

Grand Boulevard Initiative

New Realities, New Choices:

A Public Forum on Transforming the El Camino Real Corridor

June 20, 2009

Forum Summary

Prepared by:



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800 Hearst Avenue
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I. Welcome, Introductions and Opening Remarks

On June 20, 2009, a public forum was held in Redwood City to educate the community about the Grand Boulevard Initiative for transforming the El Camino Real corridor. The forum was sponsored by Caltrans, City of Redwood City, San Mateo County Transit District (SamTrans), Santa Clara Valley Transportation Authority (VTA), City/County Association of Governments of San Mateo County (C/CAG), Joint Venture: Silicon Valley Network and San Mateo County Economic Development Association (SAMCEDA).

Russell Hancock of Joint Venture opened the Forum, welcoming participants and thanking Redwood City and the Fox Theatre for hosting the event. He noted that El Camino Real is an historic major urban arterial road, dating back to the founding of the missions and California. Over the years, the addition of freeways has resulted in changes in the role of El Camino Real. The goal of the Grand Boulevard Initiative is to make this road more reflective of the community's collective vision. He posed the day's main question: How can we make that happen?

Mike Scanlon, General Manager and CEO of the San Mateo County Transit District, added his welcome, and recognized the other members of the Grand Boulevard Initiative Task Force. He described the day as a landmark event among activities to bring the Grand Boulevard vision to reality, and provided an overview of the day's agenda.

Congresswoman Anna Eshoo recognized the partnership that has come together to put on the Forum. She noted how the crowd attending the event represents a cross-section of the community yearning for something new, and spoke of El Camino's potential as a unifying landmark, just as the Redwood City County Courthouse stands as a center of a redeveloped area. She has been involved with the Task Force since being asked to be the speaker at its initiation five years ago, and worked with the help of the late Congressman Tom Lantos to secure funding to begin the process. SamTrans will be seeking to secure another \$500,000 for the Grand Boulevard Initiative in the next funding cycle.

Representative Eshoo spoke of a new model that can be created – pedestrian-friendly, transit-oriented, viable and thriving – turning the roadway into a human environment. To do this it's necessary to build broad public support. This model can be a model for our nation. She concluded by stating that she believes in the Grand Boulevard and will be looking forward to making this vision a reality.

Mike Scanlon introduced the next speaker, and noted that he heard some important words in Representative Eshoo's remarks: imagination and dream – reminiscent of Disney's Imagineering concepts. He concluded that the Bay Area is expected to add 2 million more people in the next 25 years. The revitalization of El Camino Real offers the opportunity to grow in a smart way, with creative infill along transportation corridors, and become a showcase for a model metropolis.

II. A New Regional Vision

Steve Heminger, Executive Director of the Metropolitan Transportation Commission, followed the opening remarks with his comments on a new regional vision for transportation. He noted that the Bay Area is in the paradoxical position of experiencing both aging pains and growing pains at the same time. We know that our infrastructure (as well as our population) is aging: 81% of transportation funding is needed for maintenance of the system; and even at that, there are still shortfalls. There are also large operating deficits: for instance over 20% at both SamTrans and VTA. Significant changes in how these agencies are operated and how they generate revenue will be needed. Strong communities need to support transit, and in order to encourage smart growth, urban core communities have to work as well or better than new, shiny suburban areas.

At the same time, the Bay Area is growing. More efficiency needs to be squeezed out of the system that's already built, using methods such as ramp metering and HOT lanes to provide additional capacity. Improvements can be built more quickly than in the past, and by using tolls, they can be financed through contributions rather than a raise in taxes.

Mr. Heminger went on to describe FOCUS, a regional development and conservation strategy that links land use and transportation and is led by the Association of Bay Area Governments (ABAG). El Camino Real has been identified as one of FOCUS' Priority Development Areas – locally-identified areas where opportunities exist to build around the existing infrastructure. Why focus on El Camino Real? It offers economic development opportunity as well as a chance to link transit to land use. How do we make this happen? We need to reward the communities that are willing to take the risks. Also, local transit agencies – Caltrain, BART, SamTrans and VTA – can work together to reduce greenhouse emissions and congestion both within and traveling into and out of the county.

Mr. Heminger concluded by enumerating the next steps to be taken: addressing the \$40 billion shortfall for highway, transit and local road repair; improving transit performance through smarter service, fewer systems, and sustainable funding; and reforming federal transportation

law. He noted that change begins at home, and asserted that with changes in attitude and behavior, breakthroughs are possible.

III. Keynote Presentation

Russell Hancock introduced **Will Kempton**, Director, California Department of Transportation, who gave the day's keynote presentation.

Mr. Kempton stated that the Grand Boulevard Initiative is a model for what we need to be doing in other parts of the state, and not just urban areas. He agreed that pricing and land use are important. The last time state revenues were raised for transportation was 20 years ago. We need to find the middle ground in our state legislature. We need a sustainable system, and we need to be willing to pay for the services we get. The advantage of raising revenues for transportation is that for every one billion dollars we spend, 18,000 jobs are created.

He noted that Caltrans has a reputation of being an engineer-driven culture. That culture has been changing as Caltrans engineers have been learning to "look out the window" to understand the context within which transportation exists. The conversation today is full of such terms as "community-friendly," "attracting pedestrian/bike use," "providing for a livable, walkable corridor." Ten years ago, standards were far too rigid to have this conversation. It's also necessary to work collaboratively with other agencies and the community in order to achieve Deputy Directive 64, "Complete Streets," requiring a transportation facility to provide safe mobility for users of all modes, ages and abilities, as appropriate to the context and function of the facility.

Transportation planning has also been impacted positively by several state initiatives – including AB32, the California Global Warming Solutions Act of 2006; and Senate Bill 375, which gets local agencies to focus on land use and transportation – and by convincing the Federal Highway Administration that earmarking \$15 million in grants for regional sustainable growth Blueprints was an effective way of spending federal money.

He concluded with congratulations to the participants on the Grand Boulevard Initiative, which he hopes serves as a model not only for the rest of the Bay Area, but for all of California, as we seek to improve mobility across the state.

IV. From Commercial Strip to Grand Boulevard

Michael Freedman, Principal of Freedman, Tung and Sasaki, gave a detailed overview of the history of downtown commercial boulevards, the development of modern suburbia and the rise and decline of the commercial strip, and insights on how El Camino Real can be transformed into a Grand Boulevard.

The idea of a Grand Boulevard has its roots in Vienna as a center of innovation and creativity at the turn of the 20th century. City planners constructed the Ringstrasse, a broad and majestic boulevard that portrayed the city's greatness. As a result of this effort, and within 30 years, the whole surrounding area burst with unmatched culture and life.

In direct contrast, the advent of American suburbia in the 1940s and 50s led to the creation of suburban highways, one of which was El Camino Real, that were zoned for miles and miles of retail and commercial. The modification of the tax code in 1954 led to a huge 30-year construction boom in low-cost commercial buildings with short economic lives. Starting in the 1960s, the interstate highway system created interchanges of high-value visibility and access for retail. In the 1980s, enlarged retail formats ("supermall" and "big boxes") arose at major crossroads and freeway interchanges. Thus, the tradition of grand historic Downtown Districts was transformed into visible, unattractive linear strips that epitomize the unsustainable qualities of suburban sprawl.

However, commercial properties on El Camino Real and similar boulevards are becoming disadvantageously located. Tax reform removed the financial advantages of low-cost commercial buildings and there has been a shift in consumer preferences to an emphasis on public spaces and amenities and away from an auto-oriented model of urban formats, leading to disinvestment in strip corridors.

To realign strip corridors with the contemporary market, local leaders, along with the community, must orchestrate the restructuring of land use and development and design of the corridor, including the road, sidewalks, setbacks and buildings, through land use decisions.

There could be something grand created here – an expression, not just of a city but of a region. The barriers to this are not financial, or technical, they are emotional. We were born into the world of suburban sprawl; we don't live in cities anymore, we live in a region.

In order to move from commercial strips to a model of centers and segments, the following issues need to be considered:

- Accommodating the market's preference for retail concentrations at major crossroads; that is, reorganizing the pattern of retail from linear to nodal.
- Identifying the most favorable locations for clustering and discovering the optimum supportable pattern of retail.
 - One option is to build real centers – urban walkable nodes of accessibility and activity that are built around the neighborhood, city or region's primary public and civic spaces. It is important to avoid bisecting these districts with major arterials.
 - Another strategy is to restore value and prominence to disinvesting strip segments by retrofitting the existing long segments in between the centers. It will be necessary to enable residential development as the most viable secondary development with each increment of investment contributing to a pattern of development that flatters the community, pairs well with wide thoroughfares, and restores the value of adjacent properties.
- Identify a potential hierarchy of retail venues – regional center; city center/downtown; neighborhood center.
- Plan corridor retail as part of a supportable city and regional framework.

Importantly, our wide roads are the natural long-sought-after location to provide a wide range of housing types, and it's also necessary to capture potential demand for other uses.

Compatible building types and architectural character are the keys to creating harmony in mixing uses by using form- rather than use-based zoning. It is important to consider height, depth of setback, frontage treatment, and other determinants in the context of where you are in the continuum of urban to rural – aka the "Transect."

In conclusion, Mr. Freedman spoke about how to make the transition from arterial routes to boulevards. This involves using the right-of-way to stimulate and support corridor restructuring and focusing capital improvement resources to pair each segment's development type with the appropriate form of street design. He indicated that the primary urban activity of the 21st Century will be the rebuilding and restructuring of suburban America; and, he believes that history might look back on the Grand Boulevard Initiative as a turning point in re-imagining the Bay Area as a place to live, work and play.

V. Making a Place for Transit

Chris Augenstein, Deputy Director for Planning of the Santa Clara Valley Transportation Authority, followed with a discussion of the elements involved in making a place for transit.

He described the elements of place involved, including physical and social elements; a sense of uniqueness, character and identity. There are also many elements of transit involved. The rider experience is important, as is density, diversity and design of land uses, as well as integrating transit with land use through planning routes, stops, stations, etc. to maximize ridership. The pedestrian environment also must be considered – an attractive, safe and intuitively organized interface with stops and stations and interesting surroundings. Elements of the operating environment include fast, efficient, reliable transit; a system of integrated stops/stations and streets; a transit-preferential environment; and reliable funding and maintenance. Finally, service design must be market-driven, with product branding, and an effort to develop a constituency for transit by considering the preferences and attitudes of all existing and potential riders.

Making a place for transit on El Camino Real will involve some physical changes. Land use and transportation planning must be linked with forethought and integration. Street design must be multimodal and include the whole street, beyond curb-to-curb planning. Policy changes will also be necessary. Factors in planning include zoning according to form-based codes; integration; the embracing of new technologies; funding; promotion and marketing; operations and maintenance; and creating urban synergies by linking places.

Mr. Augenstein described Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) as one useful solution. It has many of the same features as rail transit – high frequency, high capacity, high quality, and high reliability, and a greater sense of permanence – but with greater flexibility and comparatively lower costs. BRT also features a 30% travel time savings over regular bus service. The VTA has adopted a BRT Strategic Plan, which provides a vision for bringing transit to several corridors and is based on rigorous analysis of the market and of the operating environment. In the plan, there is a very high ranking for Line 522, which serves the GBI Corridor.

VI. Conclusion

Mike Scanlon concluded the Forum with thanks to all the speakers for their thoughtful and provocative presentations, and to the participants for their attention and engagement in the day's activities. He invited all in attendance to stay involved in the local and regional

conversations that will lead to the policy and investment shifts necessary to bring the Grand Boulevard vision to reality.

el camino real

GRAND BOULEVARD INITIATIVE

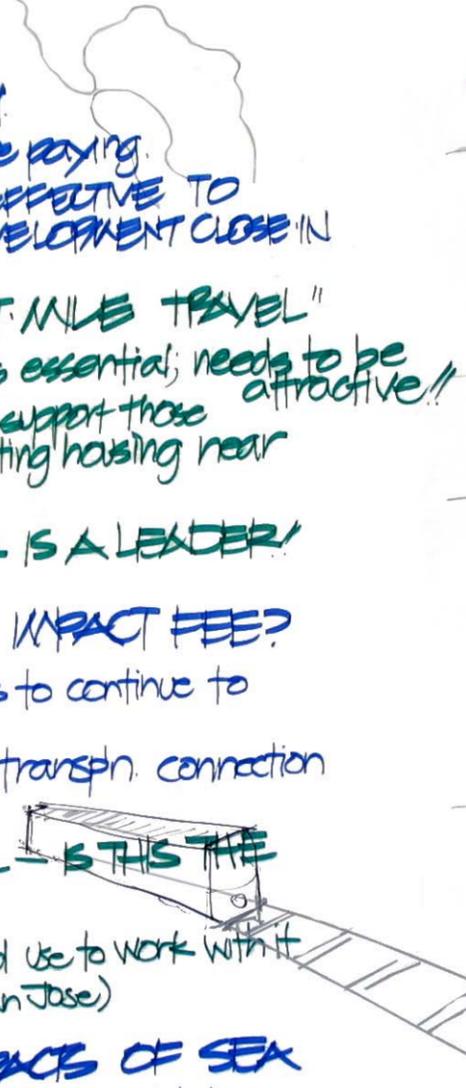
- AGE: SUBSIDY
 - Taxpayers are paying
 - MORE COST EFFECTIVE TO PROVIDE DEVELOPMENT CLOSE IN

- ISSUE OF "LAST MILE TRAVEL"
 - Local transit is essential; needs to be attractive!!
 - Region needs to support those communities putting housing near transit
 - THIS CORRIDOR IS A LEADER!

- NEW REGIONAL IMPACT FEES?
 - This region needs to continue to help itself.
 - ★ Better land use-transpn. connection

- SMART RAIL - IS THIS THE WAY TO GO...
 - Can they get land use to work with it (like BART to San Jose)

- CONSIDER IMPACTS OF SEA LEVEL RISE ON TRANSIT INFRASTRUCTURE...
 - seawalls?



• CHECK OUT LOCAL MAGLEV TECHNOLOGY

• FERRY SYSTEM NEEDS FUNDING COMMITMENT

↳ NEW FEDERAL AUTHORIZATION

• EXAMPLES OF COMPLETE STREETS?

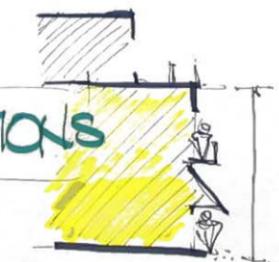
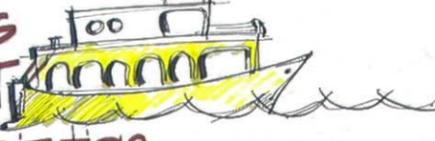
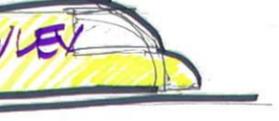
- ↳ Washington state
- ↳ Portland, OR
- ↳ Virginia

• HEIGHT RESTRICTIONS

- setback
- building type
- front door
- parking

• GRAND BLVD. REQUIRES MINIMUM HEIGHT

▶ CONSIDER RELATIONAL HEIGHT



• POTENTIAL FOR CULTURAL FACILITIES

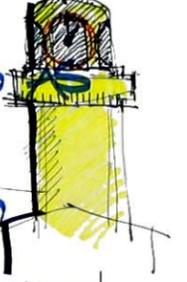
- ↳ Great opportunity to create civic space, image, identity
- ↳ "Exception" among other types - architectural character



• USE GRAND BLVD. AS GATEWAYS TO DOWNTOWNS

• GRAND BOULEVARD IS A FRAMEWORK...

- ↳ Landmarks for each community
- ↳ City center or neighborhood center



• WHAT ABOUT SERVICES?

- Auto repair, car washes
- Need to creatively approach marriage of uses...

• HOW DO WE CARRY THE VISION FORWARD?

Provide opportunity to share ideas.

"The Art of Retrofitting Suburbia!!"

CREATE A PROCESS FOR GROWING THE VISION!!

Prepared by: