



## 2020 City Council Candidate Questions

### TRANSPORTATION/TRAFFIC

**What do you see as our most serious traffic issues and how would you fix them?**

#### **PAT BURT**

Our traffic issues need to be divided between what we were facing before the pandemic, what we now face, and what we anticipate for the future.

Prior to the pandemic, we had massive traffic congestion on all of our arterial streets and traffic/safety issues in many of our neighborhoods. In addition, congestion at our at grade crossings was severe and scheduled to become overwhelming once additional train/gate downtime occurred. Now, those issues are on hold and, due to remote working, we may not see a full return to the prior level of congestion. This gives us an opportunity to plan for and move forward on a sustainable, comprehensive transportation system for our future that will create fewer parking impacts, less atmospheric pollution and GHG's, and better mobility for all forms of transportation.

We should move forward with completing our "smart signal" system, grade separations, better biking (not at the expense of traffic flow) and off street bikeways, and better transit (including emerging and exciting 21<sup>st</sup> century technologies).

#### **REBECCA EISENBERG**

Our most serious traffic issues are:

1. Too many cars on the road, creating risk of personal safety to human beings, especially children and seniors.
2. The avoidable terrible-ness of the several loud, smelly, dangerous freeways that cut through our beautiful tree-lined residential neighborhoods (built originally to serve the convenience of Palo Alto's largest employers such as HP, which is not taxed, and still has yet to be forced to clean up its pollution -- one of our country's worst Superfund Sites: the **HP Superfund Site**.)
3. The risk to life that is created when Palo Alto continues to allow commercial construction in residential neighborhoods. It was a truck from a construction site in a residential neighborhood that struck and killed my son's classmate's younger brother at Greene Middle School in March. This child's parents begged the city to do something about the dangers caused by drivers -- especially construction truck drivers -- who are not paying attention, and in this case, who do not slow down when making right turns. This risk of death by right-turning truck drivers is so common that the ARB mentioned it as a possible risk that could be generated by Castilleja's proposed commercial development in a residential neighborhood. We cannot put our children's lives at risk. So that is a big problem related to traffic.
4. Traffic creates noise and air pollution, and also harms our natural environment. We cannot afford to continue our reliance on single use vehicles.

I would work to fix these problems by considering the following:

1. Most of transit is taken by residents, not workers, so we need to recognize that we always will need transit.
2. Re transit: Re-opening the idea of undergrounding the train, given that moving the train underground would clear up virtually every congested intersection in Palo Alto, opening a wide variety of ways to travel between Palo Alto's eastern and western neighborhoods...and potentially creating 50 acres of land that Palo Alto can use for housing.
3. Investing heavily in affordable housing near jobs so that workers don't have to commute.

4. Investing heavily in regional transit, so that workers who have no choice but to commute at very least don't have to drive.
5. Investing in a local transit, ideally connected to parking lots near freeways, to give drivers of single-occupancy-vehicles non-car options.
6. Explore reserving best routes for shuttle and carpool only.
7. Invest in protected bike lanes and pedestrian bike bridges.
8. Limit office construction generally, and outright ban commercial construction in residential neighborhoods. No potential harm to our children or seniors is an acceptable risk.

## **LYDIA KOU**

The basic problem is that our streets are overloaded. This creates safety problems on those streets and the residential streets that are used to bypass the congestion. Vehicles idling in the congestion also increase Green House Gases. Congestion also narrows people's lives by increasing to unacceptable levels the time spent traveling to an activity or to see friends. I have heard from seniors that they stopped going to recuperative exercise classes because those classes were scheduled during the ever longer peak traffic hours. And one neighbor was told by a physical therapist that he was dropping most at-home visits in Palo Alto because of the unpaid extra travel time.

How to fix them? When you find you have dug yourself deep into a hole, the first thing to do is stop digging!

## **ED LAUING**

The most serious issue in traffic is the lack of ANY large, high-quality public mass transportation system on the peninsula. Caltrain was good – not excellent. Right now their capacity is down by 97% and they are desperately in need of financing. This will likely get done one way or another because we can't afford to lose that single course of mass transit for the peninsula. But fixed rail alone cannot meet our transportation needs.

More locally, post covid, we have to get serious about creating a very good local shuttle system and get it operational. That can be in the planning stages now. We need to make sure city investments in the Transportation Management Association are matched by investments from the business community, expand the ambitions of the TMA, and improve reporting of measurable outcomes. And we must require standards, monitoring, and accountability for Traffic Demand Management programs promised by developers as mitigations for traffic impacts.

## **STEVEN LEE**

*[Answerd in conjunction with the question "Should businesses be responsible for reducing traffic and parking impacts? Should the businesses pay for the remedies and how? What is the City's role?."]*

Businesses and our city have a shared role in reducing traffic and parking impacts. We have to acknowledge that our city council for decades have approved unchecked office growth without requiring the necessary housing to go along with it. We, through our elected officials, have enabled this problem in the first place. It is important that we elect candidates this coming November who will get serious about traffic and parking impacts and acknowledge the huge role housing (or rather the lack of housing) has played in generating these traffic and parking impacts. The city needs to get serious about building more market rate and affordable housing near transit corridors and near job centers in order to get our 3-1 jobs to housing imbalance under control. That is the only real way we are going to address traffic and parking impacts. We also need to ask our larger, still profitable businesses to step up, pay their fair share and invest in the services and infrastructure necessary to reduce traffic and parking impacts and more generally support the needs of our community.

## **RAVEN MALONE**

Many of the folks who work in our community are unable to live here because of the housing crisis, and have to make long commutes as a result. This, coupled with our continued reliance on automobile transportation and lack of adequate public transit, causes major issues for traffic congestion. Making sure that our workers can live here in Palo Alto by building housing that is affordable to all of them is the first step in solving this issue. We also need to make sure that everyone who lives in our city has a reliable way to get around on public transit.

Building new housing around transit hubs will ensure the convenience of using public transit, along with developing protected bike lanes around the city.

## **GREER STONE**

Traffic consistently ranks as the number one issue for most Palo Altans but every year our traffic increases. Our city's congestion is nothing new, but it has continued to worsen as large-scale office buildings are approved; bringing in thousands of new drivers every day. And if we do not decide on grade-crossing separations soon, our city will see unprecedented gridlock.

Palo Alto has an ambitious goal of reducing greenhouse gas emissions to 80% of 1990 levels by 2030. Transportation makes up 60% of all Palo Alto's greenhouse gas emissions. We will not be able to meet that goal if we are not able to reduce the dependency on single-occupancy vehicles commuting into our city every day. I am so honored to have received the endorsement of the Sierra Club, and I believe my policies will help not only relieve traffic congestion but also make meaningful strides towards our climate goals.

The COVID-19 pandemic has been a horrific tragedy, but shelter-in-place has revealed the potential of commuterless work. The County of Santa Clara, in conjunction with local jurisdictions, is exploring policies to promote greater telecommuting after this pandemic has ended. Palo Alto should also consider exploring policies to promote and encourage telecommuting, so we can begin switching from a commuter town plagued with traffic congestion to a resident-focused community. Not only will this reduce traffic, but all the woes it brings with it: parking demand, congested streets, and unhealthy air quality. And it could feasibly free up office space for additional housing production.

We can, and must, have a city that recognizes that people use cars in the Bay Area, but also construct new bike lanes and walking paths to strongly encourage alternatives to single-occupancy vehicles. We must invest in more public transportation. Partner with local jurisdictions to expand public transportation, and collaborate with the school district to provide shuttles to schools, and promote different forms of travel such as ride-sharing apps, or encouraging employees to carpool to work.

## **GREG TANAKA**

Palo Altans have consistently expressed concern about increased traffic and congestion on local streets and ever-harder-to-find parking, as well as the growing impact of development on both issues. [According to a ballot measure survey in 2020](#), 53% of respondents said that traffic and congestion on local streets and roads are a concern. The city is charged with preserving the quality of life in Palo Alto. Post COVID-19, with the rise of remote work, we need to revisit that equation and look for innovative new approaches that meet the need of residents.

## **CARI TEMPLETON**

The intermixing of bike riders with vehicular traffic is dangerous and unfortunately occasionally deadly. Because our city is so bike friendly and pedestrian friendly, we must also design our travel paths for bikes and pedestrians. Our Bicycle & Pedestrian Transportation Plan includes many ideas on how we can improve, and we can look for more inspiration for creative pathways throughout the Bay Area. I also appreciate the Shared Streets program that we are piloting during the pandemic as a way to reduce vehicular traffic in neighborhoods to make it safer for bikes and pedestrians.

## **AJIT VARMA**

We need more safety for cyclists by fixing the intersections that have been identified as dangerous and building better bike routes.