related impacts when the project-level EIR is released later this year.

The public involvement process and providing comments on the EIR for the HST proposal contributes to the Shared Vision 2025 outcome of Livable Communities by ensuring growth occurs near transit and promoting affordable livable connected communities.

FISCAL IMPACT

There is no direct fiscal impact in commenting on the EIR.

DRAFT

June _____, 2010

Mr. Robert Doty
California High-Speed Rail Authority
Attn: San Francisco to San Jose Section Preliminary Alternatives Analysis Report Comments
925 L Street, Suite 1425
Sacramento, CA 95814

Dear Mr. Doty:

SUBJECT: San Mateo County Comments on the California High-Speed Train Project
EIR/EIS Preliminary Alternatives Analysis Report for the San Francisco to
San Jose Section

San Mateo County appreciates the opportunity to comment on the California High-Speed Train (HST) Project Environmental Impact Report (EIR)/Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) Preliminary Alternatives Analysis Report for the San Francisco to San Jose Section.

The proposed project alignment passes through the length of San Mateo County, including a segment in the unincorporated North Fair Oaks neighborhood. The County Planning Department is currently undertaking an area planning process for this neighborhood. One of the key issues identified in our existing conditions analysis for this area is the lack of connectivity for pedestrians, vehicles, and other modes of travel across the existing Caltrain alignment. In fact, there is currently only one crossing at Fifth Avenue in the 1.5-mile segment between Woodside Road in Redwood City and Fair Oaks Lane in Atherton. The existing railroad alignment currently acts as a significant barrier within the North Fair Oaks neighborhood. In addition, the existing Caltrain service passes through the neighborhood, negatively impacting surrounding residential, school, and other uses with frequent train noise, while providing little direct benefit to the people living there. There is no Caltrain station within the neighborhood, and the closest nearby station at Atherton was closed to weekday riders some years ago.

The County would like to ensure that the project has minimal negative impact on the North Fair Oaks neighborhood, while affording the opportunity for improvements to the neighborhood where possible. One of the most significant improvements would be improved connectivity. The County wishes to strongly recommend that the project should not lessen connectivity for vehicles, pedestrians, and other modes of travel in the North Fair Oaks area. In fact, where feasible and practicable, the County would like to see connectivity across the rail right-of-way for vehicles, pedestrians, and other modes of travel in the North Fair Oaks area increased and enhanced. We strongly urge consideration be given to another multi-modal crossing in the North Fair Oaks area in addition to the existing Fifth Avenue crossing. A possible location for this additional crossing would be in the general vicinity of Pacific/Dumbarton/Berkshire Avenues. We expect that our community plan process will more specifically identify a preferred location for this crossing. If the opportunity exists, we would also like to see consideration given to an additional crossing(s) for pedestrians and bicycles.

DRAFT

The County notes that the analysis of alternatives carried forward includes the open trench/covered trench/tunnel option for the neighboring cities of Redwood City and Atherton, but not for the North Fair Oaks area. The County would like to see an analysis of the open trench/covered trench/tunnel option for the North Fair Oaks area. This option could reduce noise and vibration impacts, negative impacts on visual resources in the community, and allow improved connectivity across the railroad when compared to the at-grade option. Were the at-grade option selected due to cost or technical reasons, we would expect that out of fairness to North Fair Oaks residents, that noise, vibration, and visual impact mitigation and improved connectivity be commensurate to that which would be provided with the trench option were it chosen for adjacent cities.

We would also like to have additional opportunity to comment on construction impacts as the project-level EIR is developed. In particular, we would like more information on the potential impacts of the final track configuration and on the temporary impacts of construction on adjacent properties. In addition, it is unclear how any proposed alternative might connect with the proposed Dumbarton commuter rail line. The EIR/EIS does not address the cumulative impacts of both passenger rail projects on the North Fair Oaks neighborhood. The County would also like to see that any project enhance the North Fair Oaks area's access to Caltrain and/or HST rail service. We are particularly interested in knowing more about a potential HST station in nearby Redwood City as the project-level alternative is further developed. County staff has also heard from community members that past outreach efforts have been inadequate, and that procedures for public comment and input have been unclear, and would thus like to see a greater effort for public outreach and comment in the North Fair Oaks neighborhood as the project proceeds.

Thank you again for the opportunity to review and comment on the California High-Speed Train Preliminary Alternatives Analysis Report for the San Francisco to San Jose Section. Please contact me at 650/363-1861 should you have any questions.

Sincerely,

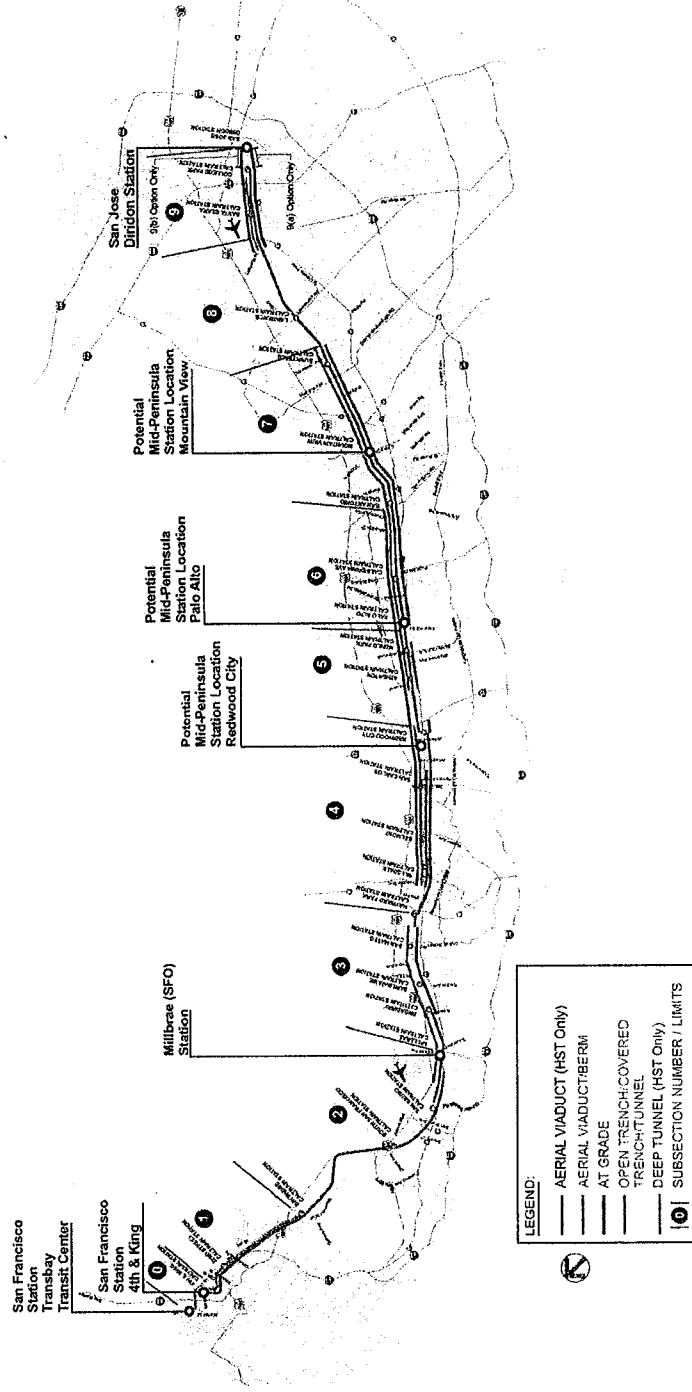
Jim Eggemeyer
Interim Director of Community Development

cc: San Mateo County Board of Supervisors Members
David Boesch, San Mateo County Manager
Jill Ekas, Redwood City Planning, Housing, and Economic Development Director
Neal Martin, Atherton City Planner

MAP 1: Peninsula High Speed Train Alignment

CALIFORNIA HIGH-SPEED TRAIN PROJECT EIR/EIS
SAN FRANCISCO TO SAN JOSE SECTION

Figure S-2
Alternatives Carried Forward



MAP 2: North Fair Oaks Area

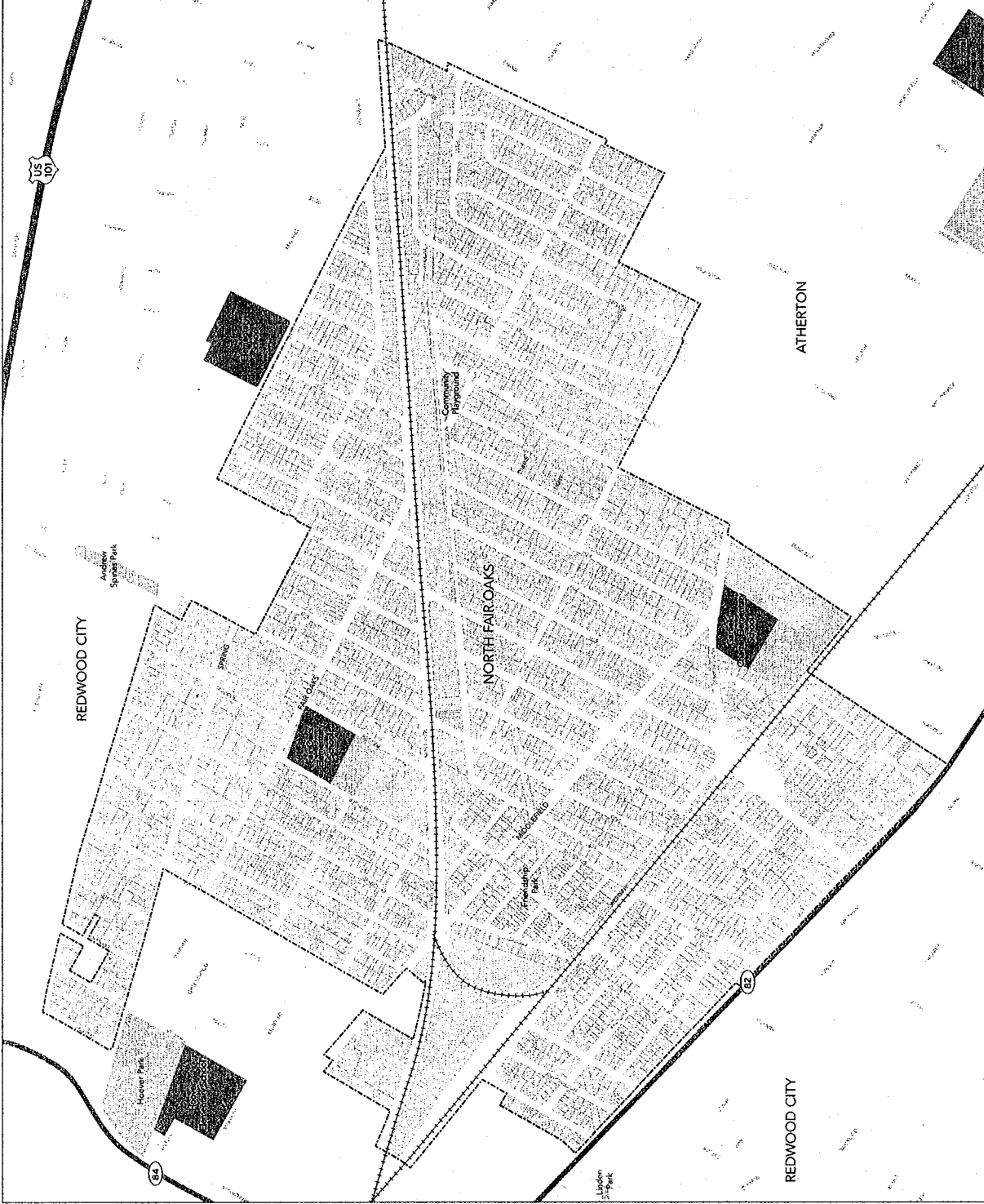


Figure 5
North Fair Oaks

NORTH FAIR OAKS

- Project Area
- Parcel
- Park
- School
- Highway
- Rail Line

Data Source: San Mateo County

Scale: 0 400 800 Feet

North Arrow

Map & GIS

Updated Feb 2013

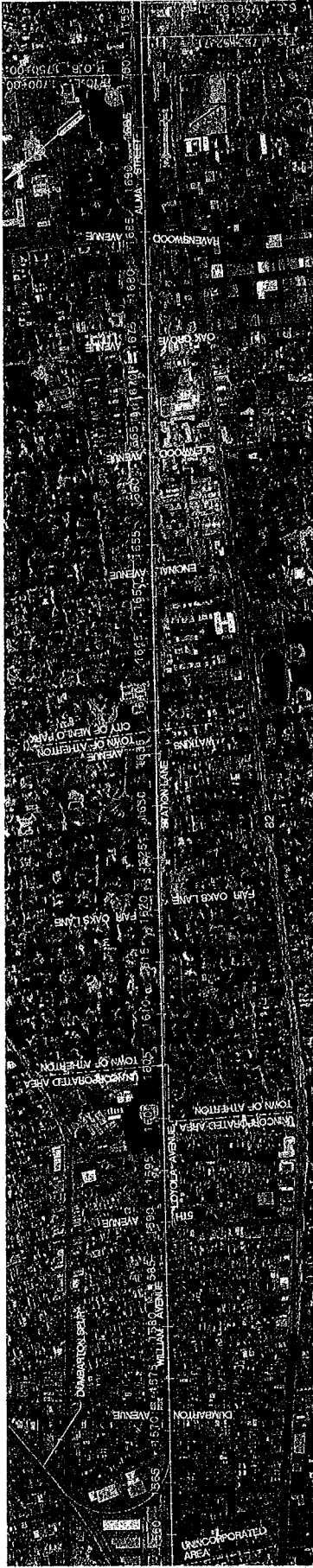
MAP 3: Vertical Alternatives, North Fair Oaks Area Subsection #5-1

Length: 2.8 miles Land Use: Urban

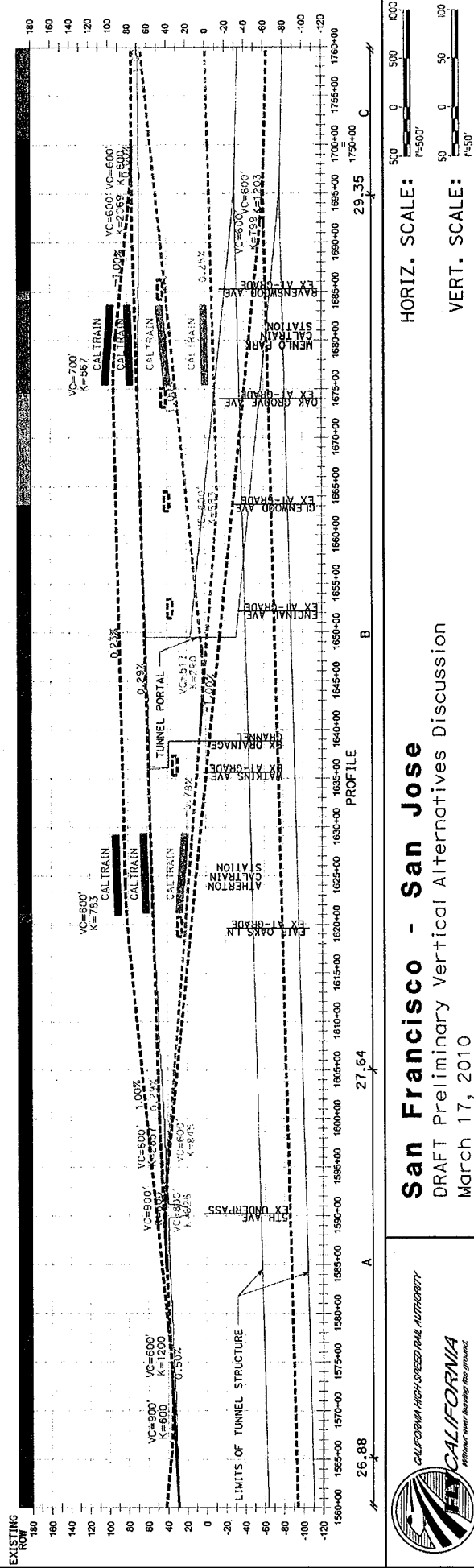
North of 5th Avenue to North of SCL/SM County Line (MP. 26.88 to MP. 29.72)
This subsection is located in the Cities of Atherton and Menlo Park, with a small portion in unincorporated San Mateo County. The Caltrain tracks are at-grade, and with one exception, all street crossings are at-grade. Generally, the streets that cross the tracks are two-lane collectors serving residential areas. In most cases, these streets are integral parts of the local street network.

EXISTING (APPROX)	ROADWAY DESIGN OPTION	STATION	ELEVATED (AERIAL/BERM)
ROW WIDTH 100'	CS	STATION	EXISTING GRADE
ROW WIDTH 90' - 99'	CS	STATION	BELOW GRADE (TRENCH/TUNNEL)
ROW WIDTH 80' - 89'	CS	STATION	BELOW GRADE (DIRT ONLY)
ROW WIDTH 70' - 79'	CS	STATION	
ROW WIDTH 60' - 69'	CS	STATION	
ROW WIDTH < 60'	CS	STATION	

- NOTES:
1. CENTERLINE SHOWN IS PROPOSED MTZ.
2. PROFILES SHOWN ARE TOR.



PLAN



PROFILE



San Francisco - San Jose
DRAFT Preliminary Vertical Alternatives Discussion
March 17, 2010

HORIZ. SCALE: 1"=500'
VERT. SCALE: 1"=50'

MAP 4B: High Speed Train Right-of-Way, North Fair Oaks Area



27
A

MP 27 TO 28

FILENAME: TCCM-200-A

REVISION: 03/01/07

SCALE: 1" = 200'

CORRIDOR MAP

PENINSULA CORRIDOR JOINT POWERS BOARD

JPB

1845 2027 S

SAN FRANCISCO TO LICK AND GILROY LAYER YARD - AERIAL PHOTO MAP OF JOINT FACILITY TRACKAGE

Flight Date: June 18, 2004

SAN FRANCISCO TO LICK AND GILROY LAYER YARD - AERIAL PHOTO MAP OF JOINT FACILITY TRACKAGE

Feb 22, 2007 - 4:46pm P:\GIS\GIS TRACKCHART\TCCM-200-8.dwg

costing

CALTRAIN

RIGHT OF WAY

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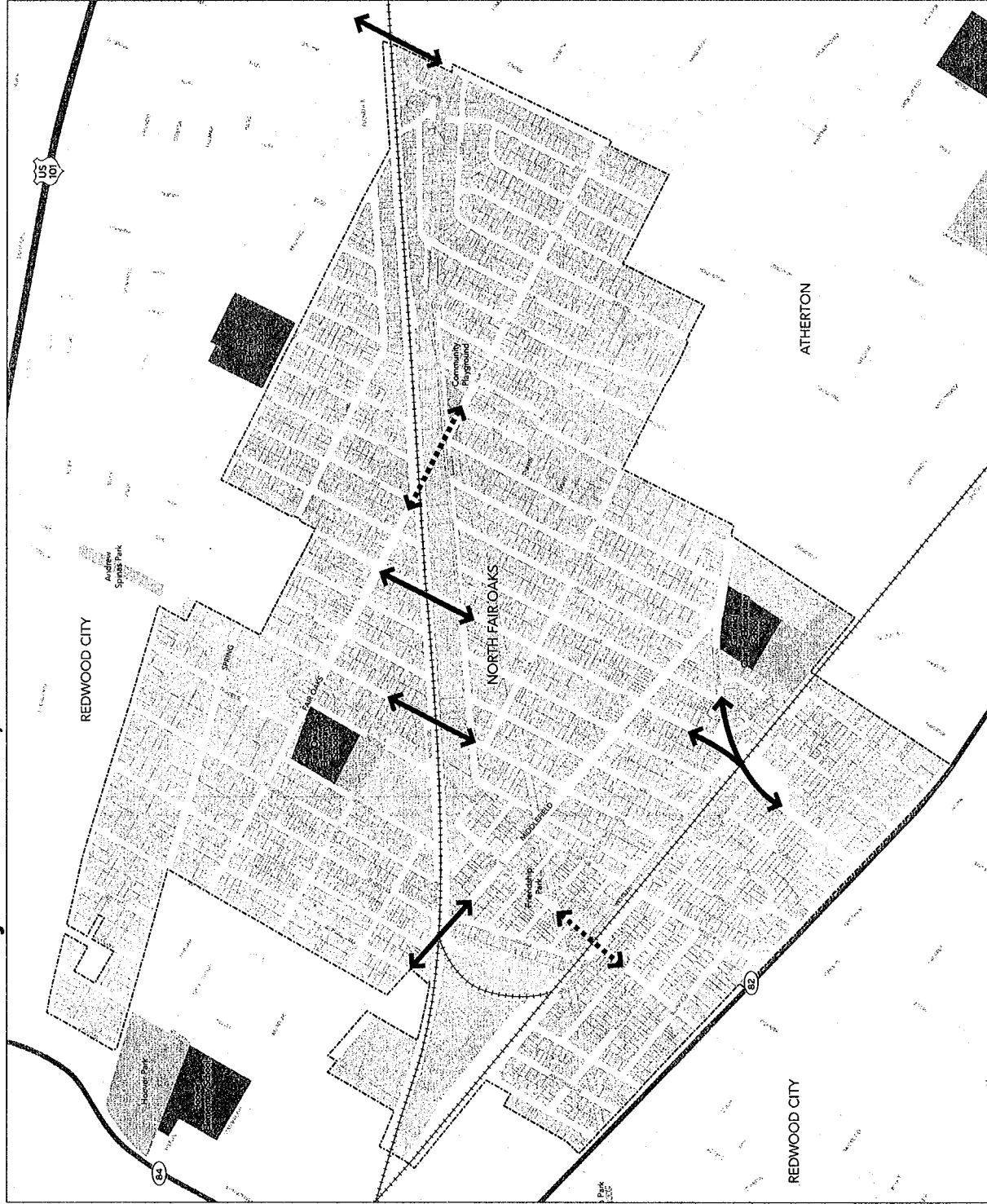
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MAP 5: Connectivity and Barriers, North Fair Oaks

Figure 11
Barriers to Connectivity
NORTH FAIR OAKS



- Project Area
- Parcel
- Park
- School
- Highway
- Rail Line
- Key Community Connections
- Potential Future Connections

Data Source: San Mateo County
 0 400 800 1,600 Feet
 M G
 Updated Feb. 2019