Agenda Item #13.1 For Council Meeting of: November 18, 2014

CITY OF SANTA ROSA CITY COUNCIL

TO: SUBJECT:	MAYOR AND CITY COUNCIL JENNINGS AVENUE PEDESTRIAN AND BICYCLE RAIL CROSSING DRAFT ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT REPORT
STAFF PRESENTER:	JESSICA JONES, SENIOR PLANNER COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT
AGENDA ACTION:	HOLD A PUBLIC HEARING AND PROVIDE COMMENTS

ISSUE(S)

Shall the Council hold a public hearing to receive public comments on the Jennings Avenue Pedestrian and Bicycle Rail Crossing Draft Environmental Impact Report (EIR)?



COUNCIL GOALS/STRATEGIES

The Jennings Avenue Pedestrian and Bicycle Rail Crossing Draft EIR supports City Council Goal 3: Provide Leadership for Environmental Initiatives, as well as Strategic Objective 1: Improve our Transportation Network to Reduce Vehicle Miles Traveled and Promote Multi-Modal Transportation. This crossing would establish another link in the bicycle and pedestrian network to serve those in the community who choose to bike and walk as a form of transportation.

BACKGROUND

- 1. On August 14, 2012, the City Council, by Resolution No. 28181, unanimously authorized a funding agreement with Sonoma Marin Area Rail Transit (SMART) to complete the environmental review and design alternatives of a grade separated bicycle and pedestrian crossing the SMART railroad corridor and Jennings Avenue.
- 2. In October 2012, SMART's contractor, Stacy and Whitbeck, Inc., completed a feasibility study of four potential layouts for the Jennings Avenue interface with the rail line, which are identified below:
 - a. <u>Alternative 1 No crossing</u>: Construction of a fence or barrier wall on the west and east side of SMART's right-of-way at Jennings Avenue.
 - <u>Alternative 2 Signalized at-grade pedestrian crossing</u>: Construction of an Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) compliant, fully signalized and protected at-grade bicycle and pedestrian crossing at Jennings Avenue,

meeting the requirements of the California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC) and the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA).

- c. <u>Alternative 3 Pedestrian overcrossing</u>: Construction of an ADA compliant, bicycle and pedestrian over-rail crossing aerial structure at Jennings Avenue, meeting the requirements of the CPUC and the FRA.
- d. <u>Alternative 4 Pedestrian undercrossing</u>: Construction of an ADA compliant, bicycle and pedestrian under-rail crossing tunnel, with elevated tracks, at Jennings Avenue with sight distances through the tunnel that allows visibility from one approach to the opposite approach, meeting the requirements of the CPUC and the FRA.
- 3. On November 13, 2012, City staff presented the results of the feasibility study to the Council, including that CPUC staff had stated that approval of an at-grade crossing at Jennings Avenue would be unlikely unless at least one existing atgrade crossing was eliminated at either W. Sixth, W. Seventh or W. Eighth Streets, near the West End Preservation District. At that meeting, the Council expressed a preference to study an at-grade pedestrian and bicycle crossing as the preferred project. The item was then continued to a future Council meeting to allow staff additional time to ascertain potential costs of environmental review.
- 4. On May 21, 2013, the Council, by Resolution No. 28284, unanimously directed City staff to complete environmental review in compliance with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) for an at-grade pedestrian and bicycle crossing of the SMART railroad corridor and Jennings Avenue, including an ADA compliant bicycle and pedestrian rail overcrossing alternative and possible removal of an existing crossing at W. Sixth, W. Seventh or W. Eighth Street.
- 5. In September 2013, GHD, Inc. was hired to assist the City in preparing an EIR for the project.

ANALYSIS

1. Overview

The Jennings Avenue Pedestrian and Bicycle Rail Crossing Draft EIR analyzes the preferred project, an at-grade pedestrian and bicycle rail crossing, and an alternative design, a pedestrian and bicycle rail overcrossing, at the same level of detail. Other alternatives included in the Draft EIR are evaluated at a lower level of detail.

It should be noted that the Council's direction on May 21, 2013 was to analyze the environmental impacts of an at-grade crossing, with a rail overcrossing as an alternative. Typically alternatives in an EIR are reviewed at a lower level of detail than the preferred project. However, following a December 4, 2013 public

scoping meeting (discussed in more detail in the Key Dates in Environmental Review Process section of this report, on page 10), in which the main issue raised was the detail at which the EIR would evaluate a potential overcrossing, it was determined by staff that the overcrossing should be analyzed at the same level of detail as the at-grade crossing. As such, the Council would have the opportunity to make a determination regarding selection of an alternative, without necessitating additional environmental review should the rail overcrossing be chosen.

2. Project Objectives

The Santa Rosa General Plan 2035, Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan, and North Santa Rosa Station Area Specific Plan (Specific Plan) identify Jennings Avenue as a bicycle boulevard, which is a shared roadway that has been modified to enhance safety, comfort and convenience for bicycle traffic. In addition, the Specific Plan also identifies a pedestrian and bicycle rail crossing at Jennings Avenue as part of the Plan's circulation system and pedestrian and bicycle network.

The proposed rail crossing would, therefore, help implement the City's bicycle and transportation planning efforts. More specifically, the project would implement the Specific Plan's primary objective which is to "support future rail transit by increasing the number of residents and employees within walking distance of the SMART station by improving pedestrian, bicycle, auto, and transit connections, increasing residential density, promoting economic development, and enhancing aesthetics and quality of life."

3. Existing Conditions

Pedestrians and bicyclists currently cross the rail corridor at Jennings Avenue, even though it is not an official crossing permitted by the CPUC. Existing railroad improvements at this location consist of raised ballast made of crushed stone supporting two sets of parallel railroad tracks. No pedestrian gates or other crossing-related improvements exist at the site.

Jennings Avenue currently terminates on either side of the rail corridor, and guard rails block the end of Jennings Avenue on either side to prevent vehicular access. On the west side of the rail corridor, a partial sidewalk is present on the north side of Jennings Avenue, while on the east side of the rail corridor, sidewalks are present on both sides of Jennings Avenue. No dedicated bicycle lanes exist along Jennings Avenue in the vicinity of the rail corridor.

A waterway with riparian vegetation and trees is located on the east side of the rail corridor between the tracks and Jennings Avenue. The Citywide Creek Master Plan identifies the waterway as Steele Creek, which flows north to Guerneville Road, then west to Piner Creek. The Sonoma County Water Agency

owns and maintains the waterway. Pedestrians and bicyclists currently cross the waterway at a storm drain box culvert.

A Sonoma County Water Agency high pressure aqueduct is located below the ground parallel to the rail corridor on the west side. City pipelines connecting to the aqueduct are located beneath the site.

W. Sixth, W. Seventh and W. Eighth Streets, where one rail crossing closure would be required as part of the preferred project, currently provide at-grade crossings of the rail corridor for vehicles, pedestrians and bicyclists. W. Sixth, W. Seventh and W. Eighth Streets are two-lane roads with sidewalks on either side (with the exception of the south side of W. Sixth Street where there is no sidewalk). No sidewalks or improved pathways currently cross the rail corridor at these sites, however, pedestrians and bicyclists can use the roadway surface. Railroad improvements at these locations include two sets of parallel railroad corridors. Standard railroad warning devices are in place at each vehicular crossing, but the warning devices are not currently active.

On October 10, 2013, pedestrian and bicycle counts at Jennings Avenue and the rail corridor were collected over a period of eight hours, including morning (7 a.m. – 9 a.m.), midday (11 a.m. – 1:00 p.m.), afterschool (1:30 p.m. – 3:30 p.m.), and evening periods (4:00 p.m. – 6:00 p.m.).

A total of 25 bicyclists and 91 pedestrians used the crossing over the observed periods. Ninety percent or more of the bicyclists were categorized as recreational users. Of the pedestrians, approximately 30 percent were characterized as school related trips.

On October 10, 2013, pedestrian and bicycle counts were also collected at W. Sixth, W. Seventh and W. Eighth Streets and the SMART rail corridor over a period of eight hours, including morning, midday, after school, and evening periods. At W. Sixth Street, 153 bicyclists and 508 pedestrians were observed using the crossing. At W. Seventh Street, 165 bicyclists and 329 pedestrians were observed using crossing. And at W. Eighth Street, 154 bicyclists and 185 pedestrians were observed using the crossing. Approximately eighty percent or more of the bicyclists and pedestrians using the crossings at W. Sixth, W. Seventh and W. Eighth streets were characterized as recreational users.

4. Project Description

Preferred Project (At-Grade Rail Crossing)

The Preferred Project would consist of an at-grade pedestrian and bicycle rail crossing at Jennings Avenue.

To construct an at-grade rail crossing in this location, the City would be required to obtain approvals from the CPUC, which is the State agency that regulates railroads and rail transit. In the event that the City constructs a new at-grade rail crossing at Jennings Avenue, CPUC staff has suggested that the City close one or two other rail crossings within the City, namely at W. Sixth, W. Seventh or W. Eighth Street, so that the total number of permitted at-grade rail crossings in the City would stay the same or be reduced. Therefore, as part of the Preferred Project, the City has included the potential closure of one existing at-grade rail crossing.

In accordance with direction from CPUC staff, the Transportation and Public Works Department requested that the Draft EIR evaluate the closure of one existing rail crossing, at either W. Sixth, W. Seventh or W. Eighth Street, in exchange for a new at-grade rail crossing at Jennings Avenue. It was also determined that the Draft EIR would not evaluate the closure of two crossings, as it be unacceptable to the City based on circulation and emergency access issues.

Construction of an at-grade pedestrian and bicycle rail crossing at Jennings Avenue would include installation of crossing surfaces across the SMART rail corridor. The conceptual layout of the at-grade rail crossing is shown on Figure 2-2 of the Draft EIR. A visual simulation of an at-grade rail crossing at Jennings Avenue is shown in Section 3.1 Aesthetics, Figure 3.1-5 of the Draft EIR.

The design of the at-grade rail crossing would be ADA-compliant and would include warning devices in compliance with federal and state regulations. ADA compliant warning devices and pathway improvements for the at-grade rail crossing would include flashing light signal assemblies with automatic gate arms, warning signs, pedestrian gates, hand rails, paving, walkways, and fencing. Warning devices would indicate when a train was approaching and would trigger gate arms to block pedestrian access. Because the site consists of a double track, electronic signs would be installed to notify pedestrians if a second train is coming in close proximity to the first crossing. Exit swing gates would be provided to allow pedestrians to exit the track, if the gate arms were activated while a pedestrian was crossing. Vandal-resistant fencing, such as wrought-iron fencing, five to six feet in height would be installed, parallel with the tracks, to direct pedestrians to the crossing.

The pathway leading to the crossing would be asphalt or concrete and a minimum of 8 feet wide with 2-foot shoulders on either side. On the west side of the rail corridor, the pathway would align with the sidewalk on the northern side of Jennings Avenue, and would open to a portion of the street for bicycle traffic. On the east side of the rail corridor, the pathway would cross Steele Creek at the location of an existing box culvert. The pathway would then align with the sidewalk on the northern side of Jennings Avenue east of the rail corridor.

Connectivity would also be provided to the SMART multi-use path on the east side of the rail corridor. A new street lamp would also be installed on the east side of the rail corridor near the northwest corner of Herbert Avenue and Jennings Avenue.

Closure of an at-grade rail crossing at W. Sixth, W. Seventh or W. Eighth Streets would include removal of the existing roadway crossing surfaces from the rail corridor, and removal of the signal components. Following removal of the crossing surfaces, the railroad track ballast and railroad ties would be restored, as necessary. A vehicle guard rail or other type of traffic barricade would be installed, and vandal-resistant fencing, such as wrought-iron fencing, five to six feet in height, would be installed across the roadway closure. Work would also require re-striping and installation of warning signs in the immediate area.

Rail Overcrossing Alternative

The Rail Overcrossing Alternative would consist of a grade-separated pedestrian and bicycle rail crossing at Jennings Avenue. Because the rail overcrossing would be grade-separated, this alternative would not require closure of an existing at-grade rail crossing elsewhere in the City.

The Rail Overcrossing Alternative at Jennings Avenue would include installation of grade-separated ramps, stairs, and an elevated crossing over the SMART rail corridor. The conceptual layout of the rail overcrossing is shown on Figure 2-4 of the Draft EIR. A site improvement plan for the rail overcrossing is shown on Figure 2-5 of the Draft EIR. A visual simulation of the rail overcrossing from the west side of the rail crossing is shown in Section 3.1 Aesthetics, Figure 3.1-6 of the Draft EIR.

The rail overcrossing would be designed in compliance with Federal and State regulations. A minimum overhead clearance of 23 feet would be provided for the rail overcrossing, and the minimum side clearance from the centerline of the railroad corridor would be 10 feet.

Based on the soil types identified at the site and the findings of the preliminary geotechnical report, the preliminary design of the rail overcrossing utilizes drilled pier foundations. As currently designed, the rail overcrossing would include 17 concrete columns, each supported by a foundation with four 36-inch diameter drilled piers installed to a depth of 68 feet below the ground surface.

To achieve ADA compliance, the preliminary design of the Rail Overcrossing Alternative utilizes eight percent slopes for the pedestrian and bicycle ramps with level landings spaced at 35-foot intervals. To obtain the necessary railroad clearance height using eight percent slopes, the overcrossing ramps would need

to be approximately 450 feet long on both the west and east side of the rail corridor.

On the west side of the rail corridor, the ramp would begin in a westward direction along the south side of Jennings Avenue extending toward N. Dutton Avenue and would then switch back in an eastward direction towards the rail corridor. On the east side of the rail corridor, the ramp would proceed in a southerly direction within the SMART right-of-way for approximately 225 feet and would then switch back in a northerly direction towards Jennings Avenue.

Stairs would be provided on either side of the rail crossing to provide an alternate, and more direct, means of accessing the crossing structure. The preliminary design of the Rail Overcrossing Alternative integrates the overcrossing with the future SMART multi-use pathway, which would be located under a portion of the overcrossing on the east side of the rail corridor.

The overcrossing ramps would be 10-feet wide, with 1-foot wide, 42-inch tall barriers on each side. Recessed LED pathway lighting would be incorporated into the standard barriers approximately every 16 feet. Hand rails and chain link railings would also be provided on each side the ramps for safety. Security lighting would be provided along the overcrossing.

To accommodate the space needed for the rail overcrossing, Jennings Avenue on the west side of the rail corridor would be narrowed from its existing width of 39 feet to approximately 24 feet, resulting in two 10-foot vehicle lanes with adjacent 2-foot gutters. Due to the narrowed configuration of the street section, curbside parking along Jennings Avenue between the rail corridor and N. Dutton Avenue would be removed. A driveway extension would be provided under the overcrossing for access to the offices located on the south side of Jennings Avenue.

A new asphalt overlay would also be installed along the section of Jennings Avenue between the rail corridor and N. Dutton Avenue.

Several existing utilities within Jennings Avenue and the rail corridor would need to be relocated to accommodate construction of the rail overcrossing. A 12-inch water main currently located within Jennings Avenue on the west side of the rail corridor would be abandoned, and a replacement water main would be constructed approximately 7 feet to the north within Jennings Avenue. Two replacement water service connections would be installed to the relocated water main. An existing fire hydrant on the south side of Jennings Avenue on the west side of the rail corridor would be relocated to the new street edge on the south side of Jennings Avenue. A below-ground telephone fiberoptic cable within the SMART right-of-way, and a PG&E gas main across the SMART right-of-way would also need to be relocated. Additionally, a utility pole for overhead

electrical and telephone service located on the west side of the rail corridor may need to be relocated to accommodate space for the rail overcrossing stairs.

Storm drain improvements along Jennings Avenue on the west side of the rail corridor would include a new storm drain manhole and catch basin near N. Dutton Avenue. New sidewalk and curb and gutter would be installed along the south side of Jennings and a portion of N. Dutton Avenue. Sidewalk would also be installed on a portion of the north side of Jennings connecting to N. Dutton Avenue. The existing pedestrian push button post on the east side of the N. Dutton Avenue adjacent to the crosswalk would also be relocated.

5. Project Alternatives

As required by CEQA, the Draft EIR evaluates the environmental effects of a "no project alternative", which is the circumstance under which the project does not proceed. In addition, during the preliminary planning of the project and the scoping process for the EIR, several alternatives to the project were evaluated and/or suggested. These alternatives, listed below, are summarized in the Alternatives Description and Analysis (Section 4) of the Draft EIR:

- Under rail crossing at Jennings Avenue;
- Closure of a different existing rail crossing (other than W. Sixth, W. Seventh or W. Eighth Street);
- An at-grade crossing at Jennings Avenue with no closure of an existing crossing; and
- Installation of sliding electric gates (in lieu of a closure of an existing crossing).

The above alternatives were evaluated to determine if they meet the qualifications for alternatives, as required under CEQA. In accordance with CEQA requirements, an alternative must meet the following three criteria:

- a. The alternative would attain most of a project's basic objectives;
- b. The alternative would avoid or substantially reduce the significant environmental impacts of the proposed project; and
- c. The alternative must be feasible.

As explained in the Draft EIR, with the exception of the no project alternative, the other alternatives identified were deemed infeasible.

6. Key Dates in Environmental Review Process

On November 12, 2013, a Notice of Preparation and Notice of Scoping Meeting for the Jennings Avenue Pedestrian and Bicycle Rail Crossing EIR was issued, with a closing period for comments on December 11, 2013. The notice was sent to approximately 1,600 interested parties, including the California State Clearinghouse, which coordinates the state-level review of environmental documents that are prepared pursuant to CEQA, responsible and trustee agencies, and owners and occupants of properties located within 1,000 feet of the project area (both the Jennings Avenue project area and the crossings at W. Sixth, W. Seventh and W. Eighth Streets). Approximately 50 written comments were received.

On December 4, 2013, a public scoping meeting was held at the Finley Community Center, with an open house followed by a presentation providing an overview of the project and time for attendees to make comments. Approximately 51 people attended the scoping meeting, 26 of whom provided comments.

Comments received during the scoping period centered on concerns related to aesthetics, air quality, cultural resources, greenhouse gas emissions, hazardous materials, land use, noise, public services, transportation, utilities, population and housing, and alternatives. One of the main issues was the level of detail in which the EIR would evaluate a potential rail overcrossing.

As discussed above, in the Overview section of this report, the Council's direction on May 21, 2013 was to analyze the environmental impacts of an at-grade crossing, with a rail overcrossing as an alternative. Typically alternatives in an EIR are reviewed at a lower level of detail than the preferred project. However, following the scoping meeting it was determined by staff that the overcrossing should be analyzed at the same level of detail as the at-grade crossing. As such, the Council would have the opportunity to make a determination regarding selection of an alternative, without necessitating additional environmental review should the rail overcrossing be chosen.

On October 17, 2014, the Jennings Avenue Pedestrian and Bicycle Rail Crossing Draft EIR was released for public review. The 45-day comment period is scheduled to end on December 1, 2014.

7. Public Outreach

CEQA requires a 45-day public review period. A combined Notice of Availability and Public Hearing Notice was mailed to property owners and tenants within 1,000 feet of the project area (including both the Jennings Avenue project area and the crossings at W. Sixth, W. Seventh and W. Eighth Streets) announcing the public review period and indicating how the public could access the Draft EIR

document. The notice was also e-mailed to interested parties that requested notification and to known neighborhood and interest groups.

Large public hearing signs were installed on either side of the Jennings Avenue crossing, as well as at each of the crossings at W. Sixth, W. Seventh and W. Eighth Streets, announcing the public hearing and the availability of the Draft EIR for public review and comment, and notice was placed in the Press Democrat newspaper. Copies of the Draft EIR were made available at the Central Santa Rosa Library (downtown), the Northwest Santa Rosa Library (Coddingtown Center), at the California Welcome Center (in Railroad Square), at City Hall in the offices of Community Development and City Manager, in the office of Transportation and Public Works (Stony Circle), and on the City's website.

8. Significant and Unavoidable Impacts

The Draft EIR evaluates, at the same level of detail, an at-grade rail crossing at Jennings Avenue, with possible closure of either the W. Sixth, W. Seventh or W. Eighth Street existing rail crossings, as well as a rail overcrossing at Jennings Avenue. The document identifies potentially significant impacts that could result from implementation of either project.

Table 1-2 in the Draft EIR identifies, by environmental topic, the significant impacts and proposed mitigation measures; most of the identified impacts can be mitigated to a level of less than significant. However, the Draft EIR found six significant and unavoidable impacts with implementation of the at-grade rail crossing project, and one significant and unavoidable impact with implementation of the rail overcrossing project. The significant and unavoidable impacts are identified in the chart below (Table 5-1 from the Draft EIR):

Table 5-1 Summary of Significant and Unavoidable Impacts

Impact	Preferred Project At-grade Rail Crossing			Rail
	w/ Rail Crossing Closure at W. Sixth St.	w/ Rail Crossing Closure at W. Seventh St.	w/ Rail Crossing Closure at W. Eighth St.	Overcrossing Alternative
AES-2: Would the Project substantially degrade the existing visual character or quality of the site and its surroundings?	LSM	LSM	LSM	SUM
CR-2: Would the Project cause a substantial adverse change in the significance of a historical resource?	LSM	LSM	SUM	LSM
LU-2: Would the Project conflict with any applicable land use plan, policy, or regulation of an agency with jurisdiction over the Project (including, but not limited to the general plan, specific plan, local coastal program, or zoning ordinance) adopted for the purpose of avoiding or mitigating an environmental effect?	SU	SU	SU	NI
NO-1: Would the Project result in exposure of persons to or generation of noise levels in excess of standards established in the local general plan or noise ordinance, or applicable standards of other agencies?	SUM	SUM	SUM	LS
NO-3: Would the Project result in a substantial permanent increase in ambient noise levels in the Project vicinity above levels existing without the Project?	SUM	SUM	SUM	LS
NO-C-1: Would the Project plus cumulative projects result in a cumulatively considerable contribution to cumulative impacts related to noise?	SUM	SUM	SUM	LS
TR-4: Would the Project conflict with adopted policies, plans, or programs regarding public transit, bicycle, or pedestrian facilities, or otherwise decrease the performance or safety of such facilities?	LSM	LS	SU	NI

Notes: NI = No Impact LS = Less than Significant LSM = Less than Significant with Mitigation SU = Significant and Unavoidable SUM = Significant and Unavoidable with Mitigation

9. Role of the Council

The Council will hold a public hearing within the public review period of the Draft EIR to allow members of the public to comment on the adequacy of the Draft EIR. Council members may also comment on the Draft EIR. Comments should focus on the environmental impacts of the project, not the design of the project itself or which alternative is preferred.

All comments received during the 45-day public review period, both written and oral, will be responded to in a separate document called the Final EIR. The Council will consider both the Draft EIR and the Final EIR at a future public meeting and will decide whether to certify the EIR, and will make a selection regarding a project.

It should be noted that, as part of the future selection process of either the atgrade rail crossing or the rail overcrossing project, because both alternatives have significant and unavoidable impacts, the Council will be required to state the reasons for its action in writing. This "Statement of Overriding Considerations" must be included in the record of project approval.

Consideration of certification of the Jennings Avenue Pedestrian and Bicycle Rail Crossing EIR and selection of a project is anticipated to be scheduled for Council review in March 2015.

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended by the Community Development and Transportation and Public Works Departments that Council hold a public hearing regarding the Jennings Avenue Pedestrian and Bicycle Rail Crossing Draft Environmental Impact Report.

Author: Jessica Jones

Attachments:

Attachment 1 – Location Map
Attachment 2 – City Council Resolution No. 28181
Attachment 3 – City Council Meeting Minutes, August 14, 2012
Attachment 4 – City Council Meeting Minutes, November 13, 2012
Attachment 5 – City Council Resolution No. 28284
Attachment 6 – City Council Meeting Minutes, May 21, 2013
Attachment 7 – Jennings Avenue Pedestrian and Bicycle Rail Crossing Draft
Environmental Impact Report (previously distributed to Council)
Attachment 8 – Draft Environmental Impact Report distribution email to Council
and Notice of Availability (English and Spanish)