

Ms. Julia Klein
 Principal Planner
 City of San Mateo
 Community Development Department – Planning Division
 330 W. 20th Avenue
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 USA

Re: San Mateo General Plan Update—Comments on the planned analysis of Traffic Mitigation and Transportation

Dear Julia:

The following comments are provided after a review of the materials sent in preparation for the October 16th General Plan Update Subcommittee and the Scope of Work Document provided by PlaceWorks, Inc. This review focused on the issues of traffic congestion. Subsequent letters will address other topics. This letter was written by a small group of Baywood residents. Our intent is to provide constructive commentary based on the opinions of residents in the Baywood and other neighborhoods.

Questions regarding PlaceWorks Inc.'s Scope of Services for the General Plan:

- a. Please confirm that the locations of the “62 San Mateo monitored intersections” whose LOS are to be reported are the intersections and the “major streets” referenced in Figures 3 and 4 in the Appendix of the Circulation Public Review Document.
- b. Will the evaluation of the effectiveness of potential circulation scenarios and improvements include analyses of the expected (1) changes in peak hour LOS at the 62 monitored intersections, (2) changes in travel time along major corridors, as well as (3) VMT per capita, Citywide VMT, and Citywide trips generated?
- c. Is 2040 the proposed “Horizon Year” to be used when preparing the General Plan? For purposes of comparing circulation alternatives and transportation alternatives, will analysis be prepared for LOS, travel times, and VMT occurring during interim year(s)?
- d. When the San Mateo traffic model was updated, what were the key input assumptions used regarding travel behavior, changes in automobiles per household, and resident and employee mode choice? What assumptions were made regarding “the emergence of clean-fuel, connected autonomous vehicles” and the percentage of these vehicles in the City’s traffic stream? Page 23 Section 6 mentions the availability of autonomous vehicles, suggesting they will be available soon or now. Regional planning efforts have suggested these cars will either reduce or increase the number of vehicles on the road, and policy assumptions are being tested against each scenario. Understanding what the General Plan Update expects will help understand the risks to plan.
- e. Will the EIR’s evaluation of Transportation Noise model analyze the changes in railway noise and operations resulting from the CalTrain electrification or simply “discuss” these affects?
- f. Is the Sunsetting of Measure P considered to be a “given” in the preparation of the General Plan? If so, will the determination of a new policy with its commensurate financial feasibility, fiscal sustainability and traffic impact be a part of the new General Plan

General comments regarding Traffic Circulation and Congestion Mitigation

- a. Use changes in travel time to compare alternative congestion mitigation measures. As stated in the General Plan Briefing Book, traffic congestion is already bad. If you mention “traffic” to any resident, you will get an earful about increases in traffic volumes and the resulting delays residents and local employees encounter when travelling from A to B during peak hours. Their perception of congestion is based on travel time, not VMT. While we appreciate the City and General Plan goal of transitioning from LOS to VMT to comply with CEQA guidelines implementing S.B.743, we strongly urge that the comparisons of alternative development scenarios, circulation plans, and related improvements also be based upon changes in peak period travel time along major routes, not solely VMT per capita or citywide VMT. Residents understand and recognize changes in travel time—due in part to intersection delays—much more readily than changes in VMT.
- b. Use peak hour travel time and congestion, not daily volumes, to compare land use alternatives. Roadways, transit systems, and other networks are normally sized to accommodate peak needs not daily requirements. Forecasts of the volume of traffic occurring over the course of an entire day are useful for environmental analyses but less useful for determining roadway congestion or delays. Our work and school schedules dictate that we travel during peak hours rather than between midnight and 6:00 AM when streets have plenty of unused capacity and few delays. Comparing land use alternatives—especially those that generate most of their traffic during peak hours—solely based upon daily traffic can be misleading.
- c. Consider relative changes in traffic volumes on local streets, not just total volumes. As noted in the Briefing Book, traffic and traffic congestion is spilling from major thoroughfares onto local streets as Waze and similar apps inform motorists how to avoid delays. If traffic on a minor street increases from 20 vehicles/hour to 200 vehicles/hour, residents of that street will perceive that traffic has increased dramatically, but a planner will accurately report that 200 vehicles/hour is far below the street’s operational capacity. As delays on San Mateo’s major streets increase, private vehicle motorists and trucks will continue to use parallel minor streets offering fewer delays. The impacts and perceived impacts on minor streets resulting from alternative land uses and mitigation measures will not be considered if the evaluation of alternatives only considers major streets and 62 monitored intersections. It is requested that the evaluation consider how minor streets will be impacted by land use plans. This is important if maintaining the character of neighborhoods is a goal of this Update.
- d. Continued reliance on private vehicles. Driving alone will likely continue to be the way most San Mateo residents travel to work and to stores when shopping for groceries and other bulky goods. It is also likely that an overwhelming majority of local residents will travel to places of work located in other towns, and most local employees will travel into the city. These decisions—where one works and lives—are personal choices as is one’s preferred travel mode. It is important to use realistic, not optimistic or wishful inputs when estimating how San Mateo’s residents and employees will travel in 2040 and interim years. People are adept at circumventing rules and policies if they believe that doing so will be in their best interest.
- e. Measuring success of past TDM programs. Have the City’s TDM programs (e.g., requirements that developers encourage use of non-automobile modes) proven successful given San Mateo’s unique geography and demographics? What has been the reduction in trips—both daily and peak hour--generated by recent residential or office developments in San Mateo compared with similar developments built in the City more than 10 years ago? As new tenants replace the original tenants, and demographics shift, have the program’s success been impacted? If it is too

early to quantify the specific results in San Mateo, what assurance is there that proposed trip reduction programs will be successful and can be considered “givens” when evaluating future land use plans and their traffic impacts? Similarly setting goals for TDM programs that anticipate large changes to current behavior in favor of lower car use runs the risk of deteriorating circulation if the TDM goals are not met. For example, plans based on reaching the stated goal of reducing new vehicle trips by 25% and reducing lanes on streets to create bike lanes and facilitate transit stops and pedestrian traffic will severely impact traffic congestion if the reduction goals are not met.

- f. The overall impression of the “Circulation Public Review-1” document is that the City is supporting a reduction in vehicle use in favor of alternative transportation measures. While admirable, is this realistic in the next five years? Expectations for new technologies to provide solutions that support reduced parking (autonomous vehicles and ride share), and reduced vehicle use of streets (TDM Programs) could backfire if the public does not adopt the new behavior as quickly as assumed. Realistic projections need to be made. This is a challenge but one that is fundamental to the success of the City and the Plan.
- g. Why is the City using a lower LOS standard (low LOS D) than the Caltrans standard of between LOS C and LOS D?
- h. Page 3 of the document states in reference to SB743- “Further, parking impacts will not be considered significant impacts on the environment for select development projects within infill areas with nearby frequent transit service.” This comment is typical of a series of similar remarks that assume that existing and proposed transit systems (Trains, buses, bikes and walking) can handle the needs of commuters and local residents’ travel needs, with trains and buses being the most prevalent mode. Do we know what the capacities of these systems are? Can they support planned development? Should we limit development to the capacity of these systems? Transit schedules will also have a significant impact. Will you analyze vehicle use when public transit schedules are not sufficient for convenient use?
- i. “The Sustainable Streets Plan also provides a potential new functional classification for street typologies (Figure 1). This classification provides a potential framework for updating the Circulation Element map to support General Plan goals while still maintaining FHWA requirements for functional street classifications for projects to be eligible for federal funds.” (See Page 7). San Mateans have long cautioned elected officials to maintain the character of the City. How will these new classifications and General Plan goals change the nature of the streets we live on. Congested residential streets that had been modified to support potentially underutilized bike lanes pedestrian lanes, transit stops will change the character of the City.

While the goal of encouraging fewer single passenger car trips is laudable, the process for achieving these goals needs to be specific and proven to avoid unintended results or, at least, to minimize them. Expending resources to support a careful approach is warranted.

Regards,
Mike Nash

CC: Patrice Olds