

May 1, 2018

MP Grade Separation Issue #5:

Is Our City Prepared To Sacrifice The Downtown/Train Station Commercial District?

Menlo Park City Council Members:

The commercial district in and around the train station area is the largest open public space in downtown Menlo Park. While it is currently divided by Caltrain tracks, it is a busy and attractive transportation center that was singled out in the \$1.7M Specific Plan for the development of new vibrant businesses and a future central plaza that would enable pedestrians and bicyclists to conveniently travel between Santa Cruz, Merrill and Alma.

This vision is currently under severe pressure as the City Council considers a grade separation alternative that would greatly harm the area bordered by Oak Grove and Ravenswood, and possibly Glenwood.

1. This business district is currently enjoying an extraordinary level of commercial development that will bring hundreds of apartments, dozens of retail locations and restaurants, and new office space to the train station district.
2. Examples include Station 1300, Alma Station, and the planned development of three properties at 506-556 Santa Cruz Avenue and 1125 Merrill Street.
3. This area is also popular with residents who use AXIS fitness, Kepler's, Cafe Barrone and the BBC.
4. The grade separation alternative that currently appears to have the greatest Council support (Alternative C) would raise the tracks on a solid embankment about ten-feet high on the Merrill Street side and 12 to 13 feet on the Alma Street.
5. The embankments would physically, aesthetically and psychologically divide the train station area.
6. There is no evidence city staff has proactively conducted outreach to the business and property owners who would be most negatively impacted by Alternative C.

In contrast, a fully elevated grade separation solution would raise the tracks on an attractive 20-foot high rail structure and would have a series of wide, 15-foot high ground-level openings underneath. This design would improve east-west bike and pedestrian connectivity and create the opportunity to integrate the train station infrastructure into a well-landscaped central plaza - a wonderful landmark gateway for Menlo Park.

I hope you will carefully consider the above as you decide whether to conduct a study of fully elevated grade separations.

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