AN EVOLVING GRAND BOULEVARD INITIATIVE

Celebrating accomplishments and looking toward the next phase

Fall 2019
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

For thirteen years, communities along El Camino Real (State Route 82) have participated in the Grand Boulevard Initiative (GBI) to revitalize the roadway into a vibrant, people-friendly place. GBI has fostered the development of ten Guiding Principles and has seen the endorsement of those principles by every community along the corridor. Numerous studies and plans have been designed to give cities, counties and other agencies a path forward to upgrade land uses, public services and infrastructure; and, well-managed higher density development.

Since roadway and development projects are aligned with GBI’s vision and the guiding principles in the implementation process, GBI has reached a crossroads in which the group will evolve to refocus its efforts on mobility along the corridor. The purpose of this paper is to recognize the achievements of GBI and its partner agencies and to describe a new approach for GBI, designed to assure its continued effectiveness in a changing environment.

GBI FORMATION AND GUIDING PRINCIPLES

El Camino Real, a 43-mile roadway extending from San Jose to Daly City, serves as the central spine connecting numerous central business districts and downtowns throughout the Peninsula and South Bay. As a state highway, the road is under California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) jurisdiction. It has two to three through lanes in each direction and has a speed limit of 35 miles per hour on most of the roadway, with a few segments at 25 and 40 mph.

GBI was launched as a result of dissatisfaction felt among residents regarding the function and appearance of El Camino Real, the most important urban corridor on the Peninsula. The street suffered from extensive traffic back-ups, an unsafe and unpleasant pedestrian environment, and inconsistent land use decisions in different cities, and was often used as an example of unattractive urban sprawl. Caltrans rated over 40 of El Camino Real’s intersections as high collision locations.

In 2006, the San Mateo County Transit District (SamTrans) led a preliminary study of El Camino Real and was surprised to learn that the corridor, assumed to be neglected, had been the subject of more than 20 major recent studies. The problem was not neglect: it was a lack of coordination among the 31 agencies responsible for parts of the corridor’s function and appearance.

SamTrans, joined by Joint Venture Silicon Valley, called a meeting of representatives of the 19 cities, San Mateo and Santa Clara counties, VTA, C/CAG, BART, Caltrain, Caltrans, MTC, ABAG, and representatives of the business, environmental and labor communities, to learn if there was interest in working together to improve the performance, safety and aesthetics of the corridor. With general interest and consensus around the issue, the Grand Boulevard Initiative was underway.

There was agreement on a few operating rules: there would not be a new layer of government; the effort would focus on education and sharing of information; all entities would maintain their autonomy; and, the new effort would guide but not mandate any actions. The purpose of the effort was to improve information-sharing and cooperation among the participants, identify the factors underlying the problems, and win grants to
fund major improvements.

The participants agreed on a Vision Statement that would guide their effort:

“El Camino Real will achieve its full potential as a place for residents to work, live, shop and play, and create links between communities that promote walking and transit and improve the quality of life.”

In 2007, after much research, debate, and refinement, the Grand Boulevard Task Force approved and adopted 10 Guiding Principles that further the Grand Boulevard Initiative Vision. These Guiding Principles were formulated as a result of examining the common themes and goals from city and county plans for the El Camino Real Corridor and have become an integral part of shaping an improved future for the corridor.

### The 10 Guiding Principles

1. Target housing and job growth in strategic areas along the corridor.
2. Encourage compact mixed-use development and high-quality urban design and construction.
3. Create a pedestrian-oriented environment and improve streetscapes, ensuring full access to and between public areas and private developments.
4. Develop a balanced multimodal corridor to maintain and improve mobility of people and vehicles along the corridor.
5. Manage parking assets.
6. Provide vibrant public spaces and gathering places.
7. Preserve and accentuate unique and desirable community character and the existing quality of life in adjacent neighborhoods.
8. Improve safety and public health.
9. Strengthen pedestrian and bicycle connections with the corridor.
10. Pursue environmentally sustainable and economically viable development patterns.

### ACCOMPLISHMENTS

#### Notable Milestones and Achievements

In addition to development of guiding principles for the corridor, GBI has led many projects, engaged hundreds of stakeholders and decision-makers, and fostered steps toward a vibrant and livable corridor. The GBI has secured over $9 million in discretionary grants and $2.5 million in matching funds to support projects and plans along El Camino Real. These grant-funded projects include:

- ECHO (Economic and Housing Opportunities) Phase I project, funded through a 2010 C/CAG grant, that assessed the overall development potential for the El Camino Real corridor and made the case for why well-planned new development will benefit individual communities as well as the region. The work also included building prototypes and renderings to illustrate the impact of change.
- A TIGER II grant funded multifaceted projects such as ECHO Phase II, Complete Streets Project, and Infrastructure Assessment and Financial Study. The individual projects funded by this grant are described below.
Accomplishments

From Daly City to San Jose

• ECHO Phase II assessed community challenges while its precedent project ECHO I (described above) assessed the Corridor’s development potential.

• Complete Streets Project developed preliminary designs for four case study segments on El Camino Real in Daly City, South San Francisco, San Bruno, and San Carlos in San Mateo County. It included complete streets as well as innovative sustainable street elements to address stormwater pollution, urban heat island effects, and greenhouse gas emissions.

• The Infrastructure Assessment and Financing study calculated infrastructure changes necessary to accommodate anticipated growth, and the estimated cost. It also presented various methods of financing that cost.

• Creating Safe and Healthy Corridor Communities project was funded by the Caltrans Sustainable Transportation Grant which facilitated the design of multimodal streetscape improvements on specific segments of El Camino Real. The case study segments were in Redwood City from Maple Street to SR-84/Charter Street, and in Palo Alto from Stanford Ave to Lambert Ave.

GBI has also provided resources for its members and the public through publications, grants, and reports.

• The Grand Boulevard Initiative Vision and 10 Guiding Principles, as mentioned above, have been endorsed by the members and incorporated into many corridor plans.

• Existing Conditions Reports (published in 2006 and 2011) document the current state of the corridor. These have become key planning documents for inter-jurisdictional programs along the Peninsula.

• Progress Reports in 2007 and 2013 summarize Grand Boulevard studies and highlight exceptional projects and plans in each corridor jurisdiction.


• Activity along the Corridor map is an interactive, visual representation of the land use development and transportation projects and plans that have been completed or are in progress.

• The Grand Boulevard Initiative website (www.grandboulevard.net) includes a searchable database of local and regional plans and projects. The website also has a Housing Toolkit and Transportation Demand Management Toolkit to provide more information on best practices and applicable resources to use within the GBI corridor.

Recognition through Awards

In addition to numerous grant-funded projects, GBI has received recognition through the following awards:

• The San Mateo County Economic Development Association 2009 Award of Excellence for a Public Agency

• The American Planning Association California Chapter 2010 Distinguished Leadership Award

• Women’s Transportation Seminar San Francisco Bay Area Chapter 2012 Innovative Transportation Solutions Award

• Association of Bay Area Governments 2012 Growing Smarter Together Award

• Sustainable San Mateo County 2014 Sustainability Award
STATE OF THE CORRIDOR

Progress

There is no doubt that El Camino Real has made significant progress since the GBI’s inception. The GBI Guiding Principles are reflected in the general plans and specific plans of jurisdictions along the corridor, which have guided the development of new mixed-use buildings, pedestrian facilities and connections, public gathering spaces, among other enhancements. Additionally, from 2006 to 2018, collisions on El Camino Real have decreased by 30% in San Mateo County and 22% in Santa Clara County, indicating that safety has generally improved. Cities continue to plan for improvements along the corridor, seeking input from residents on how to apply the GBI vision locally. For example, the City of Santa Clara and the City of Sunnyvale currently are developing El Camino Real Specific Plans. Other jurisdictions, including Redwood City, Mountain View, and Colma, are studying bicycle and pedestrian improvements on the roadway.

GBI has therefore fulfilled its original goals by:

• improving information-sharing and cooperation among the participants;
• identifying the factors underlying the problems; and,
• securing grants to fund major improvements.

The next phase of GBI will continue to provide a valuable forum for coordination and discussion among jurisdictions, especially in regard to mobility along the corridor. The opportunities section below describes the current challenges on the corridor with respect to mobility and transportation, as well as opportunities for collaboration regarding these topics. Despite the increased focus on mobility, we recognize the strong intertwined reality of land use and transportation and we will therefore continue to discuss land use, specifically housing, as it relates to transportation.

Opportunities

Currently, El Camino Real carries high volumes of traffic and a majority of key intersections experience long traffic delays during peak hours. According to Caltrans’ Annual Average Daily Traffic (AADT), the highest peak hour volume on El Camino Real is at major highway junctions, including SR-85 in Mountain View, SR-84 in Redwood City, SR-92 in San Mateo, and I-380 in San Bruno. The high traffic volumes on these segments likely are a result of vehicles heading to or from the two major north-south highways, I-280 and US-101. Overall, from 2005 to 2017, there was a 10 percent increase in traffic volumes on El Camino Real in the southbound direction, and 8 percent in the northbound direction. This indicates that there is an ever-increasing demand to travel on El Camino Real, especially during peak hours.

Individual communities along the El Camino Real corridor set their own priorities for zoning and land use, focusing on what makes sense for community needs and desires. Transportation, on the other hand, is primarily a regional issue that cannot be addressed solely at the local level. Traffic congestion is a unifying topic of which agencies can work together to mitigate and improve mobility and access to destinations across jurisdiction lines. Similarly, residents of communities do not remain within artificial jurisdictional boundaries and require the ability to move beyond these
boundaries for work and leisure by multiple modes of travel.

Bus service

Bus service on El Camino Real is the backbone of both SamTrans and Santa Clara Valley Transportation Authority (VTA) systems for both frequency and ridership. The SamTrans El Camino Real mainline routes, ECR and ECR Rapid, account for approximately 23% of daily passenger trips. The combined ridership for VTA routes 522 Rapid service and Route 22 constitutes approximately 18% of all weekday bus boardings in Santa Clara County. However, the average speed of buses on this corridor is declining and as a result on-time performance and reliability is deteriorating. Slower moving buses are less appealing to riders and increasingly more expensive for bus operators to provide.

Both transit agencies are studying how to improve their slowing service, specifically along El Camino Real. SamTrans is embarking on a Comprehensive Operational Analysis, known as Reimagine SamTrans, to provide a systemwide analysis of the bus system in its current state. One component of Reimagine SamTrans is a focused evaluation of the El Camino Real corridor, including an assessment of the highest ridership opportunity areas, areas of particular challenge with respect to on-time performance, and opportunities for bus priority infrastructure to mitigate slowing bus speeds. VTA is addressing transit speeds through their Fast Transit program, which is an agency-wide effort to make transit faster, more reliable, and ultimately more useful. The Fast Transit program includes a comprehensive examination of the causes of the declining speeds and reliability, defining problems and recommendations. As part of the Fast Transit program, VTA is partnering with cities along El Camino Real in Santa Clara County to explore bus priority projects and other mitigations.

Due to the importance of El Camino Real for both VTA and SamTrans bus service, continuation of collaboration between the transit agencies is important to share best practices, improve speed and reliability, and increase ridership. Participation from communities along the corridor is invaluable.
in providing input on local issues and how to better serve their residents.

**Active Transportation and Transit Access**

El Camino Real is a vital corridor for pedestrians and bicyclists and serves as a direct north-south route with access to numerous destinations, including housing, retail, restaurants, transit stations, and public spaces. However, walking on El Camino is hampered by minimal pedestrian amenities and its width, making it cumbersome to cross. In addition to walking, bicycling is stressful due to heavy traffic volumes and a lack of dedicated bicycle lanes. Some cities have established dedicated bicycle routes on streets parallel to El Camino Real, however, these parallel bicycle routes rely upon side streets that often are noncontiguous and disjointed, failing to provide adequate connectivity. Recently, the Peninsula Bikeway (a collaboration of four cities—Redwood City, Menlo Park, Palo Alto, and Mountain View) has created an interim north-south route that connects the four cities using existing bikeways. The initiative envisions a long-term Peninsula Bikeway that is more direct, safe, and comfortable, and is exploring opportunities on ECR.

In addition to retail and restaurant trips on the corridor, many trips are to and from transit stations. Major trip origin and destinations include BART and Caltrain stations, especially stations located within one-quarter mile of El Camino Real. All five San Mateo County Bay Area Rapid Transit (BART) stations are located within a quarter mile of El Camino Real. Fifteen Caltrain stations are located within one-half mile of El Camino Real, ten of which are within one-quarter mile of the roadway. Thus, there is opportunity for cities to collaborate with one another to create continuous bicycle and pedestrian facilities and to work with transit agencies to improve access to stations.

**Parking**

Transportation Demand Management (TDM) is one of many tools to mitigate the parking demand and traffic effects of new development occurring along the corridor. TDM focuses on understanding people’s behavior and helping them make use of the infrastructure in place for transit, walking, biking, and ridesharing. One of the most effective TDM tools is parking management, through pricing or availability. This can encourage people to carpool or use other forms of transportation, such as transit or biking. It is important for jurisdictions along the corridor to efficiently manage the demand for parking while accommodating customer, employee, and resident parking needs. There is opportunity for jurisdictions to manage both on-street and off-street parking on El Camino Real and to share best practices and strategies for matching the parking supply to the actual demand.

**Transit Oriented Development**

Transit-oriented development (TOD) is the creation of vibrant and livable communities that are near transportation, including high frequency train and bus lines. To facilitate these opportunities early, staff from the transit agencies and cities should actively monitor upcoming project pipelines early in the process. Where possible, communication amongst the partners should begin as early as possible to support the planning process so they can work together to better integrate development and transportation.
MOVING FORWARD

Owing to the many successes of the Grand Boulevard Initiative, the effort has reached a pivotal point in its existence and must evolve to remain relevant and effective in its mission. As a result, GBI will transition to a new format intended to increase participation among its members and encourage greater collaboration and information-sharing between jurisdictions. In addition, this new format will see a narrowed focus intended to address key mobility issues and better support corridor jurisdictions in their planning, implementation, and policy efforts. These format changes will impact both the Task Force and Working Committee and are discussed in more detail below.

Task Force Convenings

Moving forward, the Task Force will no longer meet quarterly. In lieu of regular meetings, there will be annual convening(s) on specific topics that are trending and/or of interest to the members. Corridor tours may also be held in lieu of regular meetings. These events will engage the GBI Task Force members in addition to new stakeholders that are interested in El Camino Real topics. The convenings will be guided by the ECR Working Committee and will be hosted in partnership with organizations such as the San Mateo County Home for All, SAMCEDA, and Joint Venture Silicon Valley.

Unlike the Working Committee, the Task Force will continue to engage on both corridor land use and mobility topics. Potential topics for Task Force Convenings include:

- Best practices and opportunities for integrating transportation into the early stages of the development process
- Corridor tour in Santa Clara County, showcasing high-quality urban design, mixed-use development, and multi-modal improvements
- Community outreach on the corridor: how to effectively engage businesses, transit agencies, residents, and community-based organizations, and the development community in the planning process
- Transit-oriented communities, including working with cities along El Camino Real on best practices and continuing the dialogue about increasing density and housing along transportation corridors where possible.

ECR Mobility Working Committee

In order to continue to share best practices along the corridor and explore ways to improve the mobility and transportation options along the corridor, the GBI Working Committee will transition to a similarly-structured El Camino Real Mobility Working Committee with less frequent meetings. The effort will be led by SamTrans (and any other interested agencies) and comprised of similar membership to the current Working Committee including transportation planners and engineers from San Mateo County and Santa Clara County jurisdictions along the ECR corridor. The group will meet quarterly, rather than monthly, and all in-person meetings will offer webinar/remote options. Holding the meetings less often will encourage participation and allow SamTrans staff and committee members time for deeper research into relevant content for the meetings. The El Camino Real Working Committee will continue to evaluate its effectiveness on an annual basis to identify potential improvement and ensure the effort is generating value for participants.
Through information sharing, coordination, and collaborations, El Camino Real communities and stakeholders are able to improve the effectiveness of their projects, share lessons learned, and position themselves for grants designed to improve the livability and mobility along the corridor.

### 2020 Work Plan Outline

The ECR Mobility Working Committee will serve as a forum for information-sharing on transportation-related issues. Initial topics of interest may address the mobility barriers addressed in the “State of the Corridor” section of this report and specific items for discussion are outlined below. There is also opportunity for this committee to lead and guide specific projects that provide resources and information for all communities along the corridor.

#### Examples of Topics for Discussion and Informational Presentations:

- **Progress on various ECR Projects and Specific Plans**
  - Regular updates from Sunnyvale, Santa Clara, Colma, and others with in-progress plans
  - C/CAG Smart Corridors - presentation
- **Bikeways on ECR**
  - Peninsula Bikeway - presentation
  - Regular updates from Redwood City and others studying bikeways on ECR
- **Access to transit**
  - Caltrain station access - presentation
  - BART station access - presentation
  - Housing access to transit - Home for All presentation
- **Bus service**
  - VTA’s Fast Transit Program - presentation, ECR focus
  - SamTrans Comprehensive Operational Analysis - presentation on ECR assessment over duration of project
- **Parking Management**
  - Parking requirements for development on ECR
  - Managing on-street parking on ECR

#### Potential Projects:

- **Collision Analysis for the entire corridor**
  - Building off of the recently completed GBI “Creating Safe and Healthy Corridor Communities” project that underscores the importance understanding collision causes to plan for and design infrastructure improvements
- **Speed analysis** - looking at congestion on ECR, its impact on bus reliability, and opportunities to speed up and normalize reliability of bus service