



Memorandum

TO: HONORABLE MAYOR AND
CITY COUNCIL

FROM: James R. Helmer

SUBJECT: STOCKTON AVENUE RAILROAD
CROSSING CLOSURE

DATE: 05-31-05

Approved

Date

6/22/05

Council District: 3, 6

RECOMMENDATION

Adopt a resolution to close a segment of Stockton Avenue at the railroad crossing between Emory Street and University Avenue.

BACKGROUND

The segment of Stockton Avenue between Emory Street and University Avenue is crossed by five railroad tracks carrying approximately 120 trains daily. The five railroad companies that operate along the corridor are:

- Peninsula Corridor Joint Powers Board (Caltrain) – daily commuter service between San Francisco, San José and Gilroy
- Capitol Corridor Joint Powers Authority – daily commuter service between Sacramento, Oakland and San José
- Altamont Commuter Express (ACE) – daily commuter service between Stockton, Pleasanton, and San José
- Amtrak – national passenger service
- Union Pacific Railroad – national freight service

The Stockton Avenue railroad crossing has a poor surface condition and several near accidents have been reported in the recent past. The California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC) has conducted a safety analysis of the site and recommends a permanent closure of Stockton Avenue at the crossing. Attached are maps and photos showing the railroad crossing location and condition.

ANALYSIS

Caltrain is currently in the process of developing a project to close Stockton Avenue in an effort to enhance safety and to facilitate higher speeds for their "Baby Bullet" train service. The project also has an environmental benefit to the surrounding neighborhood, because the closure will eliminate the need for trains to blast their horn as they approach the crossing (as is required by safety regulations).

The Caltrain project to close Stockton Avenue is being funded by a Federal railroad crossing safety grant. The scope of the project includes the modification of City streets, sidewalks and lighting, relinquishment of property rights, installation of safety fencing, and removal of crossing gates and signals. The cost of the project is approximately \$200,000. The project design is under development and construction is proposed to begin in Spring 2006.

The City's Department of Transportation (DOT) recommends closing Stockton Avenue at the railroad crossing at this time, in advance of the Caltrain closure project, in order to achieve the safety and community benefits in the near-term. The key issues of safety concern are the long crossing distance and number of tracks, the skewed crossing angle which reduces visibility, the speed and volume of trains, and the poor crossing surface condition.

The California Vehicle Code authorizes local authorities to close any highway to vehicular traffic when, in the opinion of the legislative body having jurisdiction, the highway is no longer needed for vehicular traffic. Additionally, the California Constitution authorizes charter cities, such as San José, to take reasonable regulatory actions necessary to protect the health, safety and welfare of its citizens.

DOT staff has evaluated the Stockton Avenue railroad crossing closure and finds that there are no significant impacts created by the closure, and there is substantial support for the closure, as noted below:

- The traffic volume is considered to be very low. The closure of Stockton Avenue and the redirection of traffic will not have a significant impact to other streets in the area (redirected traffic will primarily use Taylor Street and Coleman Avenue). Approximately 1000 vehicles cross the tracks daily. This is comparable to a local neighborhood street. A typical City 2-lane collector street has a daily volume in the order of 5,000 to 10,000 vehicles.
- The Fire Department has concluded that the closure does not cause emergency response times to exceed standards, and it is therefore not a significant impact.
- The adjacent neighborhood and Bellarmine College Preparatory school support the closure, particularly due to the noise reduction benefits gained by the elimination of horn blasts and crossing signals.

- Central Concrete has business operations along Stockton Avenue on both sides of the track. However, these operations are generally independent of each other and they have expressed support of the closing in the interest of overall public safety.
- All five railroad operators along the corridor support the closure.

Additionally it is noted that on January 13, 2005, the CPUC approved for San José a new railroad crossing for the extension of Autumn Street to support the San José Marketplace retail center (a Cousins Development project). The CPUC staff expedited the approval of this crossing at the City's request. In the interest of continued positive relations with the CPUC, it is recommended that the City help expedite the CPUC's request to close the Stockton Avenue railroad crossing.

Next Steps

Subject to Council approval, the near-term closure of Stockton Avenue will be implemented this summer by DOT staff and involves the installation of temporary concrete barriers, signage and pavement markings. The subsequent Caltrain project (proposed to start construction in Spring 2006) will provide permanent street improvements at the closure location. Future City Council action will be required relative to the vacation of the City street right-of-way at the crossing location. It is noted that the future Caltrain project is being coordinated with a neighborhood traffic calming project that is evaluating the closure of Emory Street between Laurel Street and Stockton Avenue.

OUTCOME

The closure of the Stockton Avenue railroad crossing improves public safety, enhances the speed and quality of rail services for passengers and businesses, reduces train system noise impacts for the adjacent neighborhood, and provides a proactive City response to recommendations from the California Public Utilities Commission.

PUBLIC OUTREACH

On September 24, 2004, Caltrain and City staff met with Central Concrete to discuss the proposed closure of Stockton Avenue. A public meeting was held on September 29, 2004 at Bellarmine College Preparatory school to review the project and address community questions and concerns. The overall response was supportive of the closure.

COORDINATION

The proposal to close Stockton Avenue has been developed together with Caltrain and CPUC, working in coordination with the Departments of Public Works, Fire, and Planning, Building and Code Enforcement, and the City Attorney's Office.

COST IMPLICATIONS

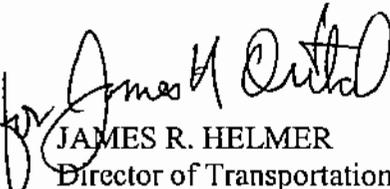
The cost of temporary measures to close Stockton Avenue is estimated at less than \$5,000. Funding is available in the Traffic Capital Budget in the line item titled "Railroad Grade Crossings."

BUDGET REFERENCE

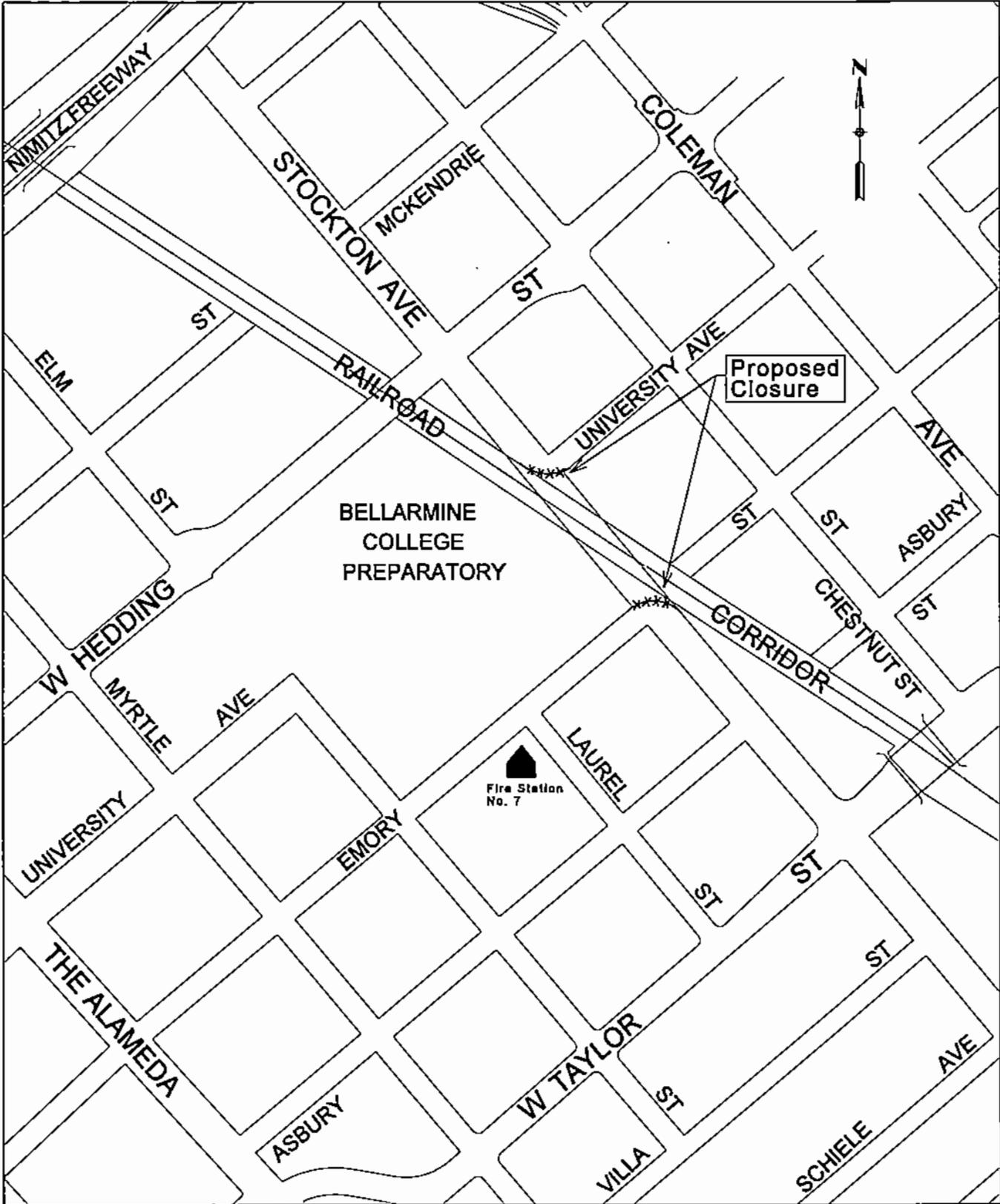
Fund #	Appn #	Appn. Name	RC #	Total Appn	Amt. for Contract	Adopted Budget Page	Last Budget Action (Date, Ord. No.)
465	4313	Railroad Grade Crossings	072253	\$200,000	\$5,000	2005-2009 Pg. V-992	10/12/04, No. 27267

CEQA

Exemption PP05-077


JAMES R. HELMER
Director of Transportation

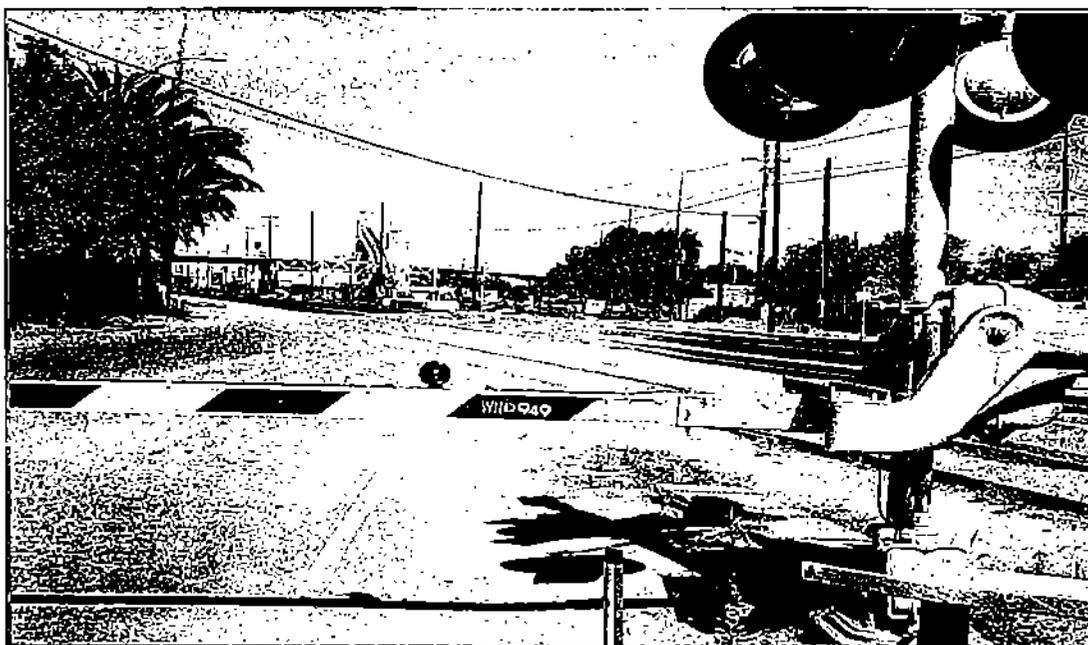
Attachments



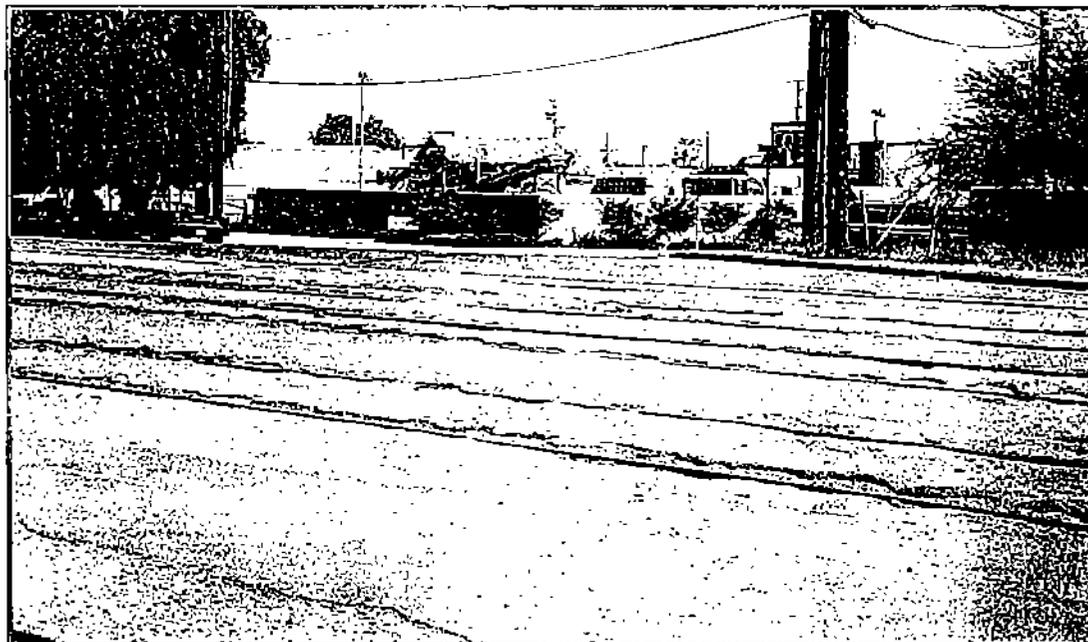
VICINITY MAP
STOCKTON AVENUE
AT-GRADE RAILROAD CROSSING

CITY OF SAN JOSE
DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION
MAY 2005

Stockton Avenue Railroad Crossing Photos



A. 5 Tracks at a Skewed Angle



B. Crossing Surface in Poor Condition