



2022 City Council Candidate Questions

TRANSPORTATION/TRAFFIC

Regarding Grade Separation, what is your personal design preference (underpass, hybrid, trench, etc) for each of the three locations?

PAT BURT

Based on the preliminary engineering performed to date, my preference is for the underpass at Meadow and Charleston, provided that property impacts can be minimized or eliminated. At Churchill, based on lower projections of future trains and commuter traffic, I believe that we likely do not need to proceed with a grade separation or closure for the foreseeable future. Instead, I believe that a combination of signal optimization, vehicle and pedestrian improvements (underway) to significantly improve safety, next generation technologies for track security, and quiet zones or wayside horns to drastically reduce or eliminate horn noise (in addition to the now far quieter electric trains will achieve over 80% of the need benefits of a grade separation without the negative impacts associated with the partial underpass and its construction.

KATIE CAUSEY

Having grown up in Palo Alto during the youth suicide clusters my first choice has always been the viaduct as it offers the most separation from trains and people. However, my top priority is that grade rail separation is completed and is not delayed as we need to protect our community, currently my first choice is the underpass, but we are still researching the possibilities for all three locations.

ANNE CRIBBS

It is past time to make decisions to help cars, trucks, and bikes get across town. I lived on Military Way in Barron Park. Two of my children biked across El Camino and Alma and the East Meadow railroad crossing to JLS. I worried every day. We must move forward to build safe crossings for all with no more delays.

Since traffic volumes will continue to increase, even by modest amounts, cumulative traffic numbers mean we must plan for the future as cities build housing up and down the peninsula.

Let's design the crossing at Charleston first. Lessons learned there can improve our choices at other crossings. Waiting for gridlock will make construction more painful. Additional money poured into consultant fees will not get us to a perfect solution. The shot clock is running; let's score!

HENRY ETZKOWITZ

Did not respond.

GEORGE LU

For Churchill, I'd prefer closing the street, with further analysis of options to support capacity along Page Mill and Embarcadero. While the option to develop a partial underpass is reasonable, closure is much less expensive, avoids eminent domain, and better serves Paly students and cyclists.

On Meadow and Charleston, I prefer the hybrid approach. This is likely fiscally responsible, avoids eminent domain, and is more intuitive to pedestrians and cyclists. This is a standard solution across other cities for a reason.

Ultimately, there is no perfect option. We need to develop clearer engineering plans, but we actually need to move forward. Years of discussion have resulted in less feasible and more expensive plans, and we should strive to benefit generations of Palo Altans on both transportation and safety.

KEITH RECKDAHL

I served on the Community Advisory Panel for grade separations so I'm well aware of the options and how difficult the choices will be. Provided its property acquisitions can be reduced, I favor the underpass for Meadow/Charleston for two main reasons: 1) it allows bikes and pedestrians to be fully separated from Alma, which would make things much safer, particularly for kids on bikes, and 2) because the Underpass is the only alternative that would actually improve the traffic at the intersections because it would remove the signal interruption by bikes and pedestrians. Before making any decision, the existing very preliminary conceptual designs need significant refinement including reduced property acquisitions and better bike/ped implementation.

For Churchill, I think we need to wait. There are a variety of improvements that can be made in the interim such as quad-gates that can help with incursions, improved fencing, and improved track security measures. But the need for a grade separation at Churchill is a very low priority for the City at this time.

GREER STONE

I'm maintaining an open mind regarding the grade separation alternatives currently under consideration. While I lean toward the underpass option at the Meadow/Charleston crossings, I do have concerns about potential property takings associated with this plan. As it stands, the designs are only at 5% completion. To better understand the impacts on our neighborhoods, including property implications and traffic conditions, I supported advancing both the underpass and hybrid options to 15% preliminary engineering design. The hybrid option raises additional concerns for me, as it could create a significant barrier that divides our community without demonstrably improving traffic flow at these crossings.

For the Churchill crossing, I backed the advancement of the partial underpass alternative. During this design phase, we aim to refine plans for Churchill, Meadow, and Charleston to minimize property impacts, enhance bicycle and pedestrian connectivity, and optimize infrastructure improvements. This includes mitigating the traffic circle impacts of the Charleston Road Underpass Alternative and ensuring compliance with environmental documentation requirements.

DORIA SUMMA

Since Cal-Train ridership has dropped by more than 50% since this project was initiated, I support a thorough re-examination of all options that increase safety -- such as quad gates --without requiring hugely expensive and disruptive infrastructure projects that will also take private property. If we do need to proceed, my personal preference is either trenching or viaducting for the rail line. The Council has authorized additional design work on options for three crossings. I will closely evaluate the findings of this study, however, I do not support options that require taking private property.

CARI TEMPLETON

The City of Palo Alto has been working on design options for grade separation for the rail crossing for a decade and a half, and has recently narrowed down to two options for the south Palo Alto crossings, both of which many residents find undesirable: the hybrid and the underpass (Charleston roundabout). Both of these have flaws that many Palo Altans would find unacceptable, including the large number of property takings the City would have to conduct. There is one option the council did not fully consider or explore, which is the viaduct, which will not require takings of properties and could be quieter and cheaper in the long run. I would like to see us explore that option and at least the level of detail we're looking at for the hybrid and the underpass options.

For Churchill, I prefer no change for now, because the road will remain accessible for school buses without creating additional dangerous intersection elements for vehicles and bikes crossing Alma. However, we should explore what relationship a viaduct in South Palo Alto would have to options for Churchill to inform our longer term approach.

For the crossing at Palo Alto Avenue which has been put on the back burner for some time, the City should study options and make a decision as soon as feasible, because the infrastructure supporting the railroad tracks at this site is deteriorating rapidly.