

COASTAL RAIL TRAIL
Project Working Group Meeting
March 26, 2014

Members in Attendance

Andy Hanshaw, San Diego County Bicycle Coalition
Debby Knight, Friends of Rose Canyon
Janay Kruger, University Community Planning Group
Peter Krysl, University Community Planning Group
Joe LaCava, La Jolla Community Planning Association
Karin Zirk, Friends of Rose Creek

City and Agency Staff/Consultants in Attendance

City Staff

Abi Palaseyed, City of San Diego
Nitsuh Aberra, City of San Diego
Mel Millstein, City of San Diego

Agency Staff

Chris Carterette, SANDAG

Consultants

Larry Thornburgh, Nasland Engineering
Mike Singleton, KTU+A
Mark Carpenter, KTU+A
Dick Rol, AECOM
Kristen Byrne, MJE Marketing Services

1. Call to Order

Abi Palaseyed called the meeting to order at 5:15 p.m.

2. Meeting Overview, Administrative Items and Public Workshop Summary

Abi provided an overview of what we hope to accomplish today, and indicated that the final report will capture all input from the Project Working Group and other information generated during the process. A draft report will be made available for the Project Working Group to review when it is complete. Abi explained that at the meeting today we are asking the PWG members to rank the remaining alternatives. Those that were not able to attend the meeting today were asked to submit their ranking by email.

Abi handed out a summary of the input received from the public workshop.

3. Alternative Alignments to Move Forward

Larry Thornburgh provided a recap of the review of alternatives throughout the process. Based on this review process, alternatives 2, 4, 5, and 7 were the top scoring alternatives.

Q: (Karen Zirk) Alternative 6 was included on the rating card. Why was it included if it is not one of the top 4?

A: Alternatives 2, 5, and 7 scored the highest, and alternative 4 was supported by the UCPG as an alternate to their preferred alternative (alternative 2). Alternative 6 was not actively eliminated by the PWG (like baseline, alternative 1 and alternative 3 were), but it is lowest scoring of top five alternates.

Q: (Joe La Cava) Didn't alternative 4 receive the lowest score?

A: Alternatives 4 and 6 are very close. It was brought forward because the UCPG supported it as an alternative if we needed one.

Q: (Peter Krysl) Two of the alternatives were scored with a cost of \$11M for the Caltrans I-5 segment. This has now been funded, and if the alternatives were re-evaluated, alternatives 2 and 4 would score much higher. I'm concerned that the evaluation rankings will be carried through environmental analysis. I don't want wrong information to be carried through.

A: These evaluation rankings will not be taken into account in the environmental review.

C: (Peter Krysl) Even though it isn't part of the environmental review, it is still part of the record and should be corrected.

A: Any adjustments undertaken to the evaluation rankings would only have minor effects on the overall scores and not affect the alternatives moving forward.

Q: (Janay Kruger) Are you out of money now? Will this go to City Council to determine alternatives to study?

A: We aren't out of money, but we have to evaluate the budget and amend the contract to move forward into environmental review.

Q: I thought we were supposed to select a preferred alternative, but now we are being asked to rank alternatives to present to City Council to make a decision.

A: A final report will include a ranking of alternatives by the PWG and other elements (evaluation criteria, public workshop comments, staff recommendation). The City Council can choose what to move forward with (all or a subset).

4. CEQA/NEPA Process

Dick Rol provided a review of the CEQA/NEPA process. Design of the alternatives will need to get more specific for the environmental review process to be completed.

The project will have to go through both CEQA and NEPA because it includes federal funding. The processes are similar, but not identical. Both require that a "reasonable range of alternatives" be evaluated. There is no required number, and the number of alternatives studied depends on the situation.

The purpose of CEQA/NEPA review is to inform and disclose potential impacts of alternatives to support informed decision making.

Dick reviewed the steps of the environmental review process and where public input is sought:

1. **Notice of Preparation (NOP)/Notice of Intent (NOI)** – Public notices are published and there is a 30-day comment period to allow the public the opportunity to comment on the scope of the environmental document.

2. **Technical studies/Design/Draft document**
3. **Public review of draft document** – The draft document is made available for public review and comment for a period of at least 45 days.
4. **Response to comments/produce final document** – The agency prepares responses to comments received on the draft and publishes these responses in the final document.
5. **Public hearing** – The decision-making body makes a decision about whether or not to approve the project. The public can submit comments in writing to decision makers and/or speak at the public hearing.

The CEQA/NEPA process does not pick a project. It only discloses information for decision makers to use to make an informed decision. NEPA requires that an Environmentally Preferred Alternative be identified and requires that all alternatives be analyzed to same level of detail.

Q (Karen Zirk): Will this also go to City Council before environmental review begins? Will they address alternatives that have been evaluated?

A: We need to amend the consultant contract, and the Council will have the opportunity to address alternatives at that time, if they wish to do so.

Q: Who is the lead agency on the project?

A: The city is lead agency for CEQA, and Caltrans is the lead agency for NEPA.

Q (Kathy Keehan): It is my hope that we can come up with compromise alternative that pleases everyone, but this will require some very specific design work. Will we have the opportunity during environmental review to work together to review the design work to potentially build an alternative that we can agree on?

A: It is possible to create a new alternative, but if a new alternative is selected, we need to make sure we have the right level of detail in the analysis to support it.

Q: (Kathy Keehan) If we wanted the City to study an alternative that didn't have water quality impacts, or didn't abide by specific grades, when would we have an opportunity to do that? I don't anticipate adding new segments, but want some design flexibility. If we analyze canyon segments, can we look at alternate routes that might be less impactful?

A: The ideal time to suggest this is during the scoping period where you can suggest what should be included in environmental analysis. Alternatives will also have a more detailed description at this time. We would like to have enough specifics for each alternative to be able to adequately study them (grading footprint, surface, lighting, etc.).

Q: (Peter Krysl) The EIR will need to be worked out under some constraints. If scoping changes the criteria significantly by redesigning something else, it might not be consistent with what we have discussed here.

A: This should be a very honest process. There would have to be significant reasons to deviate from what we have been discussing in this process. But scoping also provides an opportunity to "course correct," if needed. Perhaps the working group can be reconvened if a new hybrid or deviation from a corridor route comes up in the initial phases of the environmental, engineering and design process.

Q: (Joe La Cava) In light of what I've heard, when the final report comes out is it appropriate to have another meeting with the PWG to go over the design before the scoping process?

A: This is a good suggestion. We will need to discuss when the best time is for this since design specifics will evolve after scoping and during environmental review.

Q (Karen Zirk): How can you reconcile the "coastal" and "rail" goals with this project? We are doing neither. It doesn't apply to this situation.

A: The Coastal Rail Trail has the user experience and concern for safety and connectivity as its primary goal, so following the rail line with limited vehicular presence and road crossing points is the primary focus. The coastal part is about a wide corridor and not specifically along the coast. The CRT project realizes that it can not follow the rail line in all locations, but the user experience and distance away from vehicular traffic should still be kept in mind.

Q (Debby Knight): NEPA does allow a preferred alternative and I would like to suggest that alternative 2 be identified as the preferred alternative. It scored the best, and has the most public support. The contract for Nasland has a deliverable of identifying a preferred alternative. I think we should identify this now and move it forward to Council. It raises red flags if you don't identify alternative 2 when all of your efforts to date (technical evaluation and public input) have led to this alternative. What was this process for?

A: From a process perspective, this can be done. But sometimes this shouldn't be done until a more detailed analysis is complete to make sure we have enough information to make a decision on what the locally preferred alternative should be. The results from the public outreach will reflect the facts that alternative 2 received the most support from the community and PWG.

C (Janay Kruger): We did identify an alternative for the Mid-Coast Trolley. I want to hear from SANDAG on this.

C (Andy Hanshaw): I think we should move forward with numerous alternatives for study without choosing a preferred alternative right now.

Q (Karen Zirk): Identifying the alternative that was preferred by the PWG sends a message to those that will be involved in the future that the community was involved in the alternative selection.

C (Debby Knight): Saying that there is no preferred alternative undercuts your credibility given all the public input and evaluation that leads to alternative 2.

Q (Janay Kruger): Who will be writing the document? Do you have a budget?

A: Aecom will draft the document as a subconsultant to Nasland, but this is a city document. We do not have a budget yet, but expect to have one soon.

Q (Karen Zirk): If we decided to designate a PWG preferred alternative at this point, when would the community have a chance to weigh in on this in the environmental process?

A: It can change anytime along the way, and a different alternative than preferred could be selected.

C (Karen Zirk): So the PWG could pick a preferred alternative, and that could be revisited at another time?

A: Yes, this is possible. We could have another check-in with the PWG at a time when there is more information available.

Q (Janay Kruger): Would you prefer to hear from environmental attorneys earlier or later in the process? Who is the city attorney on this project?

A: Shannon Thomas is the city attorney for this project. The scoping period is a good time for getting involved.

C (Joe La Cava): I suggest that we vote on a PWG preferred alternative and have it reflected in the minutes.

Joe La Cava made a motion to support alternative 2 as the PWG preferred alternative. The motion was seconded by Debby Knight. The motion carried on a vote of 5-1.

5. Next Steps

Nitsuh Aberra thanked the PWG and the community for working with the City throughout this process. She then shared what the next steps in the process will be. A draft final report will be prepared and shared with the PWG (anticipated this summer). After this, a contract amendment will be taken to City Council to authorize moving forward with the environmental review process (anticipated in the fall). The CEQA/NEPA environmental review process is expected to take about 12-18 months to complete. Once complete the project would go to City Council for a decision.

6. Adjourn

The meeting was adjourned at 6:25 p.m.