Problems With The El Camino Real Corridor Study Process

April 2, 2015

City Council Members & Planning Commissioners:

I would like to share my concerns about the EL Camino Real Corridor Study and its potential impact on the future safety and convenience of drivers, cyclists and pedestrians who use El Camino Real and the residents who live in nearby neighborhoods. The El Camino Real Corridor Study could lead to Menlo Park deciding to reconfigure vehicle lanes, add either bike lanes or separate bike paths, and reduce street parking. Unfortunately, the study is a poor foundation for making well-informed and well-reasoned decisions. It suffers from both too narrow a scope and questionable methodologies, and so far both the proposed alternatives and findings have been poorly communicated to the public. I urge you to re-evaluate this study and set it on a more meaningful path.

I believe the study …

1. Fails to strongly establish the need for cyclists to ride on El Camino Real. No analysis of cyclist (in)convenience has been done, and while many cyclist "prefer bikes to cars", ideology should not drive the City Council's decision-making.

2. Understates the dangers to cyclists, drivers and pedestrians of adding either bike lanes or separate bike paths to a heavily travelled highway that has about 60 spots where vehicles would naturally cross the paths of cyclists. And unfortunately, the illusion of safety would encourage cyclists of all levels to unknowingly and unnecessarily expose themselves to collisions and accidents. No other Peninsula city encourages riders on their sections of this highway.

3. Understates the negative impact of encouraging cyclists and drivers to share this main artery on the flow of vehicle traffic and driver convenience.

4. Understates the greater safety and similar convenience of encouraging cyclists to ride bikes near El Camino Real on either existing or planned bike routes.

My personal objective is simply to have a majority of well-informed residents make well-reasoned decisions that optimally balance the needs and wants of all interest groups, and I accept that each might prefer different alternatives, as we do not share all the same values and ideologies.

Unfortunately, the current study does note provide a meaningful answer to the most fundamental question: Which design option for El Camino Real provides the best absolute and relative SAFETY and convenience for the majority of potential users?

I urge you to consider three actions:

- Evaluate the relative convenience of riding on El Camino Real versus alternative routes between LIKELY popular origins and destinations.

- Require a bike network design specialist like Alta Planning + Design to evaluate how bike facilities on El Camino would impact the safety of all users.

- Conduct a field trial that tests the impact of making El Camino Real three lanes in each direction for its entire length. (Note: this can be done without modifying the Ravenswood Avenue right turn lane.)

These actions would put residents in a much better position to make the right choices.

I welcome the opportunity to either explain or clarify any of my points at your convenience if you feel that would be helpful.

Best regards,



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Enclosed: Specific Concern About The Study

Specific Concerns About The Study

1. *Scope.* The relative safety and convenience of the design options cannot be fully appreciated by examining only El Camino and the small study area surrounding El Camino. A bike network is a system of routes and ignoring the safety and convenience of other bike routes east of Alma and west of Hoover Street AND cross streets is a major study shortcoming. At a minimum, the study should include the bike network that either exists or is planned between Encinal Avenue, Sand Hill Road, Laurel Street and Fremont Street.

2. *Scope.* The option of "no change" was not evaluated and presented on an equal footing with the three study alternatives. The existing design should be the baseline for comparing all trade-offs between the four available design options.

3. *Methodology.* While the addition of bike lanes and paths to El Camino Real is a central focus of the study the lack of evidence these are needed is glaring. Proponents have advanced various arguments, e.g., "Complete Streets", environmental benefits, and convenience. However, El Camino Real does not need to be a "complete street, the environmental impact has not been sized, and convenience is a measurable attribute yet no analysis has shown that riding a bike on El Camino Real is materially more convenient than alternatives. In fact, no actual data has been presented that shows how residents already use the existing Menlo Park Bike Network, their priorities for enhancing this community resource, and how much they would actually use El Camino if it were included.

4. *Methodology.* The safety of drivers, cyclists and pedestrians should be the primary consideration for selecting a best design for El Camino yet the study has failed to provide a comprehensive analysis of this subject. The study offers static component-level descriptions and illustrations of PHYSICAL lane configurations, major intersections, and safety measures, BUT no evaluations of the dynamic nature of the interactions of drivers and cyclists at intersections and the more than 50 mid-block public access points where vehicles would still cross paths. There is also no assessment of the risks and dangers of cyclists sharing turn lanes with highway drivers. Since safety is THE primary resident concern I am surprised the highly regarded bike network design consultant who has assisted Menlo Park and Palo Alto – Alta Planning + Design – was not asked to evaluate the design options and explain why they have never recommended that adding bike facilities to El Camino Real should be a high priority for either city?

- *Methodology.* The current study lacks any evaluation of the impact biking facilities would have on vehicle traffic flow and driver convenience. Mixing zones at major intersections will force drivers to slow down, an action that will also impact following vehicles. Drivers will also be required to slowdown to merge behind bikes whenever they cross bike lanes mid-block to exit into public driveways. Unfortunately, this problem will grow non-linearly with an increase in the number and spacing of cyclists.

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- *Methodology.* The consultant W-trans has presented vehicle and bike traffic projections in a way that cannot easily be interpreted by our city government and residents. Meaningful projections would include probability statistics like standard deviations that communicate the RANGE of likely outcomes yet the consultant has only provided single expected values. Also, no explanation as to the origins, destinations nor patterns of vehicle traffic have been reported.

- *Communications.* The piecemeal approach to illustrating and presenting design options has made it difficult for residents to visualize how the lane configurations in the different designs would *vary along the entire length* of El Camino Real. On March 28, I received the first aerial views for some of the designs after I submitted questions to the Transportation Division, and I understand more are now in the works. These drawings should have been presented in all earlier public reviews and certainly before requesting resident feedback. *Why have residents not been given a clearer more holistic view before now?*

- *Communications*. I doubt that many residents know much about the existing Menlo Park bike network and future enhancement described in the Specific Plan. Yet the study team expects residents to evaluate the value and safety of adding a single segment on El Camino Real. (Note: when I asked for a copy of the Menlo Park bike network I was given a San Mateo County bike map which states that Middle Avenue is a Class III bike route which I believe is NOT true).

- *Communications and Methodology.* The recent online surveys have provided little useful information. The users lacked the information I have described, the choices have been poorly illustrated, and the user sample was likely biased by a non-representative set of residents who ideologically “breath biking and abhor more vehicles” just about anywhere.