

COUNTY OF SAN MATEO
BICYCLE AND PEDESTRIAN
ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Department Liaison:
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February 20, 2020

Jim Porter
Director, Department of Public Works
555 County Center
Redwood City, CA 94063

RE: Santa Cruz/Alameda de las Pulgas Safety Improvements

Dear Mr. Porter:

The Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Committee to the Board of Supervisors of San Mateo County has, since the formation of the BPAC in 2016, participated actively in the consideration of alternatives for improving pedestrian and bicycle safety in the Santa Cruz Avenue/Alameda de las Pulgas corridor in Menlo Park and adjacent unincorporated areas.

The matter has been discussed at several BPAC meetings, including most recently a meeting on February 20, 2020. At these meetings the BPAC has heard from senior county officials and community representatives. BPAC members have participated in several community meetings, including the recent meeting on January 30, and one alternate member of the BPAC, John Langbein, has been a member of the task force that has been coordinating with the Department of Public Works.

The corridor has received so much attention because it is more than an important transportation artery: it is also very much a neighborhood street. We have heard from parents who fear to let their children cross the street on their way to school and play, and who are thus forced into their cars for relatively short trips. We have heard from cyclists who view this corridor as the most dangerous part of their daily commute, and from others who would consider walking or cycling to work or school or stores but who are deterred by sheer physical risk. It is clear that for several decades we have been prioritizing automobile flow in this corridor over all other considerations, and the result is a community that lives in fear of its own main street.

The BPAC is also cognizant of the Complete Streets Policy set by the Board of Supervisors (resolution 072326; January 8, 2013) and believes that the task force has worked to fulfill this policy.

After a multiyear process that has featured active involvement from the community and the DPW, we are down to a series of alternatives that represent very different approaches to the problem. The BPAC has reviewed these alternatives and has the following recommendations:

COMMITTEE MEMBERS:

Susan Doherty, *Chair* John Langbein (Alternate)
Dianna Butcher, *Vice Chair* Elaine Salinger (Alternate)
Natalie Gore
Bill Kelly

An Advisory Committee to the San Mateo County Board of Supervisors



Adopt Alternative “B” for both the Santa Cruz Avenue and Alameda de las Pulgas sections.

The “road diet” reflected in these alternatives would create a single lane for cars in both the northbound and southbound directions, plus turn lanes, widened sidewalks and buffered bike lanes. It would promote pedestrian and bicycle safety and activity by effectively narrowing the distance that these users would have to negotiate to cross the corridor, and by separating people from cars.

This would be a significant change with substantial community benefits, but it is not such a radical idea. The Alameda is already a two lane street north of Avy and south of Sand Hill (where it becomes Junipero Serra), and so as a practical matter the road diet would simply make this approach consistent through the entire corridor. The community surveys in connection with the project show consistent support from residents for prioritizing safety, even at the cost of eliminating traffic lanes.

We understand that some have expressed reservations about this alternative because of current and projected traffic congestion, especially in the afternoon commute period. But we believe that these concerns are overblown. The analyses appear to assume that the number of cars moving through the corridor is a fixed (and, in the case of projected volumes, growing) quantity, whereas in practice traffic levels are affected by a wide range of factors, including:

- the availability of alternative routes
- the greater use of active modes of transportation (we should, for example, expect that some people will shift from their cars when it is safer to walk or cycle)
- the impact of government programs to deter single passenger car use in urbanizing sectors like downtown Menlo Park

In other words, we believe that rational people and governments will adapt.

On the other hand, if Alternative C is chosen, then we suggest that the two bike lanes on Santa Cruz be widened slightly by reducing the lane width of the center turn lane from 11 to 10 feet, consistent with the widths of the proposed three travel lanes.

Adopt Alternative “C” for the “Y” intersection of Santa Cruz Avenue and Alameda de las Pulgas.

Although none of the alternatives is particularly advantageous for cycling, Alternative C offers the most improvements for pedestrians as it maintains all four crossings of this complex intersection and provides for relatively short crossing distances with median refuges. For cycling, both Alternatives A and C each have some elements that better accommodate cyclists. We suggest that the final plan include both the separated bike lane for northbound Santa Cruz cyclists depicted in Alternative A and the defined bike lane on southbound Alameda depicted in Alternative C.

Do not permit “right turns on red” at the “Y”.

Whichever alternative is chosen, however, we believe that in the northbound direction cars should not be permitted to make the right onto Santa Cruz unless there is a green light. This is a troublesome intersection at best, especially for cyclists seeking to continue northbound onto the Alameda, and we fear that a “right turn on red” rule will put cyclists and pedestrians at unreasonable risk.

The BPAC would like to thank the Department for its thoughtful approach to this opportunity, and especially for its efforts to ensure that all relevant constituencies are heard from. We look forward to continuing to work with you to bring the benefits of the project to the residents and other users of the corridor.

Respectfully submitted,

Susan Doherty, Chair
San Mateo County Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Committee

cc: Joe Lococo
Diana Shu
Harry Yip