

OREGON EXPRESSWAY IMPROVEMENT PROJECT

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

General Project Questions

What is the Oregon Expressway Improvement Project?

The Oregon Expressway Improvement Project **proposes to make operational, pedestrian and bicycle safety improvements at intersections** along Oregon Expressway between West Bayshore and Bryant. The project will enhance safety and improve operational efficiency for all modes of travel at Oregon Expressway intersections, including lane configuration changes on cross streets. The need for the project was identified as part of the 2003 Comprehensive County Expressway Planning Study. The key elements of the project, as listed in the Expressway Study, are as follows:

- Replace signal hardware and optimize signal timing plan avoiding impacts on safety at unsignalized intersections.
- Construct pedestrian curb ramps with relocation of traffic signal poles at signalized intersections.
- Study operational changes at the unsignalized intersections at Waverley, Ross, and Indian that avoid increasing traffic impacts on cross and parallel streets, enhance bicycle and pedestrian safety, and maintain vehicle safety.
- Conduct a feasibility study of adding turn lane at Middlefield Road and converting to 8-phase signal operation to enhance efficiency and safety without taking right-of-way.

What is the Comprehensive County Expressway Planning Study?

The Comprehensive County Expressway Planning Study provides a long-term plan for the improvement and maintenance of the County Expressway System. It covers all types of capital improvements, operational and maintenance needs, and funding strategies for the 62 miles of expressways. Approximately \$2 billion in capital and operational improvement needs were identified for roadway, bicycle, and pedestrian projects for the 8 expressways in the County Expressway System. The Expressway Study was adopted by the County Board of Supervisors in 2003 after it was endorsed by all affected cities, including the Palo Alto City Council on August 14, 2003. A full copy of the Expressway Study is available for download at www.expressways.info.

What is the budget for the project and where does the money come from?

The Oregon Expressway Improvement Project has secured approximately \$3.5 million including a federal grant and County match to implement the above-proposed improvements on Oregon Expressway between West Bayshore and Bryant.

What is the project schedule?

April 3, 2008	First Community Meeting
April to June 2008	Alternatives Development
June 9, 2008	Second Community Meeting
Throughout 2008	Alternatives Refinement
Early 2009	City of Palo Alto Planning and Transportation Commission
Mid 2009	City of Palo Alto City Council Approval of Project Scope
Mid 2009	County Board of Supervisors Approval of Project Scope
2009 - 2010	Environmental Clearance, Design and Construction

What is the community input process for Oregon Expressway Project?

Extensive community outreach is a key component of the planning phase of the project. The process began with a community workshop on April 3, 2008, to inquire about the public's experiences in using and crossing Oregon Expressway and the types of improvements they would like to see. On June 9, 2008, a second community workshop was held where staff presented a range of alternatives for various intersections that were developed in direct response to the comments/concerns received during the April community outreach process. The purpose of the June 9 workshop was to receive input about the alternatives to help refine the alternatives and develop recommendations.

Additional project forums to provide information and receive input include:

- A project website: www.oregonexpressway.info.
- A project e-mail address: comments@oregonexpressway.info.
- A phone number where people could call in comments or request a questionnaire to fill out: 408-494-2700.
- Questionnaires from each workshop that could be mailed or faxed to the County.

In addition, County staff attended meetings with interested organizations to present the alternatives and receive input. These organizations included the Palo Alto Bicycle Advisory Committee (PABAC), County Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Committee (BPAC), the Mid-Town Neighborhood Association, and the Ohlone School Parent/Teacher Association.

Future opportunities for public input and comment will also be provided when staff's recommended alternatives are brought to the Palo Alto Planning and Transportation Commission, Palo Alto City Council, and County Board of Supervisors in 2009.

Why wasn't I invited to the community meetings?

Various methods of notification were used to advertise the community meetings with the goal of notifying all residents near Oregon Expressways as well as all users of Oregon Expressway. For each community meeting, postcards were sent to over 3,200 households within a quarter mile radius of the project limits. The meetings were advertised in two local newspapers. In addition, e-mails were sent to various community/neighborhood groups asking them to notify their memberships about the workshops.

Who is the lead agency for the project and what is the approval process?

The County of Santa Clara Roads and Airports Department is the lead agency for planning and implementing the project. The project scope is being developed in collaboration with the City of Palo Alto, and the final project scope (i.e., list of improvements) will be approved by both the Palo Alto City Council and County Board of Supervisors prior to design and construction.

What is the environmental process? How can I get a copy of any environmental documents?

The environmental document is prepared before a project is approved but after the project has been fully defined so that the appropriate environmental process and environmental documents can be determined. The project is receiving federal funding so National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) clearance will be required. We are in the public outreach stage for project planning and are still collecting public input in order to refine the project description and to clearly define the project needs and alternatives. Once we have an approved project definition/scope of work, then the appropriate NEPA environmental process will begin.

Project Scope Questions

What locations and types of improvements may be included in the project?

The goal of the project is to facilitate and enhance travel for all modes of transportation, with special attention to pedestrian and bicycle needs. To achieve the goal, modifications within the intersection areas could include replacing old traffic signal hardware to modernize equipment and operations, and making minor changes to side streets for a short distance as needed to improve signal operations and optimize signal timing including coordination of Oregon Expressway traffic lights. Intersection improvements will include **a short segment** along the following cross streets to the North and South of Oregon Expressway: West Bayshore, Indian, Greer, Louis, Ross, Middlefield, Cowper, Waverley, and Bryant.

Why are side street improvements included this project?

Modifications to the lane configurations at cross streets are necessary in order to:

1. Reduce pedestrian, bicycle, and vehicular traffic conflicts at the expressway intersections
2. Achieve smoother traffic flow on the expressway

These issues have been raised as major community concerns. However, any modifications to side streets will require approval by the City of Palo Alto.

What happened to my comments for the Oregon/El Camino Real intersection from the April 3 community meeting? What is planned for this intersection?

The City of Palo Alto is studying improvement options for this intersection to be funded by Palo Alto's Traffic Mitigation Fund. Comments/concerns received about this intersection through the community outreach process have been forwarded to the City.

Has a traffic study been done regarding any of the intersection alternatives? When will the data available to the public for review?

A traffic analysis report is being prepared and will be shared on the project website once it becomes available in late October 2008.

Will the project make Oregon Expressway more like a freeway?

No. During the 2003 Expressway Study, the following vision was developed for Oregon Expressway: "a multimodal, pedestrian friendly arterial roadway with slower, smooth-flowing traffic." The project aspires to achieve this vision by smoothing the flow of traffic on Oregon, reducing pollution from cars idling at red lights, and keeping cars on Oregon rather than using neighborhood streets to bypass red lights. This 2-mile stretch of roadway will continue to be 4 lanes wide and maintain its existing 7 traffic lights (average of one signal every quarter mile). The project will maintain the existing 35 miles per hour speed limit and improve pedestrian and bicycle crossings of the expressway.

Will the project include sound walls?

No, sound walls are **not** part of this Oregon Expressway Improvement Project. They are not an eligible use of the grant funds for the project. Several people complained about noise levels and some requested sound walls during the April 2008 community input process but the County's response was that they are outside project scope. The 2003 Comprehensive County Expressway Planning Study did include a noise analysis for all eight expressways and noted that additional noise mitigation is needed for Oregon Expressway; however, determining the types of noise mitigation improvements would require a separate project that would be subject to its own community outreach process should future funding become available for noise mitigation.

Will the project include pedestrian overcrossings?

No. Pedestrian overcrossings (POCs) are bridges that span over freeways, expressways, creeks, and other pedestrian barriers. There were several public comments suggesting pedestrian overcrossings or undercrossings be built at certain intersections to separate pedestrians/bicycles from automobiles. POCs are **not** in the project scope for the following reasons:

- POCs are not recommended for intersections – POCs are used in mid-blocks along freeways and expressways where the nearest at-grade crossing is outside convenient walking distance. They tend to be ineffective at intersections because people choose to just cross the street rather than go up and down the bridge ramps.
- Building POCs as part of the project are not feasible due to right-of-way and cost – The long ramps needed to go up and down POCs would likely require taking a significant amount of yard space and/or all of the homes on corners. In addition, a single POC can cost from \$6 million to \$10 million. The entire project budget is only \$3.5 million.

What are the pedestrian ramps that will be included in the project?

Pedestrian ramps are wheel-chair accessible curb ramps which transition from the curb at the corner to the roadway to facilitate pedestrian, wheelchair and bicycle crossing. They must meet current Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) design requirements (e.g., sloping angles, texture, color).

Will the project include sidewalks along the south side of Oregon Expressway?

The project might include some sidewalk gap closures. As part of the 2008 Update to the 2003 Expressway Study, pedestrian route plans are being developed for all 8 expressways. The draft pedestrian route map for Oregon Expressway was shared at the June 9, 2008, community workshop. The map includes the Oregon Avenue frontage road for pedestrian travel along the north side of the expressway and a mix of existing sidewalks, frontage/parallel streets, and proposed new sidewalks for the south side. In response to public concerns about lack of space for sidewalks west of Waverley to High Street, these locations will be marked very long term and will only be built should demand develop and/or the area redevelops.

The Oregon Expressway Project's improvement alternatives include filling in sidewalk gaps along the south side to connect pedestrians from the unsignalized intersections (Indian, Ross, and Waverley) to the nearest signalized intersections for access to the north side of the expressway. The following sidewalk gaps may be included if project budget allows: Waverley to Anton Court; Cowper to Tasso; Middlefield to Ross; and Greer to Indian. For some of these segments, there are already worn dirt paths indicating existing pedestrian demand.

Will the project remove any existing sidewalks on Oregon or the cross streets?

No. None of the improvement alternatives involve removing existing sidewalks on Oregon Expressway or any of the cross streets. Some sidewalks may be modified at intersection corners to provide pedestrian curb ramps, but no sidewalk gaps will be created.

Why doesn't the project include improvements for the Oregon Expressway undercrossing of Alma?

The 2003 Expressway Study identified the need to reconstruct the Alma/Oregon Expressway interchange as a separate project from the Oregon Expressway Improvement Project. It is expected that reconstruction could cost upwards of \$130 million (2008 dollars) due to the complexity of this project involving the railroad as well as the two roadways and the very limited right-of-way. The first step is to conduct a feasibility study at a cost of approximately \$300,000 that will take 1 to 2 years to complete. This feasibility study is not an eligible use of the federal grant funds available for the Oregon Expressway Improvement Project.

Public Comment Response Questions

How can I provide input or comments on the project?

The first cut-off date for consideration of comments was July 19, 2008. However, continuous public participation is welcome and essential for alternative development and refinement. Comments are appreciated by email at comments@oregonexpressway.info or by fax at (408) 298-3806.

What happened with the comments received during and after the April 3, 2008, community meeting?

The purpose of this workshop was to receive input about the public's experiences in using and crossing Oregon Expressway and types of improvements they would like to see. All the comments were summarized in a community outreach report available for download from the project's website (www.oregonexpressway.info). Also available on the project website is a listing of all comments received with staff's response to each comment. Concerns/comments about issues outside the project scope (e.g., noise, speeding, landscaping maintenance, other streets) were referred to the appropriate agency. Concerns/comments about issues relevant to the project scope helped form the range of alternatives shared at the June 9 community meeting.

What will happen with the comments received during and after the June 9, 2008, community meeting?

As part of the comments and alternatives evaluation process, **ALL** comments received after the second community meeting are being tabulated. All comments received to date are being considered as part of intersection alternative design development and refinement. A second community outreach report and the list of comments and responses to the comments will be posted on the project website once they become available. We will send a notification e-mail to all interested parties that have contacted us when the project website is updated.

Who is responsible for maintaining pavement and fixing potholes on Oregon Expressway?

The County of Santa Clara Roads and Airports Department is responsible for pavement maintenance on Oregon Expressway from El Camino Real to West Bayshore. The State Department of Transportation (Caltrans) is responsible from West Bayshore to and over US 101.

Who is responsible for maintaining the landscaping along Oregon Expressway?

Most of the landscaping along Oregon Expressway is being maintained by the City of Palo Alto.

Who is responsible for enforcing speed limits and ticketing red light runners along Oregon Expressway? What is a rat box and how does it aid police enforcement for red lights?

The Palo Alto Police Department is responsible for traffic enforcement on Oregon Expressway. The Red Light Enforcement Indicators (aka Rat boxes) – so called because they "rat" on offenders – feature a small Light-Emitting Diode (LED) that faces opposite the traffic light. The LED illuminates when the traffic light cycles to red. Officers can position for stakeout in a place where they can see the limit line and the rat box simultaneously. With this **optional** device installed behind traffic signals, an officer no longer has to follow an offender through a red light to issue a ticket; he or she will already be on the far side of the intersection. Please refer to the Project website (www.oregonexpressway.info) under "related links" for a copy of the rat box training video.

How will providing left turn lanes at Oregon/Middlefield improve traffic flow on Oregon and reduce backups on Middlefield?

Currently, the Oregon/Middlefield intersection is operating at capacity during peak periods. This results in long delays for all modes of travel. Creating short left turn pockets on Middlefield will significantly improve the signal operation by allowing concurrent operation of left turns followed by through movements on Middlefield. This signal operational improvement will result in significant reductions in delay, gas consumption, and congestion for both Middlefield and Oregon Expressway. Adding left turn pockets with left turn arrows to Middlefield will allow for the coordination of Oregon Expressway signals to provide for smoother flowing traffic on the Expressways. In addition, the intersection signal cycle times can be lowered resulting in reduced delay and wait times for pedestrian and bicyclists crossing the intersection.