



Agenda Item No. (5)

To: Transportation Committee/Committee of the Whole  
Meeting of May 20, 2021

From: Raymond Santiago, Principal Planner  
Ron Downing, Director of Planning  
Kellee J. Hopper, Deputy General Manager, Administration and Development  
Denis J. Mulligan, General Manager

Subject: **DESIGNATE A PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE TO SERVE AS THE  
FOCUS OF THE DRAFT ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT REPORT FOR  
PROJECT NO. 2017-D-30, SAN RAFAEL TRANSIT CENTER RELOCATION  
ANALYSIS, ENVIRONMENTAL CLEARANCE, AND PRELIMINARY  
DESIGN**

### **Recommendation**

The Transportation Committee recommends that the Board of Directors designate the Move Whistlestop Alternative as the preferred alternative to serve as the focus of the Draft Environmental Impact Report (DEIR) relative to Project No. 2017-D-30, *San Rafael Transit Center Relocation Analysis, Environmental Clearance, and Preliminary Design*:

The California Environmental Quality Act ("CEQA") requires the agency undertaking environmental review of a project, also known as the "lead agency," to provide an "accurate, stable, and finite" description of the proposed project. More recently, CEQA has been interpreted to require the lead agency to designate a "preferred alternative" to serve as the focus of the environmental study. This designation is required at this time so that the consultant can complete the DEIR. This designation does not require the Golden Gate Bridge, Highway and Transportation District (District) to ultimately adopt the preferred alternative, but is intended merely to make it easier for the public to understand what the project entails and which alternative seems to best meet the project's purpose and the community's priorities.

This matter will be presented to the Board of Directors at its May 21, 2020 meeting for appropriate action.

### **Background**

At its September 22, 2017 meeting, the Board of Directors, by Resolution No. 2017-087, authorized the award of Professional Services Agreement No. 2017-D-30, *San Rafael Transit Center Relocation Analysis, Environmental Clearance, and Preliminary Design*, to Kimley-Horn and Associates. The District issued the Notice to Proceed to Kimley-Horn on November 20, 2017.

Over the course of the project, the project team, which is comprised of District staff and the consultant team, has collaborated with stakeholder agencies including the City of San Rafael, Marin Transit, the Sonoma-Marín Area Rail Transit Agency (SMART), the Transportation Authority of Marin (TAM), and the Metropolitan Transportation Commission (MTC). Meetings between the agencies have occurred at the staff, general manager, and policy group (elected/appointed officials) levels. Attached is recent correspondence regarding the project arising from the ongoing community collaboration and extensive outreach.

### **Selection of a Preferred Alternative**

The purpose of an Environmental Impact Report (EIR) is to provide the information necessary for the District to make an informed decision about the proposed project and to supply the information necessary to support related permit applications and review processes.

A Draft Environmental Impact Report (DEIR) has been prepared to evaluate the potential impacts to the natural and built environment of the proposed San Rafael Transit Center Replacement Project (project or proposed project) and other build alternatives. The DEIR is expected to be released in early summer 2021, after which the District will provide a public review period of at least 45 days after the issuance of the DEIR for written comment. During this time, the District will also conduct public outreach to provide information, engage the community, answer questions and receive input.

Once the public review period is complete, the District will prepare a Final EIR that includes all the comments received on the DEIR, provides responses to all comments, and includes any necessary revisions to the DEIR. CEQA requires the District to review and consider the information in the EIR before making a decision on the proposed project.

There are four build alternatives being considered for this project: the 4th Street Gateway Alternative, the Under the Freeway Alternative, the Adapt Whistlestop Alternative, and the Move Whistlestop Alternative (see Attachment A).

**Move Whistlestop Alternative:** This alternative has been identified as the District's preferred alternative. Preliminarily, this alternative seems to best achieve the project objectives, and it provides the best customer experience for transit riders. It places the transit center on one block, so passengers do not have to cross any public streets with automobile traffic to make a transfer between buses or between buses and trains. Among the alternatives, it appears to offer the best opportunities for place-making. It provides clear visual access among all connecting buses and trains and public spaces. It also incorporates the construction of an adjacent raised class 4 bikeway, closing a gap between two existing north/south bikeways.

The extent of the transit services are bounded by 4th Street, 3rd Street, west of Tamalpais Avenue, and Hetherton Street, as well as curb space along West Tamalpais Avenue between 5th Avenue and 4th Street. Tamalpais Avenue between 2nd and 4th Streets would be shifted east to be directly adjacent to the SMART tracks. The Whistlestop building would be relocated to the west side of Tamalpais Avenue between 3rd and 4th Streets.

Seventeen straight-curb bus bays would accommodate transit, airport shuttles, and Greyhound services at the transit center. Each bus bay would have a minimum 9-foot-wide platform adjacent

and platforms would provide passenger amenities including weather protection (such as shelters or canopies) and seating. Paratransit, pick-up/drop-off, maintenance vehicle, and shuttle curb space would be provided. Other features would include public art, security, and provision for bicycle parking including racks and lockers, and wayfinding signage.

The DEIR analyzes three other build alternatives at an equal level of detail that vary in site area and location as well as specific features. Similar to the proposed preferred alternative, all build alternatives have the following components:

- 17 straight-curb bus bays to accommodate transit, airport shuttles, and Greyhound services at the transit center
- Provision of paratransit, pick-up/drop-off, maintenance vehicle, and shuttle curb space
- Provision of bicycle parking, including racks and lockers
- Minimum 9-foot-wide platforms adjacent to bus bays
- Platforms providing passenger amenities including weather protection (such as shelters or canopies) and seating
- Other features including public art, security, and wayfinding signage
- Provision of a roughly 3,000-square-foot building including customer service, public restrooms, driver relief facilities, small retail, maintenance, and security.

**Adapt Whistlestop Alternative:** The extent of this alternative site is the same as the Move Whistlestop Alternative, bounded by 4th Street, West Tamalpais Avenue (between 4th Street and 5th Avenue), Hetherton Street, and 3rd Street, and is on the same block as the existing SMART station. The site crosses nine parcels currently occupied by the Whistlestop building, a café, a restaurant, parking spaces, the SMART tracks, and the Citibank building with its affiliated parking lot, also referred to as the “Citibank parcel.” The Whistlestop building would remain and be adapted for District use.

**4th Street Gateway Alternative:** This alternative site is bounded by 5th Avenue, 3rd Street, Hetherton Street, and the SMART tracks, as well as curb space along West Tamalpais Avenue.

**Under the Freeway Alternative:** This alternative site is generally located beneath U.S. Highway 101 (US-101) and bounded by 5th Avenue, south of 4th Street, Irwin Street, and Hetherton Street. Underneath US-101 there is a park-and-ride lot, maintained and operated by the California Department of Transportation.

**The No-Project Alternative:** This alternative is based on what would reasonably be expected to occur if the project is not implemented. Under the No-Project Alternative, the District would not relocate the transit center; it would remain at its current location in Downtown San Rafael and continue to operate in its current state, which is deficient for bus operations, connectivity between modes, and a challenging pedestrian environment. Additionally, there is insufficient land available for provision of paratransit, pick-up/drop-off, maintenance vehicle, and shuttle curb space.

It is recommended that the Board of Directors designate the Move Whistlestop Alternative as the preferred alternative to serve as the focus for the completion of the DEIR. The Move Whistlestop Alternative offers the following benefits over the other alternatives;

- It has no impact to waterways;
- It avoids impacts to properties that are eligible to be officially designated as historic;
- It avoids a ground lease with Caltrans that can be revoked with 30 days' notice;
- Most significant benefits to transit travel time and reliability;
- Passengers transferring between buses/between buses and trains do not have to cross busy streets to make transfers; and
- It provides clear visual access among all connecting buses and trains.

### **Fiscal Impact**

There is no fiscal impact associated with the action contained in this report.

Attachments: A. San Rafael Transit Center Alternative Locations Map  
B. Correspondence  
C. San Rafael Transit Center Relocation Presentation Slides

ATTACHMENT A



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May 7, 2021

Denis Mulligan  
General Manager/CEO  
Golden Gate Bridge, Highway and Transportation District

Dear General Manager Mulligan:

Thank you for the April 19th presentation to the San Rafael City Council and the larger San Rafael community about the environmental planning for the potential transit center relocation in central San Rafael. The Council appreciates that GGBHTD continues to seek our input on this very important project. As a good partner and joint approver in this endeavor, the City Council and our community stakeholders verbalized a number of questions at the Council meeting and we respectfully request that this additional data is presented and shared prior to the release of the draft EIR with a preferred alternative.

We want to ensure that the preferred alternative recognizes that the highest transit users are those who are transit-dependent and that commute patterns have permanently changed due to the impact of the pandemic. We believe it is important to discuss these implications and not advance the project until the most up to date information is incorporated into the planning efforts regarding traffic impacts and pedestrian safety (especially at Third Street and Heatherton), traffic queuing on affected streets, transit, expected future transit use, and feedback from our transit-dependent riders. This data will provide transparency to the process and enable the stakeholders and our residents to have a meaningful dialogue about why the preferred alternative was selected.

We received public comment from many stakeholders, including from the Canal Alliance (see attached). They support this effort, but their feedback suggests that the amount of information presented by GGBHTD is still being processed by the community and they are anxious to continue to engage with you and the City prior to the release of the draft document. As I mentioned in the TAM meeting, utilizing an equity lens requires more than presenting information, it requires incorporating and evolving alternatives to reflect that feedback.

We respectfully request that the alternatives minimize the impact to on-street parking and include a bike facility on Tamalpais Avenue. We all want the new transit center to be an asset to our city as it is a gateway to San Rafael, so seeing architectural conceptual renderings that incorporate "world class" design that go beyond the early sketches would confirm that this project is the best in can be.

Thank you and we look forward to the continue collaboration so we can have a transit center of which we are all proud.

Sincerely,

Kate Colin  
Mayor





Mayor Kate Colin, City of San Rafael  
Members, San Rafael City Council

**Re: Community Engagement in the San Rafael Transportation Center**

April 19, 2021  
Via Electronic Mail

Dear Esteemed Leaders of the **San Rafael Transportation Center Project**:

On behalf of Canal Alliance and Voces del Canal, a Canal resident leadership group, we write to express our support for the **San Rafael Transportation Center** and for the many ways this project represents an opportunity not only for our city and our region, but especially for the low-income and Latino transit riders who make up the majority of the ridership. We also want to strongly recommend that there can be an opportunity for greater equity in the design, analysis, and implementation of the project.

We are aligned on what we believe are common goals across stakeholders and decision-makers. We also agree on the need for a transit center that not only meets current and near-future public transportation needs, but also anticipates the kind of growth we are working toward in the city and the region. In particular, to serve the long-term needs of our communities ensure that the environmentally-friendly public transportation system offers the best, easiest, most affordable, and reliable option for mobility, a transit center needs to plan for a rise in demand that will result from increased housing, both affordable and low-income housing options.

Recently, Canal Alliance had the opportunity to host a presentation of the various alternatives by the GGBHTD's staff for the leadership team of Voces del Canal. It was a great opportunity to learn more about the project and the details of the proposed alternatives. However, it also provided an overwhelming amount of information for our participants to process, let alone provide immediate feedback on.

As we look at your materials and timeline, we see that there is still some time for us to partner and develop a process that provides capacity-building for our community leaders to understand the project and to then provide more informed and helpful recommendations and a set of priorities that we believe should guide the development of the transit center. In the meantime, we wanted to share with you some initial thoughts and reflections based on many years of working with our community and our community leaders on what we know are critical priorities from prior community development and transportation issues discussions. Below is a preliminary list based on what we know about our community and from discussions we have had about the future of transit in the Canal neighborhood and surrounding areas:

- Public Safety: street lighting, transit center lighting, multilingual signage, way-finding.
- Street Safety: traffic calming, wider crosswalks, safety lights at crosswalks.
- Wide Access: multi-generation family groups walking together (parent, stroller, children, grandparent).



- Bicycle Infrastructure: safe, easy access, free, bike sharing for Canal-to-downtown mobility,
- Restrooms: clean and well stocked secure.
- Affordability: concerned for raising fare rates.
- Reliability: accountability and reporting on delays
- Capacity: concern for a full a bus passing-up a passenger trying to get to work or health appointments.

We welcome an opportunity to have more time for us to build capacity and implement a short process that would allow more community members provide direct input. Relative to other stakeholder groups, our communities require greater support to feel confident in offering informed feedback, considering all the project's factors, inputs, benefits, liabilities, and the short and long-term impacts on the community, the city, and the region. Many other key stakeholder groups already benefit from that knowledge and have organized advocacy infrastructure and expertise to effectively communicate their opinions.

We feel it is important for the whole process to be grounded in and guided by the reality that the majority of riders are Latinos and low-income essential workers whose contributions are necessary to holding up our economy and leading our recovery. An equitable approach would recognize that they are people who rely on transit, and that such access is an essential element to accessing employment and making a living. Such an approach would also allow for great opportunities and investment in incorporating community participation more strategically and would be responsive to the context and the barriers to engagement faced by this group.

In addition to the priorities listed above, we want to note that there are significant drawbacks and dangers to some of the alternatives, which we can share with you in more detail. However, the highest concerns are that a transit center that is separated into different stations increases danger for pedestrians, complicates transfers, and can be confusing to riders. The downtown traffic is already heavy, confusing, and dangerous; adding hurried riders racing to catch a bus will only make conditions worse. A single-site option works best for all riders, and as noted above, crosswalk safety measures are a priority for any alternative.

While we need a transit center that meets the public transportation needs of today and the near-future, we also need a transit center that strategically and inclusively anticipates, plans for, and accounts for the kind of growth we are working toward in the city and the region.

The future of mobility is sustainable, equitable, affordable public transit alongside infrastructure that invites and inspires non-car means including walkable streets and a working-people's biking network. We look forward to partnering with you to develop plans that include a vision for transit for future generations in our communities.

Sincerely,



**Omar Carrera**  
Chief Executive Officer  
Canal Alliance



**Marina Palma**

Community Leaders  
Voces del Canal



**Darlin Ruiz**

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415.457.7656

April 15, 2021

San Rafael City Council  
1400 Fifth Avenue  
San Rafael, CA 94901

**RE: San Rafael Transit Center Preferred Alternative**

Honorable Mayor and Council Members,  
Sustainable San Rafael has carefully reviewed the current Transit Center concepts developed by the Golden Gate Bridge Transit District. We recommend that you support the 'Whistlestop Block' concept (including its 'Relocate Whistlestop Alternate') as the preferred alternative for the project EIR.

This alternative safely consolidates transit services on a single block, while returning the existing depot building to transit use. Per the current GGBTD analysis, the Whistlestop Concept results in "significant benefits to bus travel time and reliability" and reduces traffic delay. It has the potential to fulfill the key project objectives identified by the community, including those outlined in our previous letters:

- Serve passengers with efficient transit routes; convenient connections among buses and with other transportation modes; amenities like shelter, rest rooms and snacks; and clear orientation and signage.
- Provide easy, safe and pleasant access to and from the Transit Center via walking, bicycles, drop-off, and nearby parking areas.
- Improve traffic flow where possible.
- Create a gateway to San Rafael, celebrating the city, keeping historical buildings and facilitating future development opportunities.
- Celebrate and enhance the natural setting and restore the creek and improve pedestrian connections under the freeway.
- Recognize and respond to the reality of sea level rise.

**'Whistlestop Block' Concept**

This concept has the best 'place-making' possibilities, creating a central 'transit plaza' framed by 'gateway' development opportunity sites north and south, the Tamalpais bikeway to the west, and the chance to restore Irwin Creek and otherwise enliven the area under the freeway east of the site. In short, the concept would result in a welcoming and active entry to San Rafael, implementing the basic scheme first presented in the Downtown Station Area Plan.

An attractive feature of the 'Relocate Whistlestop Alternate' is that it allows both closer physical access and clear visual access among all connecting buses and trains. The easterly realignment of Tamalpais also makes good use of the sliver of the Bettini site south of 3<sup>rd</sup> Street and west of the rail tracks for a car and taxi drop-off zone, with wider bike and pedestrian access along the west side of Tamalpais. Enhanced intersection treatments for Tamalpais at both 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Streets would assure safe access to the project by cyclists, bus passengers and other pedestrians, activating a lively greenway along Tamalpais.

This concept also provides the greatest flexibility for future expansion and modifications of transit services, securing public ownership of the entire block between 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Streets, with the potential to retain public ownership of the Bettini site by ground-leasing development rights on its buildable eastern portion. This makes the scheme well adapted for likely future changes in transit technologies and services.

Public ownership and use of the depot building, with portions perhaps operated by private parties, offers a number of possibilities, including ample ground floor transit services and perhaps direct access to the west train platform. Marin-specific retail and cafes could open onto plazas at both ends of the building. The original arcade might be re-opened to engage such uses and invite in the public. Bike storage could also be accommodated inside.

The building would provide an iconic visual anchor for both the transit plaza block and the surrounding gateway district. Some of its architectural details, such as the repeating arches, might be echoed in contemporary elements of the bus plaza such as curved canopies over passenger waiting and loading areas, and elegant seating design.

The depot building together with the open transit uses would provide a visual commons at San Rafael's front door, which would help avoid the walling off of downtown as adjacent blocks are developed with taller buildings. This would also help preserve the view corridor along Tamalpais and the train tracks from 2<sup>nd</sup> Street to Mission, keeping the city's defining hillsides in view.

The car and taxi drop-off zones shown along Tamalpais north of 4<sup>th</sup> Street are important elements of this concept. They should be supplemented by the zone south of 3<sup>rd</sup>, as mentioned above, which would better serve drop-off traffic approaching from the west. Enhanced pedestrian pathways from the park-and-ride lots under the freeway should also be provided as part of this concept, improving usage of the lots and pedestrian access to the East End of 4<sup>th</sup> Street. Restoration of the creek would greatly enhance this experience.

The 'gateway' quality of the new transit center would also be heightened by planting large street trees (like the London Plane trees now thriving on 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue) along Hetherton, Irwin and Tamalpais, and within the transit plaza itself. The arrival into San Rafael would then feel like entering a vibrant downtown in a park-like setting.

**'Under Freeway' Concept (south and north of 4<sup>th</sup> Street)**

The under-the-freeway scheme would be far less pleasant for users and require crossing busy Hetherton and/or Fourth to reach the trains, other buses or downtown, as well as covering over portions of the creek and thereby sacrificing the amenity it could provide if properly restored. The noise and exhaust under the freeway make it an unpleasant and perhaps unhealthy place to wait,

**'4<sup>th</sup> Street Gateway' Concept**

Our chief concern with this concept is that the buses on both sides of 4<sup>th</sup> Street would interrupt enhanced pedestrian access to the East End. Maintaining an unencumbered sidewalk on the sunny north side of the street is essential to this goal. The concept also precludes development of a significant opportunity site at the northwest corner of 4<sup>th</sup> and Hetherton and sacrifices two Victorian buildings on 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue. The 'plazas' shown on Hetherton are too small, exposed, and uninviting to function as open space. The scheme also prohibits automobile turns onto 4<sup>th</sup> Street.

Sustainable San Rafael also endorses the City staff's recommendations to use the updated San Rafael Climate Change Action Plan and associated GHG Emissions Reduction Strategy in assessing the greenhouse gas impacts of the project, and to assess the risk associated with projected sea level rise in the station area.

Thank you for providing the opportunity for public discussion of this significant improvement. We look forward to a thoughtful public decision-making process.

Sincerely,

William Carney  
President, Sustainable San Rafael

Copies:

Raymond Santiago, GGBTD  
Jim Schutz  
Bill Guerin  
Paul Jensen  
Danielle O'Leary  
Cory Bytof

# SAN RAFAEL HERITAGE

P.O. BOX 150665, SAN RAFAEL, CA 94915



April 20, 2021

Mayor Kate Colin  
San Rafael Vice-Mayor Bushy  
San Rafael City Council Members Hill, Kertz, Llores-Gulati

Subject: San Rafael Transit Center

Dear Mayor Colin, Vice-Mayor Bushy, Council Members and City Officials,  
Cc: Golden Gate Bridge and Highway Transportation District

We are San Rafael Heritage, the City's only organization committed to and actively involved with the preservation of our local historic resources. Heritage is San Rafael's preservation watchdog and strongly advocates for preserving important structures which define San Rafael's identity and special charm.

Just as we are dedicated to this effort, so is the City. San Rafael's commitment to historic preservation is engrained in the General Plans and is an integral part of the municipal code.

"San Rafael is home to many valuable historic treasures. These features aid in defining San Rafael's character and make the City unique. Policies in the Community Design and the Culture and the Arts elements encourage preservation of these identifiable features so that San Rafael can maintain its heritage and identity." - General Plan 2020, Page 134

"Protect and maintain San Rafael's historic and archaeological resources as visible reminders of the city's cultural heritage. As a mission city established over 200 years ago, San Rafael values its history and the people, places, and buildings that have shaped it. Preservation can provide a strong sense of place and civic identity, bolster the City's economy, and support the City's sustainability goals". - General Plan 2040, DRAFT  
Page 5-25

We expect the City will continue its commitment to our historic treasures in their decisions on the Transit Center. If the option selected for the Transit Center is either the Whistlestop or the Whistlestop alternative we especially advocate for the preservation of the Whistlestop building itself. It was originally the depot for the Northwestern Pacific Railroad and is an integral part of our city's history and development. We will defend the NWP Depot and the other historic buildings in the Transit Center area.

## Background to NWP Depot Preservation

In 2015 our inaugural project was to protect San Rafael's iconic 1929 Mission Revival Northwestern Pacific Railroad Depot from impending destruction, and we have devoted six years to the preservation of this building.

In those years, we have conducted exhaustive research on every physical and historical aspect of the Depot and its relationship to San Rafael's railroad and transportation history. Not only do our findings completely negate a previous study's conclusion that the Depot has no historical value, we have

established that the building retains enough historic integrity to deserve a local landmark designation, and we expect it to be treated as such by both the city of San Rafael and the Golden Gate Transit District.

### NWP Depot's Historic Value

The depot's historical value to our community lies in its connection to railroad passenger and freight service. Railroads and this depot are key to our economic and social growth, from 1871 on. San Rafael would have remained an outlying village without them. It would be tragic to throw this history away as SMART and the new Transit Center are re-newing the importance of a Transportation Gateway into San Rafael. Any new Transit Center can be made more meaningful and more successful if the existing Depot is part of it.

The NWP Depot is clearly a historic building and the last remaining, highly visible feature of the development of our city as a "railroad suburb". Built in 1929 on the original site of the previous station, its importance increased when the NWP relocated its headquarters there in 1944. This began its historical "Period of Significance".

Our July 2020 application to the City for Local Landmark designation substantiates the Depot's status. Included with it is the review of Architectural Historian Diana Painter who worked with our evaluator extensively to be sure the application conformed to the current standards required by the state of California (Department of Park and Recreation Form 523). In her supporting letter she stated *"There is no question of the importance of this building and site to San Rafael and the region's history... it is undoubtedly significant for its design ... The fact that few original (stations) remain increases the importance of this building"*

We previously worked with 2 architectural historians, one being Richard Brandi who was hired to review the Form 523 evaluation prepared for Whistlestop in July 2012 by JRP Historical Consulting. In his October 2015 letter, he found *"that the JRP evaluation is flawed and its conclusions are not substantiated..... The building still conveys its historic significance as a railroad station"*.

SRH is adamant that, at the minimum, the building be made a local landmark. Also that the "Secretary's Standards for Rehabilitation" be followed to improve its possible inclusion on National and State historic resource lists. Both the restoration and the landmark process must be pursued to protect the building in whatever way it is affected by the Transit Center development.

### Summary

The San Rafael Heritage Steering Committee has reviewed the various San Rafael Transit Center options. While we are not endorsing any option, we strongly urge that existing historic structures be preserved and utilized within any new Transit Center configuration. Otherwise, a timeless sense of connection to San Rafael history that gives this area a sense of place and identity will be lost. Historic buildings should be deliberately kept as part of the Station Area, and their preservation is paramount.

The historic structures in the Station Area include:

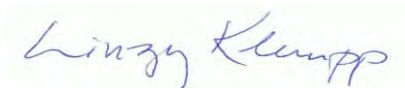
1. 930 Tamalpais Avenue, The Northwestern Pacific Depot (NWP) (aka Whistlestop)
2. 927 Tamalpais Avenue (Trevor's) (aka the Barrel House)
3. 709-711 Fourth Street (The Tavern on Fourth)
4. 633 and 637 Fifth Avenue (Queen Anne houses)

Our group has worked with the City on a number of important historic preservation projects. We are in partnership with the City. We at San Rafael Heritage have given hundreds of volunteer hours to assist in preparing the updated historic resource inventory with their ratings, for the Downtown Precise Plan, and

on the plan itself. We also have members who recently contributed to the drafting of the city's General Plan 2040.

We ask to continue to work in partnership with the City no matter which option is decided on. Call upon us. We will lend our expertise as issues develop to be certain these historic structures are properly preserved. When the scope of work for station restoration and reuse is prepared, Heritage expects to be at the table directly involved with the City and Golden Gate Transit.

Yours truly,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Linzy Klumpp". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Linzy Klumpp  
President, San Rafael Heritage

cc:

Paul Jensen, San Rafael Director of Community Development

Jim Schutz, San Rafael City Manager

Bill Guerin, San Rafael Director of Public Works

Lindsay Lara, San Rafael City Clerk

Denis Mulligan, GM/CEO, GGBH&TD

Ray Santiago, Project Manager San Rafael Transit Center, GGBH&TD

Adam Dankberg, Consultant Kimley-Horn





April 14, 2021

Honorable Mayor and San Rafael City Council Members

Dear Mayor Kate Colin and Members of San Rafael City Council:

We understand that you are scheduled to hear a presentation from Golden Gate Bridge, Highway and Transportation District (GGBHTD) staff on the status of the San Rafael Transit Center Project at the April 19 San Rafael City Council meeting. The District plans to issue its Draft EIR report in June of this year, which will include a preferred site. Because this is a project that will impact San Rafael and serve Marin transit users for many years to come, we encourage the City to work closely with GGBHTD officials to agree on a preferred site prior to the release of the Draft EIR.

The COVID-19 virus had a devastating effect on transit systems and their riders. Transit officials project that it will take many years to restore ridership to levels that existed before the virus. However, in areas where transit serves those without viable alternatives, the ridership rate is expected to return sooner and even increase. Prior to COVID-19, the San Rafael Transit Center was one of busiest transit centers in the Bay Area serving 9,000 riders a day. A large percentage of the users were from the Canal Neighborhood.

The District's three location options include the Under the Freeway Alternative, the 4<sup>th</sup> Street Gateway Alternative and the Whistlestop Block Alternative.

We believe the location of the new Transit Center should

- a. Serve as a central hub for transit users, and be safe, comfortable, and attractive;
- b. Be designed with good vehicle traffic circulation, both for transit-related vehicles entering and leaving the site, vehicles dropping off users at the site, and vehicles traveling near the site;
- c. Be designed to be responsive and adaptable to sea level rise, in keeping with State and local sea level rise projections and in accordance with the planned life expectancy of the infrastructure;

- d. Be designed to incorporate energy conservation measures such as solar panels and electric charging stations for e-bicycles;
- e. Be located to minimize dangerous pedestrian crossings of highly trafficked major streets;
- f. Be more than just a replacement of the existing Transit Center; it should be something better with placemaking design;
- g. Be designed as the gateway to San Rafael's Downtown Area;
- h. Be integrated with San Rafael Station Area Plan components;
- i. Be designed to accommodate future expansion and innovations in modes of travel;
- j. Include areas large enough to safely accommodate pedestrian and bicycle access;
- k. Provide for adequate "Kiss and Ride" drop-off and pick-up areas.

#### The Under the Freeway Alternative

We believe the Under the Freeway Alternative does not meet these objectives. Furthermore, we are concerned that this option, being the least desirable of the three, will negatively impact the many minority transit users who live in the Canal Neighborhood and use the Transit Center. The site would be a more dangerous and less comfortable station for the low-income people who are the predominate users of public transit. This may result in grounds for a Title VI lawsuit by transit and equity advocates.

Additionally, we have environmental concerns about having to cover the creek in that area, which would result in the loss of creek habitat. Also, transit users going to or from the SMART Station would have to walk across a busy Hetherton Street.

This property would remain under the control of Caltrans who could request Golden Gate Transit to vacate the site, necessitating another search for a new site. Should this happen, it would be likely that the sites in the area available now would have been developed for other uses, and the Transit Center buses would need to be relocated to City streets which would result in significant impact on City traffic.

Finally, placing the Transit Center at the site is considerably more expensive, with a projected \$60-\$85 million cost compared to the \$40-\$55 million cost for the two other alternative sites.

#### The 4<sup>th</sup> Street Alternative

The 4th Street Gateway Alternative also does not meet the above objectives. It would take up two City blocks bordered by Hetherton Street, Third Street, Tamalpais Ave, and Fifth Avenue and prohibit right turns from Hetherton Street to Fourth Street, which is a major concern of the San Rafael business community. Passengers would have to cross Fourth Street to make some transfers. Finally, this Alternative would utilize an extra City block that could be used for other purposes.

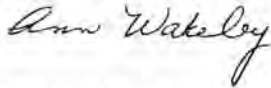
### The Whistlestop Block Alternative

We believe the Whistlestop Block Alternative provides the most flexibility in serving the needs of transit users while integrating the Transit Center with Downtown. It best meets the objectives that we have laid out. It places the Transit Center on one block in an open and safe area. Passengers do not have to cross any street to make transfers. The use of the Whistlestop building creates a pedestrian-friendly information and retail center.

We recommend that the City work with GGBHTD staff to adopt a public review design process in which San Rafael citizens and Transit Center users will be able to provide input on things such as placemaking and public art. This would occur after the Project EIR is approved and the Transit Center site chosen.

The League of Women Voters of Marin will continue to monitor and provide input on this important project.

Sincerely,



Ann Wakeley  
President

CC:

Marin County Board of Supervisors  
Patty Garbarino, Board Member GGBHTD  
Alice Fredericks, Board Member GGBHTD  
Denis Mulligan, General Manager- GGBHTD  
Ron Downing, Planning Director, GGBHTD  
Raymond Santiago, Project Manager, GGBHTD  
Jim Schutz, San Rafael City Manager  
Nancy Whelan, General Manager- Marin Transit  
Robert Betts, Marin Transit, Director of Operations and Planning  
Ann Richman, Executive Director, Transportation Authority of Marin



# SAN RAFAEL TRANSPORTATION CENTER



Relocation Analysis, Environmental Clearance, and Preliminary Design

## Golden Gate Bridge Highway & Transportation District Transportation Committee

May 20, 2021



**SAN RAFAEL**  
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## SAN RAFAEL TRANSPORTATION CENTER

Relocation Analysis, Environmental Clearance, and Preliminary Design



### Role of the Transit Center

- Over 800 daily bus trips
- 9,000 daily boardings and alightings serving equally as an access point to Downtown San Rafael and as a transfer point between services
- Large contingent of transit center users are essential workers who have continued to rely on transit through pandemic and will continue to rely on transit in future



### Transit Center User Demographics

Population Group	Riders on Routes Serving Transit Center	City of San Rafael Population	Marin County Population
Household Income Less than \$50k	45%	31%	25%
Minority (non-white)	69%	33%	29%



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## Why a New Transit Center is Needed

Construction of SMART tracks impacted ability to access several bus bays, limiting flexibility and usability of transit center

Transit center has insufficient space for pick-up/drop-off, shuttles, taxis, and bike parking

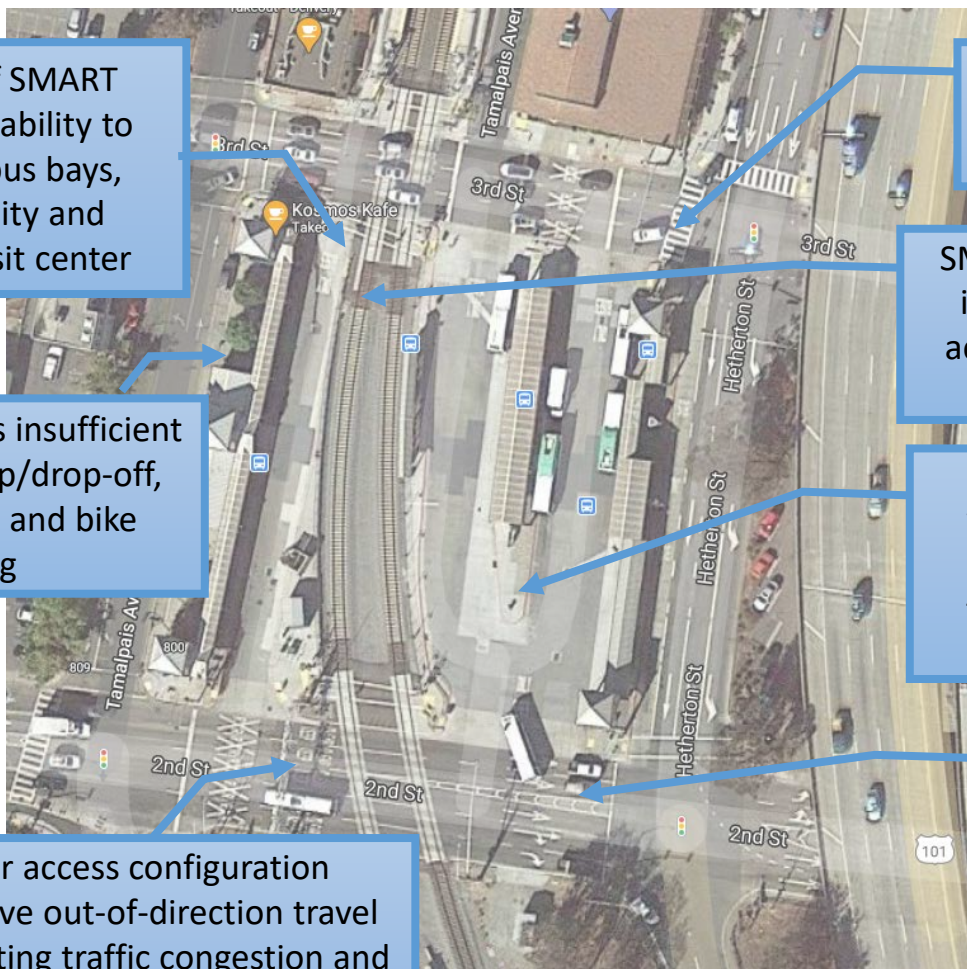
Transit center access configuration requires extensive out-of-direction travel for buses, impacting traffic congestion and increasing operating costs

Third Street serves as a major barrier for pedestrian access and transfers to SMART

SMART tracks bisecting transit center impacts pedestrian circulation and access, increasing transfer times and making wayfinding difficult

Current transit center was built 30 years ago, lacks sufficient space for customer service, and needs technology, sustainability, and user comfort improvements

Congestion on 2<sup>nd</sup> Street makes it challenging for buses to exit transit center, increasing travel times and impacting reliability





## COVID-Recovery Considerations

- Transit center site identification and sizing is based on transit **SUPPLY**, not **DEMAND**
  - Bus volumes through the transit center have ***increased*** during pandemic
  - There are no plans for service reductions or eliminations by either GGT or MT
  - Existing transit center is at (or exceeding) its capacity today, impacting service efficiency and flexibility
- Transit center concepts incorporate flexibility to allow for evolution in service patterns, fleet size, and technology
- Transit ridership is projected to grow in both San Rafael and Marin County
  - Transit serves as a critical means of providing mobility and meeting climate change goals





## Inputs Used to Select Preferred Alternative

- Technical analysis of transit center usage patterns, pre-COVID, during COVID, and into the future
- Technical analysis of bus operations, traffic circulation, bicycle and pedestrian circulation through downtown San Rafael
- Extensive community engagement and community feedback, particularly from transit riders
- Extensive stakeholder engagement and feedback
- Environmental Analysis to date



# Community Outreach Process

- Five phases of public engagement
  1. Listening (March 2018 Open House & Survey)
  2. Input on Specific Concepts (June 2018 Open House, Canal Outreach, Survey)
  3. Scoping for Environmental Analysis (October 2018 Meeting)
  4. Project Update/Review of Alternatives (November 2020)
  5. *Review Findings of Environmental Analysis (anticipated Summer 2021)*



## Community Engagement Activities to Date

- Four well-attended community meetings
- Facebook Live event in Spanish
- Over 45 hours of tabling at the transit center
- Tabling at several food distribution events in the Canal
- Approximately ten presentations to community groups
- Two online/in-person surveys with over 1,200 responses
- Over 7,000 total in-person and virtual interactions



# What Identification of a Preferred Alternative Means

- Identifies an initial preference based on the environmental analysis contained in the Draft
- Does not represent approval of the project or adoption of an alternative
- Apprises the community as to what the initial environmental review is pointing towards to inform their responses

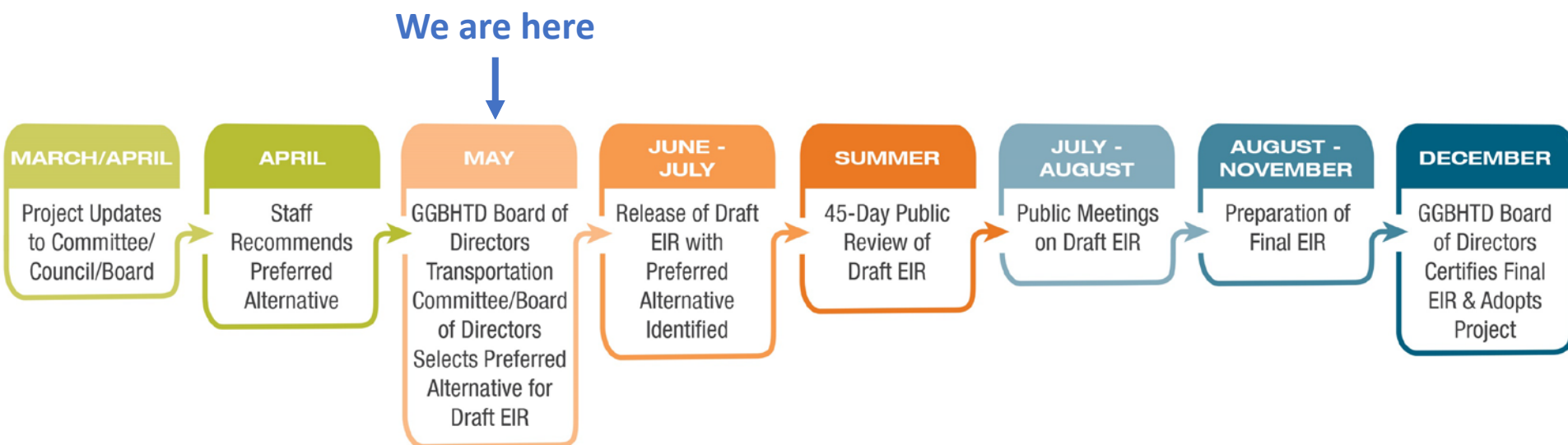


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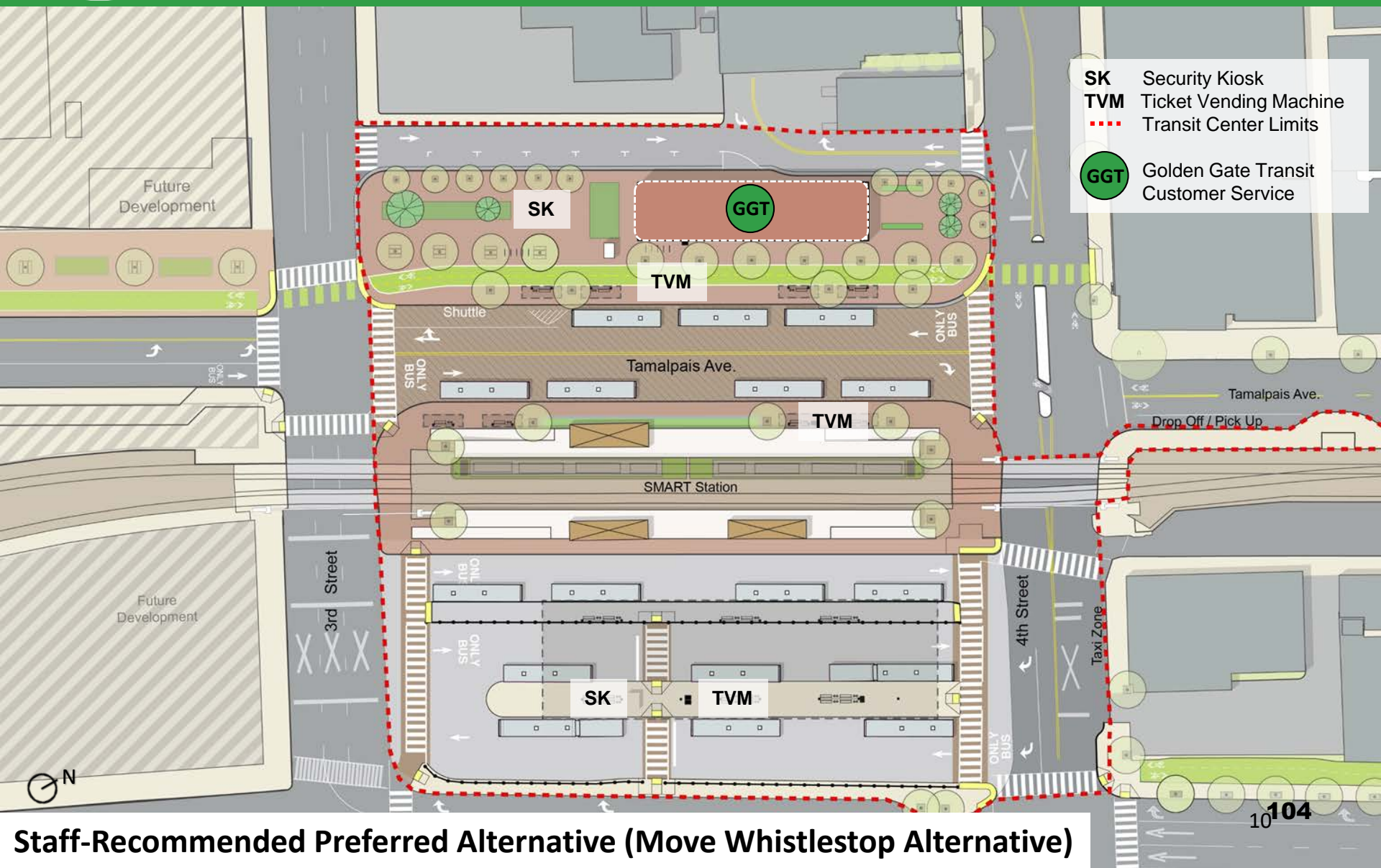
## Process for Formal Selection of a Preferred Alternative





# SAN RAFAEL TRANSPORTATION CENTER

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- SK** Security Kiosk
- TVM** Ticket Vending Machine
- Transit Center Limits**
- GGT** Golden Gate Transit Customer Service

Staff-Recommended Preferred Alternative (Move Whistlestop Alternative)



## Proposed Transit Center Includes

- 17 bus bays
  - Same capacity as current transit center, fully utilized at peak times (even during pandemic)
- Existing SMART Station
- Security
- Clipper machines
- Covered waiting areas and passenger seating
- Bike parking
- Green (LEED) treatments
- Wayfinding
- Customer service and transit information
- Lighting
- Landscaping and public spaces
- Ancillary retail space
- Maintenance parking
- Pick-up/Drop-off space
- Taxi/TNC and shuttle space
- Driver relief facilities
- Public restrooms
- Consideration for Consideration for Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) strategies





# SAN RAFAEL TRANSPORTATION CENTER

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## Rendering





## **Benefits of Move Whistlestop Alternative**

- Reduction in bus travel time and improvements in bus reliability
- Reduction in amount of bus circulation on local streets
- Operational flexibility to allow for future potential expansion of transit service and schedules
- New transit center facilities, including enlarged customer service, new shelters, integration of technology, green treatments (LEED), improved waiting areas
- Flexible curb for microtransit, shuttles, TNCs, taxis, pick-up/drop-off
- New public spaces that will create a sense of place and transition to downtown San Rafael



## Benefits Relative to Other Alternatives

- Better achieves Project Objectives
  - Does not require passengers to cross any auto streets for either transfers between buses or transfers between buses and SMART
  - Most significant benefits to transit travel time and reliability, providing improved transit connections and optimizing operating costs
  - Creates a cohesive transit identity and simplifies wayfinding for transit users
  - Provides clear lines of sight and active public spaces, creating a safe and secure space for patrons
  - Implements key tenets of the City's Station Area Plan, including enhancing the public realm
  - Implements a key part of the City's Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan, the north-south cycle track on Tamalpais Avenue



## **Benefits Relative to Other Alternatives (cont.)**

- Environmentally least damaging
  - No significant, unavoidable impacts
  - Does not impact historic resources
  - Does not impact Irwin Creek
- Impacts the fewest number of active businesses



## Community Sentiment Received Thus Far

- Letters of support from League of Women Voters, Marin Conservation League, and Sustainable San Rafael
- Letter emphasizing need for a consolidated transit center from Canal Alliance
- Strongest support for Whistlestop Block from transit riders in recent survey
- Highest priority from initial project survey was for “having a safe transit center”



## Upcoming Outreach

- **Objective:** Receive comments from stakeholders and community on draft environmental document
- **Community Outreach Activities during Draft EIR review:**
  - Community meeting
    - English language with translation services available
  - Community group presentations
  - Press Release and advertisements
  - In-Person Engagement at Transit Center
  - Workshop series with Canal community



## Path Forward

- GGBHTD Board of Directors Transportation Committee – May 20<sup>th</sup>, 2021
  - Recommend Preferred Alternative for Draft EIR to Board of Directors
- GGBHTD Board of Directors – May 21<sup>st</sup>, 2021
  - Selection of Preferred Alternative for Draft EIR
- Prepare and Release Draft EIR – June/July 2021
- Community Outreach during 45-day Draft EIR Circulation – Summer 2021
- GGBHTD Board of Directors – December 2021
  - Final EIR Certification/Project Adoption





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