



Midpeninsula Regional
Open Space District

R-21-20
Meeting 21-95
July 14, 2021

AGENDA ITEM 4

AGENDA ITEM

Approval of a Comment Letter to the San Mateo County Transit District on the Dumbarton Rail Corridor Project

GENERAL MANAGER'S RECOMMENDATION *den*

Authorize the Board President to sign a comment letter, with any final modifications as directed by the Board of Directors, on behalf of the Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District Board of Directors to the San Mateo County Transit District regarding the Dumbarton Rail Corridor Project.

SUMMARY

The Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District (District) has an opportunity to submit a comment letter to the San Mateo County Transit District (SamTrans) for their public hearing on the Dumbarton Rail Corridor Project (DRC Project) where they will consider approving the pre-environmental feasibility studies and Preferred Alternative to proceed into the environmental review phase. At this time, SamTrans has not yet announced the meeting date for this presentation, but the General Manager recommends completion of a comment letter that will be ready to submit to SamTrans. The Project aligns with the District's mission to "provide opportunities for ecologically sensitive public enjoyment and education", by providing future opportunities for public access to Ravenswood Open Space and furthering regional trail connectivity. The District Board of Directors (Board) previously received a brief presentation on this Project as part of the Regional Trails Overview at the August 14, 2019 meeting. A draft comment letter is provided to the Board for consideration (Attachment 1). The Board's approval of the comment letter would not result in any fiscal impact.

BACKGROUND

The DRC Project is a critical connector between residential neighborhoods in the East Bay and job centers on the San Francisco Peninsula (Attachment 2). Since the early 1990s, SamTrans has been studying the corridor in an attempt to address the growing demand for travel between the East Bay and Peninsula and lack of a high-capacity transit option across the southern portion of the Bay. In August 2018, SamTrans began partnering with Facebook and a private developer (Plenary Americas) to explore a series of alignment alternatives for a high quality, high-capacity public rail system that could bring much-needed commute alternatives to the Bay Area. The District previously submitted comments on September 8, 2017 and August 1, 2017 to SamTrans Board of Directors regarding the inclusion of the bicycle/pedestrian trail within the Dumbarton Rail Corridor (Attachment 3). In Spring 2020, the project was put on hold due to the global pandemic and was recently restarted to compile and document pre-environmental work for the

alignment and technology options under consideration for the DRC Project. Facebook recently withdrew from the partnership due to their decision to refocus their priorities during the pandemic. SamTrans revised their partnership agreement with Crossbay Transit Partners (CBTP), now owned by Plenary Americas, to continue the pre-environmental work under consideration.

To date, SamTrans has outlined the Project's purpose and need, collaborated with resource agencies, engaged with stakeholders, held community meetings, documented existing conditions, developed a range of alternatives, developed a ridership forecast tool, and conducted a ridership forecast analysis.

DISCUSSION

District Planning staff have attended a series of stakeholder and community meetings where a range of transit alternatives for the Dumbarton Rail Corridor have been discussed. In addition, staff have attended meetings with trails and community stakeholders, including the Peninsula Open Space Trust (POST), Silicon Valley Bicycle Coalition, MenloSpark, Friends of Caltrain, and Rails to Trails Conservancy to collectively develop analysis and provide information about the importance of a bike/pedestrian trail within this corridor.

Project presentations and plans to date have not shown a continuous system of proposed bicycle and pedestrian improvements within the Dumbarton Rail Corridor right-of-way to connect Redwood City, Menlo Park, East Palo Alto and the Dumbarton Bridge. At public meetings, SamTrans has not confirmed the inclusion of a bike/pedestrian trail for further evaluation in the environmental review/compliance phase. This lack of clarity has elicited concern amongst trails and community stakeholders that this could be a missed opportunity to improve and expand bike and pedestrian connections locally in Menlo Park and East Palo Alto and other communities throughout the region.

SamTrans has identified the following next steps for the project:

- Select Preferred Alternative (SamTrans Board action)
- Environmental Clearance - EIR/EIS
 - Engineering Refinements
 - Environmental Technical Studies
 - Travel Demand Forecast/Ridership
- Projections
- Continued Inter-agency Coordination
- Continued Outreach/Stakeholder
- Engagement
- Permitting

The General Manager recommends submitting a comment letter focusing on the inclusion of a continuous bike/pedestrian trail within the right-of-way of the rail corridor (Attachment 1). The proposed comment letter addresses the following:

- Leveraging an opportunity to provide a critical community asset by connecting residents and communities with a new bike/pedestrian trail within the rail corridor to access Ravenswood Open Space Preserve (Ravenswood Preserve) and the San Francisco Bay Trail. Within proximity to this corridor, residents of Redwood City, Menlo Park, East Palo Alto and Palo Alto would directly benefit from this future bike/pedestrian trail.

- Leveraging an opportunity to expand multi-modal access options and pedestrian/bicycle connections to Ravenswood Preserve that promotes “green” modes of transportation to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and roadway congestion through a nonmotorized trail connecting the Peninsula to the East Bay (Newark, Ardenwood, Union City, Fremont).
- Promoting regional trail connectivity and supporting POST’s Bay to Sea Trail that will offer future trail connections within Redwood City, East Palo Alto, Menlo Park, Palo Alto and other communities to access the foothills, skyline, and ocean.
- Alignment with Senate Bill 375 Sustainable Communities Strategies.
- Alignment of the District’s mission to “provide opportunities for ecologically sensitive public enjoyment and education” with the Project’s goals and benefits.

The trails and community stakeholders are separately intending on submitting a collaborative letter to SamTrans that would recommend inclusion of a bike/pedestrian trail.

FISCAL IMPACT

Approval of a Comment Letter to the San Mateo County Transit District on the Dumbarton Rail Corridor Project has no immediate fiscal impact.

BOARD AND COMMITTEE REVIEW

This project has previously come to the Board on August 14, 2019. The Board received an informational presentation on Regional Trails Overview, where this Project was presented along with other regional trails to the Board.

- [Board Report](#)
- [Minutes](#)

PUBLIC NOTICE

Public notice was provided as required by the Brown Act.

CEQA COMPLIANCE

This item is not a project subject to the California Environmental Quality Act.

NEXT STEPS

If approved, staff will submit a signed letter to SamTrans for their public hearing.

Attachment(s)

1. [Draft Comment Letter](#)
2. [Dumbarton Rail Corridor Location Map](#)
3. [2017 Communications from Midpen to SamTrans Board](#)

Responsible Department Head:
Jane Mark, AICP, Planning Manager

Prepared by/Contact person:
Tyler Smith, Planner II



Midpeninsula Regional
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| Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District

XX XX, 2021

SamTrans
Attn: Board of Directors
Mr. Carter Mau, Interim General Manager
1250 San Carlos Ave
San Carlos, CA 94070

DELIVERED VIA E-MAIL

SUBJECT: Dumbarton Rail Corridor Project (Selection of Preferred Alternative)

Dear Honorable Board of Directors and Interim General Manager Mau,

The Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District (Midpen) is submitting feedback on the San Mateo County Transit District (SamTrans) Dumbarton Rail Corridor Project (Project). It is our understanding that the SamTrans Board will soon consider approval of the pre-environmental feasibility studies for the Project and selection of a Project Preferred Alternative for environmental review. Midpen's comment letter focuses on recommendations to include a continuous bicycle/pedestrian trail in the right-of-way of the Dumbarton Rail Corridor.

Midpen's mission is to acquire and preserve a regional greenbelt of open space land in perpetuity, protect and restore the natural environment, and provide opportunities for ecologically sensitive public enjoyment and education. On the Coast, Midpen has an expanded mission to acquire and preserve agricultural land of regional significance, preserve rural character, and encourage viable agricultural uses of land resources. We believe that the Project's goal of providing a critical transit connection between East Bay and Peninsula communities aligns with our mission to provide public access to open space and would provide greater opportunities for the public to visit Ravenswood Open Space Preserve (Ravenswood Preserve), the San Francisco Bay Trail and Cooley Landing Park in East Palo Alto.

Within proximity to the Dumbarton Rail Corridor, Ravenswood Preserve provides a critical trail segment establishing 80 miles of continuous access to the San Francisco Bay Trail for region-wide and local bicycle commuters, and nature and recreation enthusiasts. Including a pedestrian and bike trail within the Dumbarton Rail Corridor would complement the Bay trail segment in Ravenswood by providing a critical east-west trail connection from the Redwood City Transit Center to the Ravenswood Preserve, the regional San Francisco Bay Trail, and Cooley Landing Park in East Palo Alto.

Midpen Planning staff have attended a series of stakeholder and community meetings where SamTrans has presented a range of transit options in the Dumbarton Rail Corridor. In addition, staff have been collaborating with trails and community stakeholders, including the Peninsula Open Space Trust (POST), Silicon Valley Bicycle Coalition, MenloSpark, Friends of Caltrain, and Rails to Trails Conservancy to collectively develop analysis and provide information about the importance of a bicycle/pedestrian trail within this corridor.

To date, SamTrans has presented conceptual alternatives that include a range of transit options and a proposed regional bicycle/pedestrian network that starts at Redwood City, extends through the communities of Menlo Park and East Palo Alto, and continues onto the existing bicycle path on the Dumbarton Bridge. However, SamTrans has not shown a continuous system of bicycle and pedestrian improvements within the Dumbarton Rail Corridor right-of-way to provide residents with the opportunity to walk or bike to key destinations within their communities, that include access to Ravenswood Preserve, the Bay Trail and Cooley Landing Park.

At public meetings, SamTrans has not confirmed the inclusion of a bike/pedestrian trail for further evaluation in the environmental review/compliance phase. This lack of clarity concerns Midpen and regional trails stakeholders that this could be a missed opportunity to improve and expand bicycle and pedestrian connections locally and throughout the region. As such, Midpen recommends inclusion of a bicycle/pedestrian trail in the Project's Preferred Alternative for evaluation in the environmental review phase for the following reasons:

- Leverage the opportunity to provide a critical community asset by connecting residents and communities with a new bike/pedestrian trail within the rail corridor to access Ravenswood Open Space Preserve (Ravenswood Preserve) and the San Francisco Bay Trail. Within proximity to this corridor, residents of Redwood City, Menlo Park, East Palo Alto and Palo Alto are among the communities that would directly benefit from this future bike/pedestrian trail.
- Leverage the opportunity to expand multi-modal access options and pedestrian/bicycle connections to Ravenswood Preserve that promote “green” modes of transportation to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and roadway congestion through a nonmotorized trail connecting the Peninsula and to the East Bay (Newark, Ardenwood, Union City, Fremont) .
- Promoting regional trail connectivity and supporting POST's Bay to Sea Trail that will offer future trail connections within Redwood City, East Palo Alto, Menlo Park, Palo Alto and other communities to access the foothills, skyline, and ocean.
- Alignment with Senate Bill 375 Sustainable Communities Strategies.
- Alignment of the Project goals and benefits with Midpen's mission to “provide opportunities for ecologically sensitive public enjoyment and education,” by providing future opportunities for public access to Ravenswood Preserve through:
 - Enhanced mobility between the East Bay and the Peninsula
 - Reduced vehicle miles traveled and greenhouse gas emissions
 - Planned anticipation of population and employment growth and demands

We appreciate the opportunity to submit comments on the Project and look forward to future coordination with the SamTrans during the environmental review phase and subsequently during implementation of Project recommendations that promote more bicycle and pedestrian opportunities in San Mateo County to visit Midpen preserves and regional trails.

Sincerely,

Curt Riffle
Board President

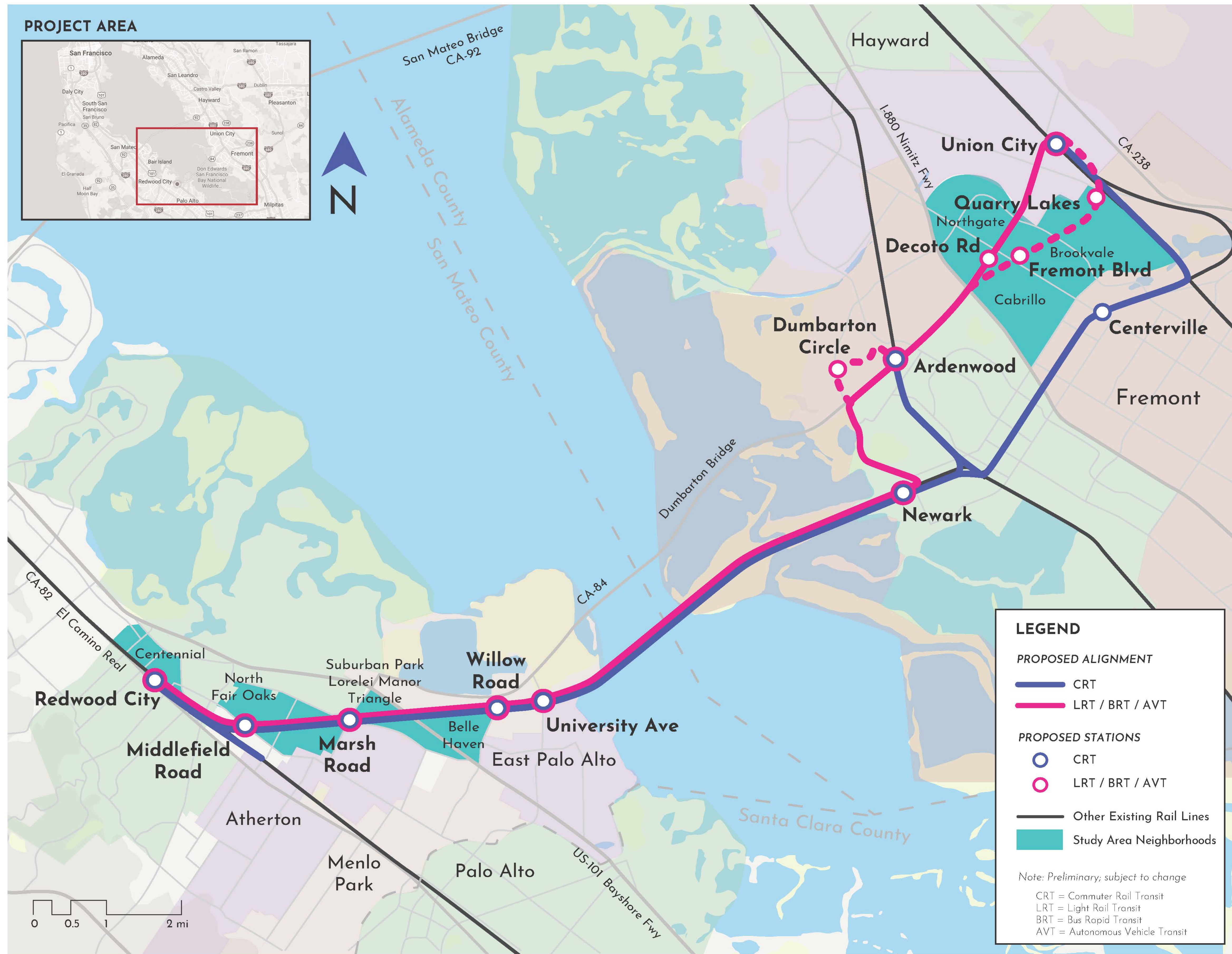
CC:

Midpen Board of Directors
Ana M. Ruiz, General Manager, Midpen
Peninsula Open Space Trust (POST)
Silicon Valley Bicycle Coalition

MenloSpark
Friends of Caltrain
Rails to Trails Conservancy
San Mateo County Office of Sustainability

Project Map: Alignment, Stations, and Neighborhoods

San Mateo County TRANSIT DISTRICT





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Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District

August 1, 2017

SamTrans
Board of Directors
1250 San Carlos Ave
P.O. Box 3006
San Carlos, CA 94070-1306

Re: Dumbarton Transportation Corridor Study

Dear Honorable Board of Directors,

The Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District (Midpen) appreciates the opportunity to comment on the Dumbarton Transportation Corridor Study (Study). Although the draft document has not been made available to the public, we have been informed the Study's recommended alternatives do not include opportunities for bicycle-pedestrian transit modes within the corridor. The exclusion of a multi-use trail for pedestrian and bicycle use on the Dumbarton rail spur from Redwood City to the Dumbarton Bridge would be inconsistent with the goals of the Study that SamTrans presented in May 2016:

1. Enhance mobility
2. Create cost effective improvements
3. Minimize environmental impacts, financial risk, and maximize safety
4. Ensure local communities are protected from adverse impacts.

Midpen owns and manages approximately 63,000 acres of open space land within Santa Clara County, San Mateo County and Santa Cruz County. Our mission is to acquire and preserve a regional greenbelt of open space land in perpetuity; protect and restore the natural environment; and provide opportunities for ecologically sensitive public enjoyment and education. While much of Midpen's open space lands are located along the ridge of the Santa Cruz Mountain, Midpen owns and manages the 376-acre Ravenswood Open Space Preserve just south of the Dumbarton Rail Corridor. As a stakeholder within the Study Area, Midpen has been implementing the Ravenswood Bay Trail Project that is located alongside to the Dumbarton Rail Corridor east of University Ave, where the project will complete a 0.6-mile gap in the San Francisco Bay Trail at the boundary of Menlo Park and East Palo Alto. This critical segment will open 80 continuous miles of Bay Trail for region-wide bicycle commuters, nature and recreation enthusiasts, and for residents of East Palo Alto and east Menlo Park.

The following are Midpen's comments regarding the draft Dumbarton Transportation Corridor Study (Study) and the recommended alternatives:

First, the recommended design alternatives are inconsistent with SamTrans' Project goals. Without the bicycle-pedestrian modes, the latest design alternatives contradicts the Purpose statement for the Study,

which states: "...the Study will examine opportunities to improve auto, transit, bicycle, pedestrian, and other uses of the Dumbarton Bridge and Dumbarton rail bridge, including enhancements to Dumbarton Express Bus (DBX) commuter service." The agency's latest actions also contradict SamTrans' Outreach goals, which include "...solicit[ing] input on topics such as project goals and objectives, evaluation criteria, initial alternatives and screening results, alternatives carried forward, etc."

Secondly, there are significant implications with the exclusion of bicycle-pedestrian transit options within the Draft Project Alternatives.

- Proposed elimination of pedestrian/bicycle trail routes precludes critical east-west trail connectivity from the City of Redwood City Transit Center to the Ravenswood Bay Trail connection and Cooley Landing Park project in East Palo Alto, and ultimately to the San Francisco Bay Trail. This action would promote no or minimal enhancements to the regional trail and bicycle commuter connectivity of the area and may ultimately undermine the goals of a robust network.
- The Corridor directly connects the cities of Newark, Fremont and Union City in the East Bay, and Redwood City, Menlo Park, East Palo Alto and Palo Alto on the Peninsula. Multi-modal transit and non-motorized trail connections provide an asset to the communities that have long been underserved on the Peninsula. This current approach would amplify the differences in opportunities between communities with significant capital investment in a transportation infrastructure that serves only a limited population.
- Finally, the Study's recommended alternatives have long-term regional implications. By excluding bike-pedestrian modes, SamTrans' draft alternatives would be inconsistent with regional/city land use plans including Countywide and Citywide Bicycle Plans that identify a regional trail and bicycle routes within the Dumbarton Rail Corridor. Some of the impacted land use plans include but are not limited to:
 - Midpen's *Ravenswood Bay Trail Connection Project and Initial Study and Mitigated Negative Declaration*. <https://www.openspace.org/our-work/projects/ravenswood-bay-trail>
 - *San Francisco Bay Trail Plan*. http://baytrail.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/San-Francisco-Bay-Trail_-Bay-Trail-Plan-Summary.pdf
 - *City of Menlo Park's General Plan* for the Facebook area. <http://www.bayrailalliance.org/dumbarton-rail-first-phase>
 - *City of East Palo Alto's Ravenswood/Four Corners Transit-oriented Development Specific Plan* (February 22, 2013) <http://www.ci.east-palo-alto.ca.us/ArchiveCenter/ViewFile/Item/129>

Third, Midpen strongly encourages SamTrans to extend the public review period for the August 2, 2017 design alternatives beyond the current two-week schedule for at least 30-days, in order to fully engage

the community and stakeholders. Due to summer breaks during the month of August, it is likely that many members of the public and major stakeholders of the Project may not be available to attend the August 15th and August 16th public meetings. In addition, Midpen recommends SamTrans update the agency's website by publishing the Study's latest alternatives for a minimum of a 30-day review period. Since the agency's last presentation to the SamTrans Board and public outreach meeting in September 2016, SamTrans has not engaged the public and stakeholders nor has the agency posted new data or Study alternatives for public and agency review. The Outreach schedule provided at the May 2016 Stakeholder/Public Meeting detailed outreach conducted for the "evaluation of alternatives carried forward, funding plan, phasing plan." Consequentially SamTrans has not yet fulfilled this Outreach goal and schedule.

http://www.samtrans.com/Planning/Planning_and_Research/DumbartonTransportationCorridorStudy.html

In summary, the multi-use trail within the Dumbarton rail corridor would greatly benefit the region that is projected to increase by 820,000 new projected households and 1.3 million jobs by 2040¹. Providing pedestrian and bicycle transit options is critical to the success of SamTrans' mission, where improving a multi-modal transportation system would enhance the quality of life by increasing access and mobility, reducing congestion, reducing greenhouse gas generation, and promoting economic vitality. Midpen urges SamTrans to include a bicycle and pedestrian trail in the refined alternatives for this 20-mile rail corridor. Where feasible, Midpen is eager to work in collaboration with SamTrans to provide these pedestrian and bicycle opportunities to connect communities to transit and public recreation.

Thank you again for the opportunity to comment.

Sincerely,



Stephen E. Abbors
General Manager

CC: Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District Board of Directors
Mike Williams, Acting Assistant General Manager
Ana Ruiz, AICP, Assistant General Manager
Jane Mark, AICP, Planning Manager
Walter Moore, Peninsula Open Space Trust
Laura Thompson, San Francisco Bay Trail Project
Mark Muenzer, City of Menlo Park
Sean Charpentier, City of East Palo Alto

¹ <http://www.planbayarea.org/2040-plan/final-preferred-scenario>, July 31, 2017

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Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District

September 28, 2017

SamTrans
Board of Directors
1250 San Carlos Ave
P.O. Box 3006
San Carlos, CA 94070-1306

Re: Dumbarton Transportation Corridor Study

Dear Honorable Board of Directors,

The Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District (Midpen) appreciates the extended public review and comment period and the opportunity to provide additional comments on the Dumbarton Transportation Corridor Study (Study). Midpen owns and manages approximately 64,000 acres of open space land within Santa Clara County, San Mateo County and Santa Cruz County. Our mission is to acquire and preserve a regional greenbelt of open space land in perpetuity; protect and restore the natural environment; and provide opportunities for ecologically sensitive public enjoyment and education. As part of this mission, Midpen is actively engaged in trail connectivity to connect neighborhoods with nearby open spaces.

Within close proximity to the Dumbarton Rail Corridor, the Ravenswood Bay Trail Project in East Palo Alto is a priority project. Midpen has and will continue to work with the San Francisco Public Utilities Commission and City of East Palo Alto, its residents, community groups and many others to complete design, permitting and construction. Our targeted completion date is 2020. The Project is located alongside the Dumbarton Rail Corridor, east of University Ave, and will complete a 0.6-mile gap in the San Francisco Bay Trail at the boundary of Menlo Park and East Palo Alto. Completing this critical segment will open 80 continuous miles of Bay Trail for region-wide bicycle commuters, nature and recreation enthusiasts. This Bay Trail segment provides a valuable asset in improving quality of life by promoting an alternative transportation mode for residents of East Palo Alto and east Menlo Park. Multi-use trail opportunities within the Dumbarton Rail Corridor would complement the new Bay trail segment for the local community by providing a critical east-west trail connection from the Redwood City Transit Center to the Ravenswood Bay Trail connection and Cooley Landing Park in East Palo Alto, and ultimately to the San Francisco Bay Trail.

As indicated in our prior comment letter dated August 1, 2017, Midpen continues to emphasize the importance of including bicycle-pedestrian trail opportunities within the Dumbarton corridor from Redwood City to the Dumbarton Bridge and facilitating regional and local trail

connectivity. It is premature to eliminate multi-use trail opportunities without conducting additional studies on right-of-way needs and trail phasing options. Also, please be aware that Regional Measure 3 transportation funding for this Dumbarton Rail Project prioritizes multi-modal transportation options that include multi-use trails.

As part of our comments, Midpen emphasizes the following salient points:

1. **Local Community and Regional Connectivity:** The Corridor directly connects the cities of Newark, Fremont and Union City in the East Bay, and Redwood City, Menlo Park, East Palo Alto and Palo Alto on the Peninsula. Multi-modal transit and non-motorized trail connections provide an asset to these communities, and in particular, provide an affordable mode of transit for underserved and low-income neighborhoods in the East Bay and Peninsula.
2. **Land Use Plan Consistency:** The inclusion of bike-pedestrian transit enable the SamTrans Study to be consistent with regional and local land use plans, and countywide and citywide bicycle plans. Examples of land use plans that support a multi-use trail within the Dumbarton corridor include:
 - Midpen's *Ravenswood Bay Trail Connection Project and Initial Study and Mitigated Negative Declaration*. <https://www.openspace.org/our-work/projects/ravenswood-bay-trail>
 - *San Francisco Bay Trail Plan*. http://baytrail.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/San-Francisco-Bay-Trail_-Bay-Trail-Plan-Summary.pdf
 - *City of Menlo Park's Connect Menlo General Plan* <http://menlopark.org/DocumentCenter/View/15014>
 - *City of East Palo Alto's Ravenswood/Four Corners Transit-oriented Development Specific Plan* (February 22, 2013) <http://www.ci.east-paloalto.ca.us/ArchiveCenter/ViewFile/Item/129>
3. **Multimodal Benefits:** Midpen along with Silicon Valley Bicycle Coalition, Menlo Spark, Sustainable San Mateo County, Carbon Free Palo Alto, Friends of Caltrain, Bike Menlo Park and local residents support the inclusion of multi-modal transit improvements and multi-use trail opportunities. A robust transportation system with multimodal improvements that include trails increases mobility for long and short-range commuters and local communities.

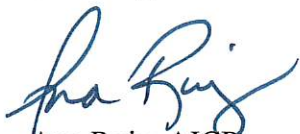
In summary, the inclusion of multi-use trail opportunities within the corridor promotes SamTrans as a mobility leader in the region, which the Board discussed at their August 2, 2017 meeting. In addition, trail options are consistent with the Study's goals presented in May 2016 that prioritizes mobility enhancements, minimizes environmental impacts, maximizes safety, and benefits local communities.

We appreciate SamTrans addressing our comments and for considering the recommendation to include a bicycle and pedestrian trail in the refined alternatives for this 20-mile rail corridor.

Where appropriate, Midpen is eager to work in collaboration with SamTrans to evaluate and plan for these pedestrian and bicycle opportunities to connect communities to transit and to their local public open spaces.

Thank you again for the opportunity to comment.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Ana Ruiz', is written over the printed name.

Ana Ruiz, AICP
Assistant General Manager

CC: Midpen Board of Directors
Steve Abbors, General Manager
Jane Mark, AICP, Planning Manager
Walter Moore, Peninsula Open Space Trust
Laura Thompson, San Francisco Bay Trail Project
Mark Muenzer, City of Menlo Park
Sean Charpentier, City of East Palo Alto