November 9, 2009

Robert Weil, P.E.
Director Public Works
City of San Carlos
600 Elm Street
San Carlos, CA 94070

VIA EMAIL

Dear Director Weil,

On behalf of the Silicon Valley Bicycle Coalition (SVBC), I am writing to provide input on the Holly Street/US 101 Access Alternatives currently being considered by the City of San Carlos. We appreciate the City’s effort to improve bicycle and pedestrian access through this important corridor, and recognize the challenges presented by this congested area. Each of the alternatives you are considering offers some improvement over the proposed PAMF mitigation, yet a number of concerns have been raised by our members. As you evaluate the various possible designs, we ask that you consider the following issues:

1. The Partial Cloverleaf designs (D-H) are preferable to both the current design and the PAMF mitigations because they eliminate the high-speed on-ramps and off-ramps that can be challenging for both cyclists and pedestrians. Designs A and B are less preferable because they still include several high speed on-ramps and off-ramps.

2. Most of the designs provide no accommodation for cyclists on the overpass itself. While experienced cyclists will likely use the travel lane, the lack of bicycle accommodation would continue to discourage most people from cycling across the overpass. For the overpass not to be a barrier for cyclists, its design should be as bike-friendly as the streets on either side. Colored bike lanes would be useful wherever bike lanes intersect travel lanes, as these areas pose the highest risk for accidents.

3. The bike boulevard (Design C) is an innovative concept that has proved to be popular among cyclists with a wide range of abilities. For the bike boulevard to be effective, however, the following elements are needed:
   a. The road design should calm motor vehicle traffic, possibly by adding a mid-street barrier to restrict through traffic. Otherwise, the bike boulevard is no different than any other road.
b. A traffic signal that detects bicycles would be needed at Old County Rd, in addition to the one depicted at Industrial Rd, to assist cyclists turning left onto and off of the bike boulevard.

c. A means for cyclists to travel to and through the Caltrain station is needed. The current design does not provide an efficient route for cyclists traveling between the bike boulevard, downtown San Carlos, and the western neighborhoods.

4. The multipurpose path in Design I would be attractive to many pedestrians and inexperienced cyclists. However, careful consideration is needed as to how cyclists and pedestrians would safely and efficiently access it on both sides of the overpass. In addition, the presence of the path should not prohibit cyclists from using the overpass travel lane if they so choose.

5. The roundabout in Design I is also an innovative concept, although it may pose issues for cyclists and pedestrians trying to navigate the constant flow of traffic in this area. Not all motorists stop at crosswalks, and this behavior is likely to be even more common in an area so close to a freeway.

6. The question of how each design adheres to Caltrans Deputy Directive-64 needs to be carefully considered. For decades, our roads have been designed to make driving an easy and comfortable experience. Unfortunately, we have not done the same for other modes of transportation, such as walking and biking. DD-64 is designed to balance this inequity by building more “complete streets” that serve the needs of all users, and this goal should be considered as each design alternative is evaluated.

San Carlos has stated objectives to decrease pollution and improve health by supporting alternative modes of transportation. Facilitating bicycle and pedestrian travel between the residential, retail, employment, and recreational centers on either side of US 101 is a significant step toward meeting these objectives. The Silicon Valley Bicycle Coalition appreciates your efforts to find the best solution to this challenging problem and stands ready to assist as you consider the various options available.

Thank you for your consideration, and please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

Corinne Winter
Executive Director