ITEM NUMBER: C-1
DATE: 8/11/20

Atascadero City Council

Staff Report – Public Works Department

El Camino Real Downtown Infrastructure Enhancement Plan

RECOMMENDATIONS:

Council:

1. Review and approve the conceptual plans for the El Camino Real Downtown Infrastructure Enhancement Plan for future roadway improvements.

2. Authorize staff to pursue grant funding opportunities for these improvements, specifically Cycle 5 of the Active Transportation Program (ATP) and the Infill Infrastructure Grant through HCD.

REPORT IN BRIEF:

The El Camino Real Downtown Infrastructure Enhancement Plan has been developed and refined since the project formally was initiated in August 2017. Over the following three years, multiple options have been considered, with preferred design alternatives refined through a process of public input, City department review, Council direction, and technical analysis of traffic modeling and safety considerations. The selected alternative described in this report combines components from earlier alternatives to best balance pedestrian and bicycle safety, downtown economic benefits, vehicular traffic needs, emergency response, increased parking, and aesthetic improvements intended to create a cohesive downtown center.

DISCUSSION:

Background

The El Camino Real Downtown Infrastructure Enhancement Plan (Project) is a planning level document that outlines recommendations for future road improvements incorporating enhanced pedestrian and bicycle access along with increased parking opportunities and safer crosswalks. The primary goal is public safety for all roadway users: pedestrians, bicyclists, and motorists. A second goal is to enhance economic development in the downtown by creating a zone that slows traffic speeds, enhances appearance and safety, and increases parking. The Plan extents include the El Camino Corridor from the intersection of Highway 41 to the intersection of Rosario Avenue.

Over the last several decades, the City has implemented improvements in the downtown, which were identified as part of the Downtown Revitalization Plan, Downtown Design Guidelines, and the City's Wayfinding Program. Improvements were generally limited to sidewalk widening at corners (bulb-outs), sidewalk enhancements, signage, raised planted medians and crosswalks. Other key facility improvements have also been implemented such as the Sunken Gardens improvements and the Centennial Bridge and Plaza project.

This project takes a closer look at how to best utilize the existing roadway width. El Camino Real in the downtown still maintains its roughly 80-foot width (curb-to-curb) and design features that reflect its past use as a highway. A large component of the plan is the analysis of existing and future traffic operations through the downtown corridor under a "road diet" scenario. By dropping a vehicular lane in both the northbound and southbound directions in the downtown area, it is possible to increase pedestrian safety, add additional parking and enhance public spaces. Given the ongoing development and redevelopment within the downtown area, most notably the La Plaza Project currently being constructed, this project is a timely opportunity to assess how the El Camino Real corridor can best serve the needs of residents, businesses, and the multiple transportation needs.

As noted above, several factors have converged over recent years that warrant a new analysis of downtown area transportation patterns. First, despite recent impacts due to COVID-19, downtown Atascadero is experiencing an economic upswing due to City investments and strong interest from private developers and business owners. New restaurants, cafes, and breweries, in conjunction with a growing number of special events, are bringing more visitors to the Downtown area.

Secondly, the Atascadero High School (AHS) and the Atascadero Junior High School (AJHS) are located within ¼ mile of the El Camino Real Downtown Corridor. School-related traffic is a significant consideration throughout the corridor, particularly during peak hours occurring from drop-off and pick-up times. With additional vehicular, pedestrian, and bicycle traffic in the Downtown area, concerns regarding the safety and function of El Camino Real have arisen from residents and business owners, particularly at intersections and existing mid-block crossings.

Third, merchants, residents, developers, and City leaders have expressed the need for more parking and pedestrian access within the downtown district due to an increase in economic activity and special events. Limited parking is available on El Camino Real and includes non-metered, parallel on-street parking. A mix of diagonal and parallel parking exists on other Downtown streets adjacent to El Camino Real. Increasing parking opportunities on El Camino Real will be advantageous in furthering the economic goals of the Downtown. Currently, the width and speed of traffic on El Camino Real discourages visitors from using the corridor for parking or walking across El Camino Real to go to a business on the other side of the street.

General Plan Goals and Policies

The 2002 General Plan recognized the need to strengthen the downtown area. Goals, policies and programs were adopted specifically for the downtown area. In particular:

- Goal 4 of the City's General Plan Land Use Element asks to:
  "*Provide for a strong and distinctive Downtown Area"*

- Policy 4.2 of the General Plan implements Goal 4 by asking to:
  "Enhance the appearance of the downtown area and improve pedestrian circulation".

- Program 4.2 (3) asks to:
  "*Develop a comprehensive streetscape and pedestrian access plan for the Downtown area"*

Given these policies and programs and understanding the potential for our downtown to be more successful, the Council discussed Downtown enhancements as a major goal during their strategic planning in February 2017, 2018 and 2019. Safety, parking, development/redevelopment, and traffic were identified as issues and opportunities in the Downtown district. The Council identified safety as the first priority and commerce as the second priority. The proposed project is catered toward addressing safety, commerce, aesthetics and placemaking. This Enhancement Plan responds to the current City Council goal to *"Leverage place-making in the commercial areas for long-term economic development."*

Summary

The overall objective of the Project has been consistent since inception in 2017 - to develop a holistic corridor plan within the Downtown El Camino Real Corridor that considers the needs and goals of all multimodal users, residents, businesses, and City leaders. The final corridor plan as proposed is intended to serve as a blueprint or master plan for future improvements within the El Camino Real right-of-way, which should further the economic goals of the City while enhancing the Downtown Corridor's safety and aesthetic appearance for all users.

During project commencement, the City identified the following project objectives:

- Provide public safety for all roadway users by incorporating complete streets and "road diet" concepts and principals
- Enhance economic development by supporting existing and future merchants with additional parking
- Support downtown business synergy through a partnership in crafting a Downtown traffic calming plan
- Enhance the streetscape of El Camino Real by creating a sense of place and arrival into the Downtown
- Create safe pedestrian connections and crossings while enhancing the walkability of Downtown
- Slow vehicular speeds to increase safety and visibility, including an analysis of impacts to level of service (LOS).
- Enhance the ability to host more special events in the Downtown area
- Accommodate multi-modal transportation, where feasible

KTUA of San Diego was hired in November 2017 to assist the City in the analysis and development of a corridor plan. Central Coast Transportation Consulting (CCTC) of Morro Bay worked as a sub consultant to KTUA to provide traffic engineering and operations analysis. City staff has been working closely with KTUA and CCTC over the previous three years to develop alternatives that met the objectives listed above, solicit input from the public and Council, and refine the multiple options into the preferred alternative presented below.

Public Outreach:

Since this project was last presented to Council in August of 2018, the City has gone through an extensive public outreach process to both educate and receive resident comments. It was anticipated that public outreach would be completed in March of 2020, but final public events were necessarily postponed as a result of COVID-19. Below is a list of public outreach events:

Outreach Effort Description	Date	Day	Time	Location
Open House Event	8/14/2020	Tue	4:00-6:00pm	City Hall - Room 104
City Council Presentation	8/14/2018	Tue	6:00-9:00pm	City Hall Council Chambers
Open House Event	4/11/2019	Thu	4:00-7:00pm	City Hall Council Chambers
	4/13/2019	Sat	9:00am-12:00pm	City Hall Council Chambers
	4/16/2019	Tue	10:00am-1:00pm	City Hall Council Chambers
	4/17/2019	Wed	3:00-6:00pm	Farmer's Market, Sunken Gardens

Study Sessions	3/11/2020	Wed	10:00-11:00am	City Hall Council Chambers
	3/12/2020	Thu	4:00-5:00pm	City Hall Council Chambers
	3/17/2020	Tue	6:00-7:30	City Hall Council Chambers
In-person Meetings, by Appointment	6/10/2020	Wed	10:00am	City Hall Council Chambers
	6/10/2020	Wed	6:00pm	City Hall Council Chambers
Virtual Zoom Meeting	6/23/2020	Tue	12:00pm	Online

Attendance at the public meetings ranged from five to approximately thirty attendees. Typically, meetings were a mix of residents and downtown business owners, and were formatted to include a brief project presentation following by an opportunity for attendees to discuss comments or concerns either individually or in a small group setting with City staff.

During the meetings in 2018 and 2019, comments typically fell into one of the following four categories:

1. Concern regarding increased vehicle travel times through the downtown corridor, specifically during school drop off and pickup times.

2. Concern regarding pedestrian safety within crosswalks at El Camino Real

3. Potential increase in emergency services response times.

4. Bottleneck for residents attempting to exit during a large-scale emergency event.

5. Support from the downtown business community.

Following the meetings in early 2019, the concept plan was modified to address concerns 1-4. The latest concept plans, completed in 2020 included several adjustments that responded to the concerns voiced by the Community.

- To respond to travel times through downtown, the City worked with traffic consultants to lengthen proposed turn lanes at Traffic Way, add a Hybrid Beacon signal for the pedestrian crosswalk at East Mall, and modify turn lanes at Entrada. Additionally, a new lane would be added to Traffic Way to handle vehicles heading eastbound on Traffic Way after existing the freeway. These adjustments significantly reduced traffic congestion in the proposed concept.
- To aid in ensuring adequate emergency response times, the concept was amended to widen the travel lanes north of Traffic Way, while adding a bicycle lane that can second as space to allow vehicles to pull over, allowing emergency vehicles to safely pass. This concept was tested by City staff using an actual field test with a fire truck and utilizing the dimensions from the proposed concept. The City's Emergency Services teams are confident that the concept plan allows for adequate emergency response.
- One of the items that did not result in changes to the plan is the concern regarding a large scale emergency. This small section of El Camino Real does not function as a major evacuation route to exit the City. Most City evacuation routes will funnel neighborhoods onto the nearby Highway 101 and Highway 41. The

Staff believes the concerns in items 1-3 have been addressed under the preferred alternative and are discussed in further detail within the Proposed Roadway Improvements Plan section below. Although the City has received concerns about changing the traffic patterns in the downtown, the plan has been met by praise from the majority of the business community, including the Chamber of Commerce.

Analysis

Existing Conditions:

Currently, the El Camino Real corridor between Highway 41 and Rosario Avenue varies in pavement width and lane configuration. Lane configuration generally consists of two through lanes in each direction and a center lane, parallel parking along both curb lines, and intermittent bike lanes from Highway 41 to Traffic Way. Roadway width (curb to curb) is 80' from Traffic Way through the Atascadero Creek Bridge, and 76' from the Atascadero Creek Bridge to Traffic Way. North of Traffic Way the roadway width narrows further to 72', and there is only a single southbound lane.

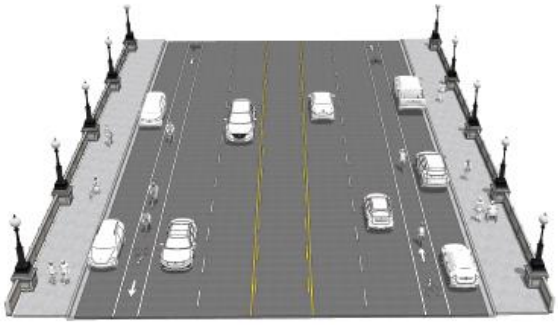
Existing Cross-Section (Highway 41 to Rosario Avenue)

From	To	Pavement Width	Existing Cross-Section						
			Southbound			Center	Northbound		
			Parking	Bike	Lanes	TWLTL	Lanes	Bike	Parking
Highway 41	Colony Square Entrance	80'	10'	-	12'/12'	12'	11'/11'	4'	8'
Colony Square Entrance	Atascadero Creek Bridge	80'	8'	4'	11'/11'	12'	11'/11'	4'	8'
Atascadero Creek Bridge	Entrada Ave	76'	8'	4'	11'/11'	12'	11'/11'	-	8'
Entrada Ave	Traffic Way	76'	8'	-	10'/10'	20'	10'/10'	-	8'
Traffic Way	Rosario Ave	72'	8'	5'	12'	11'	11'/11'	5'	8'

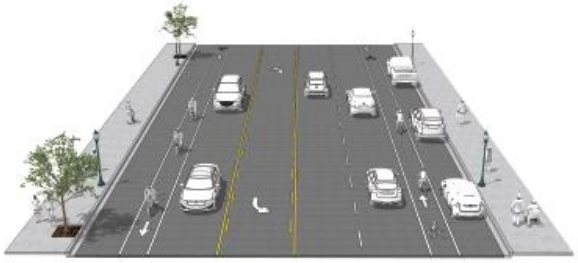
Due to increased traffic speeds, limited options for pedestrian crossings, 5 lanes of traffic and a very wide road width, El Camino Real in the downtown is not as safe as it could be. In summary, total collision, and injury & fatality rates through this section of El Camino Real all significantly exceed statewide averages for similar roadways. While the posted speed limit is 25 mph throughout the project area as allowed in designated Downtown Districts, the majority of vehicles exceed this limit. Speed surveys conducted in 2019 as part of the citywide Speed Survey Update measured the median speed through this corridor at 33 mph and the 85th percentile speed at 35 mph, with individual vehicle speeds measured at up to 44 miles per hour. In the last twelve months at least two pedestrians have been hit by vehicles on El Camino Real in the downtown.

Issues with speed and pedestrian crossings should not be surprising since El Camino Real is designed and functioned as a highway prior to current US 101. Highways inherently function to move vehicles efficiently and are not pedestrian friendly. El Camino

Real feels like a highway to many motorists due to the wide width and “sea of asphalt” from curb to curb. Expecting El Camino Real to function as a Downtown “Main Street” with slower speeds and more pedestrians is not reasonably feasible in its current configuration. Physical structural modifications are needed to transform the highway design to a “Main Street” design.



ECR between Colony Square and East Mall
Existing Conditions



Traffic Way to Rosario Avenue
Existing Conditions

Proposed Roadway Improvements Plan:
Each section of ECR has different needs and constraints, therefore, the plan changes with each block. The following discussion outlines each of the proposed sections of concept plan. Concept plans are also attached to this report for reference. The primary circulation benefits include a significant number of additional vehicle parking spaces, decreased vehicle speeds, and improved facilities for bicyclists and pedestrians. Throughout the plan, up to 130 additional parking spaces can added, all of which would be within existing City right of way, either within the median or adjacent to the sidewalk. This plan essentially divides the corridor into two one-way roads to further promote decreased vehicle speeds and improved pedestrian crossings. Pedestrian crossings are inherently safer when crossing a single lane. Reducing the number of travel lanes for pedestrians to cross from five to two, coupled with a protected “refuge” created by ramblas, will make crossing El Camino Real a much different experience. In addition, vehicle speeds will be significantly reduced due to “side friction” created by a single lane in each direction and parked cars, trees, etc. on both sides of the travel lane.

Highway 41 to Atascadero Creek Bridge:

For this segment lane configuration would be retained north of Highway 41, with one northbound lane being dropped just north of the Colony Square entrance. North of the Colony Square entrance, lane configuration would consist of single northbound and southbound lanes, center "ramblas" with diagonal parking, and parallel parking along both roadway edges. The following table summarizes the cross section.

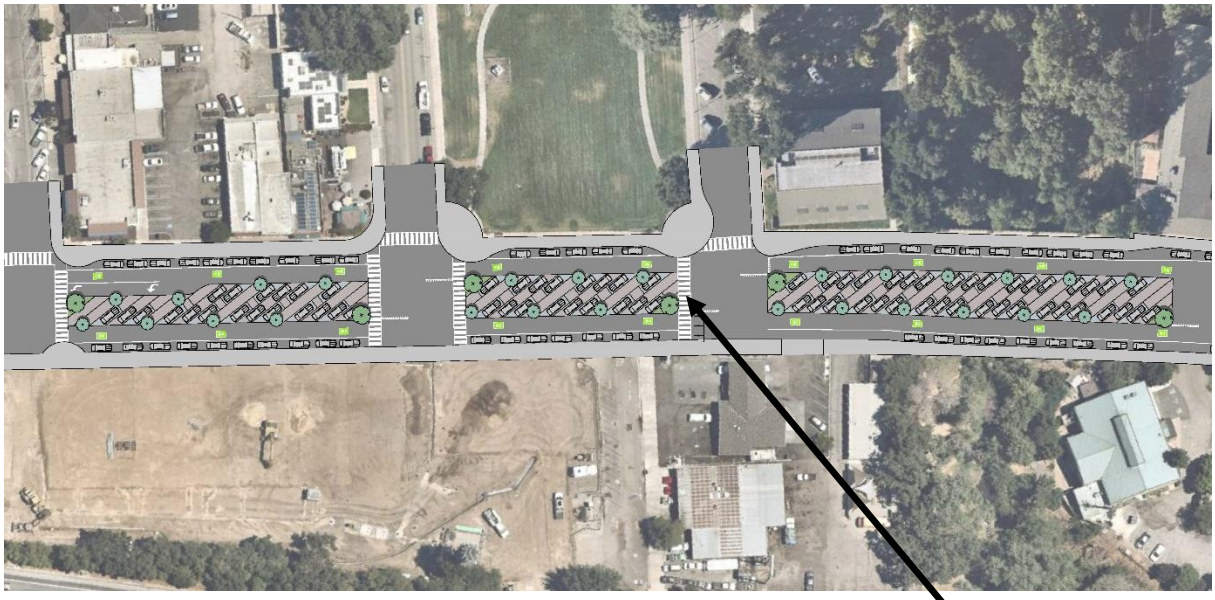
From	To	Pavement Width	Proposed Cross-Section						
			Southbound			Center	Northbound		
			Parking	Bike	Lanes	TWLTL	Lanes	Bike	Parking
Highway 41	Colony Square Entrance	80'	8'	-	12'/12'	16'	12'/12'	-	8'
Colony Square Entrance	Atascadero Creek Bridge	80'	8'	-	12'	28'	12'/12'	-	8'

Highway 41 to Atascadero Creek Bridge

Atascadero Creek Bridge to Entrada Avenue:

The cross-section through this segment retains parallel parking along both curbs, includes a single in both southbound and northbound directions and a center ramblas with double-stacked diagonal parking. Due to slow vehicle speeds, vehicles could share the lane with bicycles in this section. This concept allows for a 34' wide at-grade median area, which could be utilized for parking, landscaping, special events, etc. The following table summarizes the cross section.

From	To	Pavement Width	Proposed Cross-Section						
			Southbound			Center	Northbound		
			Parking	Bike	Lanes	Rambla	Lanes	Bike	Parking
Atascadero Creek Bridge	Entrada Ave	76'	8'	-	13'	34'	13'	-	8'

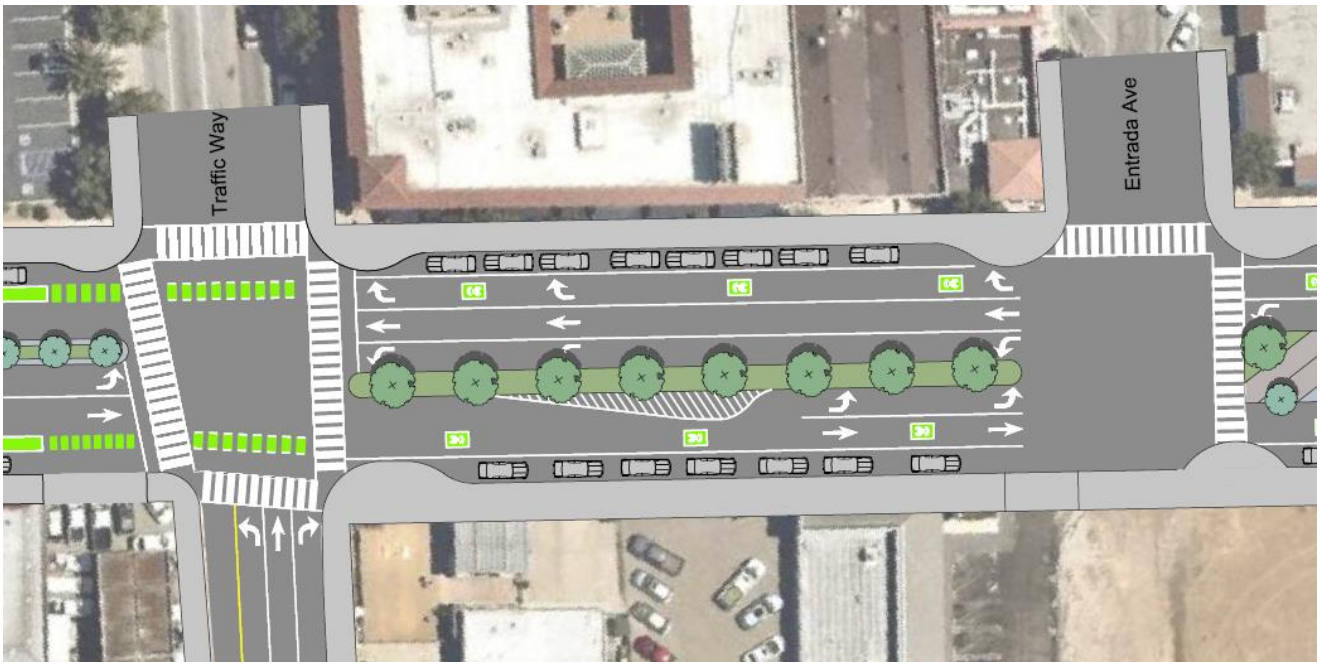


Atascadero Creek Bridge to Entrada Avenue

Entrada Avenue to Traffic Way:

North of Entrada Avenue, a dedicated right turn lane and a dedicated left turn lane are proposed to greatly reduce traffic congestion at this busy intersection. Having three lanes at this location allows adequate stacking of vehicles for each of the movements at the Traffic Way traffic signal. Parallel parking would remain on both sides of the street. The addition of the lanes does not allow the center rambla space that is included in the other segments. Instead, this section would have a raised landscaped median with trees, much like it is today. The following table summarizes the cross sections.

From	To	Pavement Width	Proposed Cross-Section						
			Southbound			Center	Northbound		
			Parking	Bike	Lanes	Median	Lanes	Bike	Parking
Entrada Ave	Traffic Way	76’	8’	-	11'/11’	5'	11'/11’/11’	-	8'



Entrada Avenue to Traffic Way

Traffic Way to Rosario Avenue:

This segment of roadway has seen the most significant changes since the preliminary alternatives were introduced in 2018. This is largely a result of resident concerns related to emergency services response times. Both Fire and Police departments noted that this segment is the only portion of the study corridor where their vehicles would potentially need to have extra width to pass vehicles pulled to the side of the road. Subsequently, staff revised the roadway cross-section between Traffic Way and Rosario to increase the lane width to 13' and include a 5' bicycle lane in both southbound and northbound directions. This total travel width of 18' allows for vehicles to pull over and allow emergency response vehicles to pass unobstructed. Field tests were conducted to confirm this width was sufficient. With these changes to this segment, both the fire and police departments to not anticipate any adverse impacts to response times resulting from this project.

The following table summarizes the cross sections.

From	To	Pavement Width	Proposed Cross-Section						
			Southbound			Center	Northbound		
			Parking	Bike	Lanes	Ramblas	Lanes	Bike	Parking
Traffic Way	Rosario Ave	72'	8'	5'	13'	20'	13'	5'	8'

Traffic Way to Rosario Avenue

Existing and Future Traffic Volume Analysis:

The City's traffic consultant, CCTC, analyzed existing and future developed (cumulative) traffic volumes and determined that having only one lane in each direction may be accommodated on El Camino Real within the downtown zone without creating significant traffic impacts. However, this determination came with several recommendations to lessen vehicle traffic impacts that have been incorporated in the selected alternative.

Traffic impacts are typically measured in terms of Levels of Service (LOS) having letter scores from A to F. LOS is related to the amount of time (delay) it takes for a vehicle to pass through a given segment of the road or intersection. If LOS is increased for vehicles, vehicle speeds commonly increase and may reduce safety for pedestrians, bicyclists, and other forms of transportation. LOS summary tables lists the worst traffic delays in busiest morning hour ("AM") and afternoon hour ("PM") – which generally correspond to school drop-off and pick-up hours. The following conditions are analyzed as part of the traffic model:

1. "Project" corresponds to the preferred one-lane alternative. This project incorporates the following traffic engineering recommendations (Mitigations) to minimize traffic impacts and improve the efficiency of vehicle, bicycle and pedestrian traffic:

    a. Install a pedestrian hybrid beacon at the existing mid-block crossing at the East Mall intersection, coordinated with the West Mall traffic signal. This will provide a more orderly crossing point for large groups of students, provide greater queue storage, and decrease the chances of vehicles blocking the intersections. This hybrid beacon is essentially a traffic signal at a roadway intersection with a pedestrian crossing. A pedestrian wishing to cross the roadway pushes a pedestrian button that informs the traffic signal controller. Once the controller determines the optimal time to stop vehicles, vehicles are stopped with a red light and pedestrians are allowed to safely cross.

    b. The traffic model analyzed the northbound approach to the El Camino Real/Traffic Way intersection to be a left lane and shared through/right lane extending back to the Entrada Avenue intersection. However the concept plan has gone a step further and separated the through and right turn lanes. Separating the through/right lanes will increase vehicle storage and allow the intersection to work more efficiently, thereby decreasing delay times and improving LOS.

    c. Widen the eastbound approach on Traffic Way to the El Camino Real/Traffic Way intersection to include a left turn lane, a through lane, and a right turn pocket to lessen queue spillback to US 101 ramps.

    d. At the intersections of El Camino Real with Entrada Avenue and West Mall, the proposed alternative replaces dedicated left turn lanes with mid-intersection yield lines, potentially reducing queueing.

    e. Coordination of traffic signals at the Traffic Way, West Mall and East Mall pedestrian crossing to optimize traffic flow.

2. “Existing Conditions” corresponds to existing traffic measured volumes.

3. “Cumulative” corresponds to future fully-developed conditions based upon current zoning of land uses.

The following table summarizes the expected delays at each intersection during the AM Peak Hour and the PM peak hour (Commute PM) for the above conditions.

Intersection Auto Levels of Service			
Intersection	Peak Period	Delay[1]	LOS
Existing Conditions			
1. Traffic Way/El Camino Real	AM	25.1	C
	Commute PM	30.8	C
2. Entrada Avenue/El Camino Real	AM	0.8(16.1)	- (C)
	Commute PM	0.6 (11.6)	- (B)
3. West Mall/El Camino Real	AM	11.0	B
	Commute PM	8.2	A
4. East Mall/El Camino Real	AM	4.5	A
	Commute PM	5.3	A
Cumulative Conditions			
1. Traffic Way/El Camino Real	AM	25.3	C
	Commute PM	31.2	C
2. Entrada Avenue/El Camino Real	AM	1.1(15.1)	- (C)
	Commute PM	0.8 (14.8)	- (B)
3. West Mall/El Camino Real	AM	13.1	B
	Commute PM	10.3	B
4. East Mall/El Camino Real	AM	4.7	A
	Commute PM	5.3	A
1. HCM 6th average control delay in seconds per vehicle (HCM 2000 used for Intersection 4). For side-street-stop controlled intersections the worst approach's delay is reported in parentheses next to the overall intersection delay.			

The study intersections all currently operate acceptably at LOS C or better and will continue to do so with the preferred alternative implemented.

CCTC also analyzed queue lengths during AM and PM peak hours, as well as during the PM school commute. Typical analysis includes measurement of queue lengths for the 50th percentile (average condition) and 95th pecentile (queue length that is not exceed 95% of the time) conditions. Under both the AM and PM peak hours, the 50th percentile left turn queues can be accommodated in the ramblas storage and through movement queues do not exceed the block length. The 95th percentile queues also do not exceed storage lengths, with the exception of vehicles that need to turn left onto East Mall and West Mall during school days in the AM peak hour. For a brief time period there will still be traffic congestion during school drop off time simliar to the conditions that are experienced with the current configuration. However, it should be noted that the concept inlcudes items that will improve the situation, such as a hybrid beacon signal for the crosswalk, and turn lanes that allow better traffic flow over the convential turn lane.

During the afternoon, when school is in session, there is currently significant traffic congestion on El Camino Real due to a lack of traffic control at crosswalks and partly due to vehicles turning onto East Mall from El Camino Real. The new concept will help aleviate some of the traffic concerns, however there will still be congestion during the afternoon pickup time. This time frame is typically limited to approxcimately 30 minmutes between 2:45 and 3:15 PM and is primarily due to the East Mall crosswalk. The East Mall crosswalk can be greatly improved by the addition of a Pedestrian Hyrbid Beacon which can regulate both pedestrian and vehicular traffic. Additionally, the Ramblas style median allows vehicles to make left turns on a more regular basis than a traditional turn lane, potentially reducing the wait times and congestion.

Conclusion

Staff has worked closely with the design consultant, traffic consultants, City Council and residents and business owners, and believes that the project as currently envisioned would provide numerous benefits with minor impacts.

The Plan does not include detailed design to a level that would allow for construction estimates, although preliminary estimates of cost have been prepared. Full buildout with associated hardscape improvements would incur significant capital costs, likely to be in the range of $6-7 million. KTUA has provided the City with a proposal to prepare an application for the Cycle 5 ATP Grant for $15,000. This fee estimate is in-line with previous ATP Grant applications pursued by the City and the adopted Budget has $100,000 in Local Transportation Funds (LTF) for the project.

If this conceptual plan is adopted by Council, the next steps would be to procure funding sources prior to environmental review, engineering design and construction. Staff believes that this project meets the requirements for and would be considered for funding under the Active Transportation Program. This program provides grants that encourage increased use of active modes of transportation by increasing biking and walking and increasing safety. Staff is currently working with KTUA to prepare an application for ATP grant funding under Cycle 5, with the application due September 15, 2020. Additionally, this project meets the goals and intent of the Infill Infrastructure Grant offered by HCD. The intent of the HCD grant is to support mixed use housing opportunities by funding the construction of infrastructure projects. This year's grant cycle will be August through September. A final approved corridor concept plan is necessary to be eligible for grant applications.

FISCAL IMPACT:

Approving the El Camino Real Downtown Enhancement Plan has no direct costs beyond previously approved consultant and staff costs. Approval of the concept plan will make the Project eligible for certain grant funds.

ALTERNATIVES:

Council could elect to not approve the corridor plan as submitted and direct staff to reconsider options.

ATTACHMENT:

1. Conceptual Plans

ITEM NUMBER: C-1
DATE: 08/11/20
ATTACHMENT: 1