

DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

DISTRICT 4

OFFICE OF TRANSIT AND COMMUNITY PLANNING

P.O. BOX 23660, MS-10D

OAKLAND, CA 94623-0660

PHONE (510) 286-5528

TTY 711

www.dot.ca.gov

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Alicia Parker, Planner III
City of Oakland, Department of Planning and
Building, Bureau of Planning
250 Frank H. Ogawa Plaza, Suite 2114
Oakland, CA 94612

Downtown Oakland Specific Plan – Draft Environmental Impact Report (DEIR)

Dear Alicia Parker:

Thank you for including the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) in the environmental review process for this project. We are committed to ensuring that impacts to the State's multimodal transportation system and to our natural environment are identified and mitigated to support a safe, sustainable, integrated and efficient transportation system. The following comments are based on our review of the August 2019 DEIR.

Project Understanding

The Downtown Oakland Specific Plan (Plan) will provide a roadmap for how the Downtown Oakland area develops over the next 20 years through policy guidance on land use, transportation, housing, economic development, public spaces, cultural arts, and social equity. The Draft Plan aims to ensure that Downtown Oakland remains a place of continuing growth and revitalization, as well as a valuable resource for the larger Oakland community through increased employment, housing, arts, and cultural opportunities. Both Interstate (I)-880 and I-980 bisect the project area.

Landscape Architecture/Aesthetics

For the proposed work within the Caltrans right-of-way (ROW), an online Visual Impact Assessment (VIA) Questionnaire will need to be completed and provided for each location/project to quantify the visual impacts (when individual projects are in the planning phases). VIAs will need to be completed for all work items identified in the master plan (VIA scope and magnitude to be

determined on a project by project basis). Viewpoints and photo simulations should be included to assess visual impacts. Avoidance and minimization measures shall also be addressed in VIA. The online VIA can be accessed here: <https://dot.ca.gov/programs/design/lap-visual-impact-assessment/lap-via-questionnaire>.

The Draft Plan area includes sections of Classified Landscaped Freeways on I-880 from post mile (PM) 30.81 (Channel Park) to 32.40 (Adeline Street) and all of I-980. These roadways are not allowed to lose their Classified Landscaped Freeway status and any work that impacts vegetation on these routes must be replaced and repaired.

For all locations where enhanced connections across freeway corridors are proposed, note that aesthetic improvements to the overpasses and underpasses will be incorporated to the streetscape design (ex: aesthetic treatments to walls, rails, etc). Include the following item to implementation actions in Chapter 7 (starting on page 258) of the Draft Plan:

- Strengthen entrances/connections with new vegetation at and around the thresholds to the overpasses and underpasses.

This work is to be funded by the City.

If any new construction disturbs existing planting and irrigation within Caltrans' ROW, then these disturbed areas are to be restored to their previous conditions (or better). If re-planting in the disturbed location is not feasible, then replanting shall occur at a nearby location within the project limits.

Pages 44 and 45 of the Draft Plan shows vegetative buffers on and along Caltrans' ROW. In areas where adequate setbacks or proper ROW spacing cannot be met, buffers are to be provided on city-owned land. Additionally, vegetative buffer projects are to be funded by the City.

Traffic Safety

Please ensure that all curb ramps and pedestrian facilities located within the limits of this project are brought up to current Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) standards.

Construction Projects on Caltrans ROW

Any facilities, utilities, or other construction projects that are proposed, moved or modified within, above or under Caltrans' ROW shall be discussed. Page 48 of the Draft Plan discusses proposals that would take place within Caltrans' ROW, which include modifications to I-980, constructing a park (Webster Green)

above the Webster Tube, parks under freeway structures, and unsheltered residence facilities. These proposals should be elaborated on and discussed with Caltrans management for approval as they require a Caltrans-issued encroachment permit.

Industrial Zoning

Caltrans recommends discussion on how the Draft Plan will be compatible with existing and viable industrial land uses in the immediate and surrounding area so as not to displace these uses that may provide good employment opportunities to residents of Oakland. Retention of land zoned for industrial based purposes is an issue of concern for the entire Bay Area Region. Regarding industrial based land uses, Caltrans continues to support transportation and land use concepts that focus on the safe and efficient movement of goods delivered to or manufactured within these areas. The development and manufacture of goods benefit not just the local economy, but the regional, state and national economies as well. Caltrans seeks to elevate the potential impact of alternative land uses with the potential health impacts of locating incompatible land uses near industrial based lands. Good land use planning ensures adequate buffers between residential, commercial and industrial uses. Buffer zones may help alleviate potential impacts relating to congestion, noise and light pollution, increased biological impacts, and increased exposure to harmful pollutants.

Caltrans further recommends that aspects concerning community benefit be thoroughly researched and that industrial land use be an integral part of this Draft Plan and overall community planning process. While Caltrans is working to implement projects that improve air quality and reduce emissions, the benefits of these projects will be further realized through local land use decisions that maintain appropriate buffers between commercial and residential land uses and industrial based lands.

DEIR and Draft Plan Corrections

The maps in the DEIR do not show the updated roadway configuration with the removal of the 20th Street block at Lake Merritt. Please update the maps in the DEIR.

In the Draft Plan, a proposed pedestrian-bicycle bridge connecting Downtown Oakland to Alameda is shown in Figure M-4 on page 110. However, in the DEIR, this connection is not mentioned. Please add this to the DEIR.

Lead Agency

As the Lead Agency, the City of Oakland is responsible for all project mitigation, including any needed improvements to the State Transportation Network (STN.) The project's fair share contribution, financing, scheduling, implementation responsibilities and lead agency monitoring should be fully discussed for all proposed mitigation measures. Furthermore, since this project meets the criteria to be deemed of statewide, regional or areawide significance per CEQA guidelines Section 15206, the subsequent EIR should be submitted to MTC and the Association of Bay Area Governments.

Encroachment Permit

Please be advised that any work or traffic control that encroaches onto the State ROW, requires a Caltrans-issued encroachment permit. To obtain an encroachment permit, a completed encroachment permit application, environmental documentation, six (6) sets of plans clearly indicating the State ROW, and six (6) copies of signed, dated and stamped (include stamp expiration date) traffic control plans must be submitted to: Office of Encroachment Permits, California DOT, District 4, P.O. Box 23660, Oakland, CA 94623-0660. To download the permit application and obtain more information, visit <https://dot.ca.gov/programs/traffic-operations/ep/applications>.

Thank you again for including Caltrans in the environmental review process. Should you have any questions regarding this letter, please contact Andrew Chan at 510-622-5433 or andrew.chan@dot.ca.gov.

Sincerely,



Mark Leong
District Branch Chief
Local Development - Intergovernmental Review

c: State Clearinghouse