

To: City of Palo Alto Rail Program Management, City of Palo Alto City Council

From: Palo Alto residents living in/around the Churchill/Alma intersection

RE: Response to Existing Conditions Report Draft (dated November 2, 2017) and Travel Demand Model Validation Report (dated October 30, 2017)

To whom it may concern,

We the residents of Palo Alto living in/around the Churchill/Alma intersection appreciate the efforts of the city to improve our public transportation systems in the Bay area. We also appreciate the research data you have provided us and have reviewed the Existing Conditions Report Draft, dated November 2, 2017 and Travel Demand Model Validation Report, dated October 30, 2017. After reviewing the documents, we had some comments:

There are multiple references to Sample Scenario 6 having Churchill Ave at-grade and also with grade separation. Which one is correct?

There is a discrepancy between Table 1 on pg. 7 of the Travel Demand Model Validation Report and Sections 4.13 and 6.3. In Table 1, it says that Sample Scenario 6 has Churchill Ave with a grade separation but Sections 4.13 and 6.3 state that Churchill Ave is assumed to not have a grade separation. Figure 6.3 also shows Churchill with grade separation. Does Sample Scenario 6 have Churchill Ave at-grade or grade separated?

Traffic was measured on both north and south sides for Charleston Rd and Meadow Dr, but not for Churchill Ave.

We are wondering why traffic was measured on either side of Charleston Rd and Meadow Dr but not at Churchill Ave. In Figure 5.1 of the Travel Demand Model Validation Report, it shows sensor location 8 north of Meadow/Alma, and sensor location 4 north of Charleston/Alma. However, there was no sensor on the north side of the Churchill/Alma intersection. Why was that data not collected?

We the residents do not support having a grade separation at the Churchill/Alma intersection for a variety of reasons. After reading the reports, the data also supports no grade separation at the Churchill/Alma intersection.

In Section 4.11 of the Travel Demand Model Validation Report, it states:

*In general, the outcomes of the tests are intuitive with those crossings that remain at grade shedding traffic to either the existing grade-separated crossings or any that will be newly constructed as grade separated. **The exception is Churchill Ave which seems relatively insensitive to changes in the layout and functions of the crossings. This may be because***

Churchill is used for very local trips that are unlikely to reroute without significant inconvenience.

This implies that it would not be worthwhile to make changes as it is unlikely to affect traffic patterns at this intersection.

In Table 3, it refers to Churchill Ave and states:

Table 3 - Response of the at-grade intersections to change

Condition Location	Remain at-grade	Closed	Grade-separated
Palo Alto Ave / Alma St	Little effect	Sheds small amount of traffic to Ravenswood Ave and University Ave	Significantly increases traffic flows. (~30%)
Churchill Ave	Little effect	Considerable diversion to Embarcadero Rd, which if widened could operate satisfactorily.	It is suspected that there would be little effect on other grade crossings, if other separations implemented. Could attract small amounts of traffic.
E/W Meadow Drive	As traffic grows, will shed to Oregon Expressway and Charleston Rd (if grade separated)	Some diversion to Charleston Road; significant if Charleston is grade-separated	Significantly increases traffic flows (~50%)
Charleston Rd	As traffic grows, will shed to San Antonio Road	Not tested but likely to either shed significant traffic to San Antonio Road or reduce traffic overall	Significant increases to traffic flows (50+%). Some diverts from San Antonio Rd.

Table 3 also suggests that if Churchill Ave were grade separated (at considerable expense), that it really would not affect traffic in a meaningful way. Therefore, we question the value of spending effort, time, and money to grade separate Churchill Ave.

Table 3 also suggests that upgrading the grade separation at Embarcadero Road could alleviate traffic concerns if Churchill/Alma intersection were closed to through traffic on Churchill. **We also believe that closing Churchill is a good solution, with needed upgrades at Embarcadero Road to enable better road and pedestrian/bike traffic through the underpass.**

We think that some sort of pedestrian/bike under or overpass should be considered at Churchill to enable children to reach Palo Alto High School as well as children who bike to Walter Hays

Elementary School, since every school day there is considerable bike traffic across Alma on Churchill in the mornings to school and mid-afternoon when high school is over.

This is another missing piece of consideration in the Existing Conditions Report Draft. In Section 2.1.5 Safe Routes to School, the report only considers four maps that cross at-grade intersections. These maps are for the schools: Briones Elementary School, Gunn High School, Hoover Elementary School, and Terman Middle School. The report is missing two more maps that cross at-grade intersections: both Palo Alto High School and Walter Hays Elementary School's maps show crossings at Churchill.

We feel that the safety of our children and students going to and from school is paramount and that we need to consider **ALL** Safe Routes to School in our decisions regarding this project.

Note that it is possible that bike traffic to/from Palo Alto High School could be diverted to the Embarcadero Rd underpass which is only 400 yards away from Churchill Ave, or the California Ave underpass, although that underpass could use some improvements due to its narrow pathway and lack of lighting.

Conclusion:

We the residents believe that closing Churchill on the west side with improvements for pedestrians and cyclists is the best and least expensive option for the Churchill/Alma intersection. After reviewing both reports, our position regarding the solution at Churchill is supported by its data and conclusions. Grade separation at Churchill/Alma would be very cost prohibitive but yet produce little change in traffic patterns. The data supports closure where traffic would be diverted to nearby Embarcadero Road, and that Embarcadero Road should be upgraded from its current design which is inefficient in its 3 lanes and multiple traffic lights between Alma and El Camino Real. Pedestrian and bike safety should always be considered and safe passages should be made to cross Alma and the Caltrain tracks.