

**CITY OF ALBANY
CITY COUNCIL AGENDA
STAFF REPORT**

Agenda Date: February 17, 2009
Reviewed by: BP

SUBJECT: Park and Ride Lot at Buchanan Street under I-80/580 Freeway Ramps

REPORT BY: Ann Chaney, Community Development Director
Randy Leptien, City Engineer

TRAFFIC & SAFETY COMMISSION RECOMMENDATION

That Council direct City staff to communicate the following to AC Transit, Alameda County Congestion Agency and Caltrans:

That the City generally supports the concept of a park and ride lot next to Buchanan Street under the I-80/580 freeway ramps, provided these agencies work with City staff regarding design concerns, and that revised concept plans be returned to the Council for further input.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

1. That Council communicate design concerns, as listed below, on the two concept alternatives for a park and ride lot.
2. If Alternate 1- North side lot is redesigned and were to be the City's preferred alternative, the Council will reevaluate its involvement with Caltrans regarding the City's interest in preserving the north side property for a future maintenance facility.

Design Concerns:

Alternative 1 – North side

- Retain the existing bicycle path in place, or incorporate minimal changes that result in no vehicular crossings
- Reduce the number of parking spaces
- Minimize and mitigate potential drainage impacts
- Consider recommendations by the City's Traffic and Safety Commission

Alternative 2 – South side (preferred)

- Improve internal circulation of the lot, including fewer dead ends
- Relocate the access entrance further to the west

- Consider a right in and right out circulation pattern from east bound Buchanan Street, near the middle of the lot, which would require a U-turn at the I-580 / I-80 on ramp (west intersection)
- Mitigate potential drainage impacts
- Consider recommendations by the City's Traffic and Safety Commission

BACKGROUND

During the latter part of 2008, Councilmember Javandel posed the idea of a possible park and ride lot on Buchanan Street by the freeway. His reasoning was that such a lot could help reduce congestion on I-80 and the Bay Bridge, and provide an alternative location to current bus and carpool commuters who park on Albany streets during weekdays. The land under the freeway is Caltrans right-of-way, and thus owned by Caltrans. To determine whether such an idea was even physically or fiscally feasible meant talking with staff members of key regional agencies. Councilmember Javandel and the Albany Community Development Director met on-site with representatives from AC Transit, Caltrans, and Alameda County Congestion Management Agency (ACCMA), and together walked the areas under the freeway ramp, north and south side of Buchanan Street.

The site visit resulted in a favorable response from AC Transit, which has built and manages other park and ride lots in the area (e.g., Richmond Parkway park and ride lot, off I-80/Fitzgerald exit, new lot off of Ardenwood in Fremont). The ACCMA staff agreed to draft a concept layout plan, and authorized their consultant Kimley-Horn and Associates to prepare plan alternatives for the north and south sides of Buchanan Street.

It should be noted that for the last nine years, the City has been in negotiations with Caltrans to acquire or lease the north side property for a future City maintenance facility. While the City was motivated in these negotiations, no formal or informal agreement has yet been reached with Caltrans staff. As a result, the City is currently considering other locations for a permanent maintenance facility.

DISCUSSION

Attached are two the alternative concept plans developed by Kimley-Horn traffic engineers, working in concert with AC Transit and ACCMA staff.

Alternative 1 – north side lot is situated between the railroad and the I-580 off-ramp. The concept plan shows:

- 312 parking spaces
- Relocating the existing Alternate Bike Path to a new location immediately adjacent to Buchanan Street (sidewalk/bike path)
- Vehicular access (driveway) on Buchanan Street over which the bike path would cross
- Bus stop along Buchanan Street
- Bioretention facility at the northwest corner of the site

Alternative 2 – south side is situated between Eastshore Highway and the I-80 on-ramp adjacent to the Golden Gate Fields property. The concept plan shows:

- 195 parking spaces
- Vehicular access (driveway) on Buchanan Street, approximately 50 feet west of I-80 EB (eastbound) off-ramp
- Bus stop (not shown) but could be located either on north or south side of Buchanan Street
- Bioretention facility at the northeast corner of the site

Both AC Transit and ACCMA staffs have expressed support for the project and prefer Alternate 1 (north side). They believe that Alternative 1 is feasible, fundable, and regionally beneficial to the transportation system. Caltrans however has not offered an opinion at this time. In order to pursue this project, it has been suggested that the City send a letter to Caltrans District 4 indicating the desired new use (park and ride lot versus City maintenance facility). It is also understood that Caltrans does not typically support locating driveways within such close proximity to freeway on-ramps. Thus review and comment by Caltrans would be imperative to any further evaluation of a park and ride lot.

According to AC Transit staff, if security personnel are required on site, AC Transit Board policy requires that parkers (or the City) cover those costs.

Because this concept appears to be gaining support from certain regional agencies, City Council direction is being sought. Therefore, on January 22, 2009, the Traffic & Safety Commission reviewed the Alternative concept plans and provided comments. Staff did not include a recommendation since the City engineering staff had not yet reviewed the plans. Although the Commission did not specifically state a preference for Alternative 1 or 2, they voted unanimously in support of a park and ride lot in this location, and provided a list of items that should be considered (see below).

ANALYSIS

Since the Traffic & Safety Commission meeting, City engineering staff has reviewed the concept plans and offers the following comments:

Alternative 1 - North side of Buchanan

1. Stalls 1 through 3 and 289 through 312 would destroy the recently installed, "ACTIA" funded, Class 1 Bicycle path, and would be relocated immediately adjacent to Buchanan Street.
2. The path back to the Buchanan Street overcrossing may exceed 5%, (i.e., may not be ADA compliant).
3. Crossing the bicycle path with a vehicular entrance from Buchanan Street is problematic. With either alignment, a stop on the path would be necessary.

4. Caltrans has indicated in the past that an access to this site from Buchanan Street will adversely impact the I-580 off ramp/I-80 onramp. Thus Caltrans has only permitted an Emergency Vehicle Access to date at this location.
5. This area was designated as a "bioretention" area on the freeway plans. The proposed facility appears to be smaller than the existing area. It may also be "uphill" and would have to be mitigated.
6. Approval of the use of the right of way along the west line of the UPRR, which is controlled by EBMUD, would be necessary.

Alternative 2 - South side of Buchanan

1. The entrance to the lot is very near the intersection and off ramp. The left turn from westbound Buchanan into the lot would require a new signal phase at the I-80 EB off ramp (east intersection).
2. A right in and right out from east bound Buchanan Street, near the middle of the lot, might be a better solution, but this would require a U Turn at the I-580 / I-80 on ramp (west intersection).
3. The circulation in this lot is not as good as Alternative 1. Several of the bays do not have an exit.
4. The drainage in this area will have to be investigated.

NOTE: Park and Ride lot designers state that Alternative 2 was constrained by the existing freeway columns, which prohibited an internal north-south driveway for better parking lot circulation. The columns also limited the location of the driveway entrance that is currently shown within 50 feet of the I-80 off-ramp (EB), and would not likely be supported by Caltrans.

Comments and questions from the Traffic & Safety Commission include the following:

- Traffic directions should be clearly signed within and outside the lot.
- Include bicycle lockers, e-lockers (similar to those at El Cerrito BART station) and bike racks.
- Pedestrian circulation to and from the lot should be evaluated to ensure safe access to and from the bicycle path Bay Trail), Target, and bus stop.
- Is AC Transit Route 18 being extended to the park and ride location in order to facilitate connections?
- Would implementation of the park and ride lot eliminate the other bus stops, if so, which ones?
- Target should be included in the discussion as there is interest from their employees to bring a bus into the store satellite parking lot.
- Consider construction of a fence or other barrier separating the railroad tracks from the park and ride for pedestrian safety reasons.

- Possibly assign a different name to the lot to acknowledge/encourage other modes of transportation (e.g., Walk/Roll/Park and Ride).
- Include security lighting
- Consider public art

The Commission discussed taking a tour of nearby park and ride lots.

SUSTAINABILITY IMPACT

Reducing freeway congestion by making it more convenient to use public transit has a direct benefit on air quality. Park and ride lots tend to be used on weekends as well as weekdays and ultimately lead to fewer vehicles on the road due to carpooling and transit use.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

The estimated cost to develop a park and ride lot is \$1,524,000 for Alternative 1 and \$1,316,000 for Alternative 2. No funding source is currently available for this project. If the project were approved, it is staff's understanding that there would be no direct cost to the City because the lot would likely be built and operated by AC Transit.

CMA staff has indicated that the federally funded I-80 Corridor Improvement Program may be a possible funding source, but depends in part on timing. For the past six months, CMA staff has been working to identify projects intended to alleviate congestion along I-80. The fact that the park and ride lot is only in the concept stage may not make it eligible for those funds. However, if there were continued interest by the regional agencies in such a lot, other funding opportunities would likely arise.

CONCLUSION

The Traffic & Safety Commission supports the concept of a park and ride lot under the freeway ramps at Buchanan Street. Following our evaluation, City staff prefers Alternative 2 - south side lot, if the entrance were to be moved further to the west, U-turns were permitted at the west intersection, and the internal circulation of the parking lot improved. Alternative 1 – north side lot appears to compromise the recently new bicycle path by necessitating bicyclists and pedestrians to stop for vehicles crossing the path. Currently the path is unencumbered by vehicular traffic, which was the original objective in building this path.

Attachments:

Alternative 1 – I-80 Park & Ride Lot (north side of Buchanan)

Alternative 2 - I-80 Park & Ride Lot (south side of Buchanan)

Cost Estimate

Draft Traffic & Safety Commission minutes (excerpt) – January 22, 2009