Draft Purpose and Need

Both the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) lead agency and the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) lead agency are required to include a statement in their environmental document regarding why each agency is considering a particular project. NEPA regulations require a description of a project's underlying "purpose and need". CEQA regulations require a statement of the proposed project's "goals and objectives". Both the "purpose and need" and "goals and objectives" provide similar functions in that they:

- *Explain why a project is being considered*
- *Assist lead agencies in the decision-making process, specifically by helping them identify what alternatives should be considered*

It is possible for the "purpose and need" and "goals and objectives" to match if both the federal lead agency (NEPA) and the state/local lead agency (CEQA) concur. If there are differences, the project's environmental document discusses these statements separately.

This document focuses on the draft purpose and need statement for the Oakland-Alameda Bicycle/Pedestrian Bridge project.

Purpose

Under NEPA, the "purpose" of a project defines (in this case the transportation) problems that need to be solved (i.e., what the project sponsor is trying to accomplish). The "purpose" does not suggest solutions to existing problems, but instead explains why an agency is proposing the project. The "purpose" must be unbiased, achievable, and comprehensive enough to allow for a reasonable range of alternatives to be identified. It must also be specific enough to limit the range of feasible alternatives.

For the Oakland-Alameda Bicycle/Pedestrian Bridge project, the proposed "purpose" of the project is to:

1) Reduce the barrier effect of the Oakland Estuary on bicycle and pedestrian travel between western Alameda and downtown Oakland, especially for equity priority communities, by providing a comfortable, ADA-compliant, convenient, and low-stress crossing for people of all ages and abilities

2) Improve multimodal connectivity between western Alameda and downtown Oakland to regional transit hubs, major destinations, recreational centers and trails, employment opportunities, and future urban infill projects

3) Encourage mode shift away from single-occupant motor vehicle cross estuary trips to reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions

4) Provide a zero-cost estuary crossing to better serve equity priority communities and environmental justice communities in western Alameda and downtown Oakland to help reduce local air pollutants and promote positive health outcomes

5) Increase resiliency to climate change and disaster recovery by providing an additional estuary crossing

Need

Under NEPA, a project's "need" provides data to support each purpose statement (i.e. establishing evidence that a problem exists). Supporting data must be factual, quantifiable, and establish clear evidence of a deficiency (current or future). The "need" must identify a problem that is fixable and justifies a commitment of resources and/or impacts to the environment.

The "need" for the Oakland-Alameda Bicycle/Pedestrian Bridge is based on the following existing conditions:

1) Cross-estuary bicycle and pedestrian facilities between western Alameda and downtown Oakland are limited. As a result, the Oakland Estuary represents a barrier to walking and biking between these two communities that are separated by less than 1,000 feet.

- The only existing biking/walking facility is a two-way, three-foot wide, shared use pathway in the Posey Tube adjacent to vehicles going 45 miles per hour, or more. This narrow path has inadequate passing space for bicyclists and pedestrians and is not ADA compliant. The existing roadway cannot be modified to accommodate a wider path. The facility is aesthetically unpleasant due to vehicle noise and emissions (City of Alameda, 2009). As a result, the Posey Tube is used for less than 200 bicycle and pedestrian trips/day (Cities of Alameda and Oakland 2021). The nearest alternative estuary crossing, at the Park Street Bridge, would require an approximate six-mile round trip for bicyclists and pedestrians.
- Construction of the planned Oakland Alameda Access Project would provide an additional shared use path via the Webster Tube. However, user conditions on this path would mirror those within the Posey Tube, but with a slightly wider four-foot-wide path. With the addition of this facility, estimated users in both the Posey Tube and Webster Tube (Tubes) would increase to approximately 380 trips/day (Cities of Alameda and Oakland 2021). This represents less than 10% of the estimated demand that a dedicated bicycle/pedestrian estuary crossing would generate (up to 6,000 trips/day) (Cities of Alameda and Oakland 2021).

2) Within the Bay Area, a Webster Street connection between Alameda and Oakland was identified as one of three top corridors for a future bike highway (Caltrans 2022). Caltrans defines a bike highway as a high-quality, uninterrupted bikeway that fully separates its users from motor vehicles. Bike highways connect to major destinations, employment centers, and transit hubs. In addition to existing and potential user demand, Caltrans considered a corridor's proximity to equity communities when scoring its suitability for a bike highway.

a. A bike highway connecting to western Alameda would link users to grocery stores, office parks and jobs, housing, shopping centers, parks, and the College of Alameda. Users could also connect to the city's existing and planned bike/pedestrian network, including the Cross Alameda Trail and San Francisco Bay Trail (Bay Trail), to travel to other destinations within the city of Alameda.

b. A bike highway connecting to downtown Oakland would link users to regional transit services including Bay Area Rapid Transit's (BART) 12th Street and Lake Merritt stations, Amtrak's Jack London District Station, and AC Transit bus lines. Users could connect to commercial and residential areas, including in downtown Oakland, Chinatown, and Jack London Square. In addition to connecting to the city's existing and planned

pedestrian/bicycle networks, a bike highway would connect to the regional Bay Trail and the future West Oakland Link, a 1.1-mile elevated bicycle/pedestrian facility connecting to the Bay Bridge.

c. The Posey Tube currently serves as a cross-estuary connection for the Bay Trail. This facility does not conform to Bay Trail standards, which would require a wider shared-use path to promote trail usage.

3) Approximately 48,000 motor vehicles per day travel between western Alameda and downtown Oakland via the Tubes (Cities of Alameda and Oakland 2021). Planned growth in both cities will increase demand for cross estuary trips in 2030 to approximately 56,000 (Cities of Alameda and Oakland 2021). Because motor vehicle travel is the primary mode of transportation to/from Alameda Island, traffic volumes and associated GHG emissions are expected to increase.

a. In western Alameda, major planned mixed use housing developments include Alameda Landing, Alameda Shipways, and Alameda Point. Large planned mixed use development projects in downtown Oakland include Brooklyn Basin, Jack London Square, transit-oriented development at BART's Lake Merritt Station, the potential Howard Terminal, and other planned urban infill projects.

b. GHG emissions, which contribute to global climate change, would increase as a result of increased cross-estuary motor vehicle trips. Both Alameda and Oakland are vulnerable to impacts of global climate change including sea level rise, drought, and wildfire smoke (City of Alameda [2022] and City of Oakland [2019]). Both cities have identified mode shift away from single-occupancy fossil fuel vehicles to lessen polluting forms of transportation and to reduce their contributions to climate change.

4) Equity Priority Communities (EPC) (Metropolitan Transportation Commission [MTC] 2022) and Environmental Justice (EJ) communities are located along both sides of the Oakland Estuary. These communities include low-income, minority, and zero-vehicle households. Existing crossing modes not only place financial burden on equity communities, but also contribute to reduced community health outcomes.

a. Currently, the only no-cost estuary crossing between western Alameda and downtown Oakland is walking/biking through the Posey Tube. Bicyclists and pedestrians could use transit (Alameda-Contra Costa Transit District [AC Transit] bus lines and San Francisco Bay Ferry service) to bypass the Posey Tube. Both transit options require users to pay a fee and are not offered 24 hours per day. Reduced frequency and hours of transit service are associated with both on weekends. Front rack space on AC Transit buses is limited to carrying three bicycles. Without transit, equity communities are left to use motor vehicles for cross-estuary trips.

b. Asthma rates in western Alameda and downtown Oakland scored in the upper 70th percentile statewide, and cardiovascular disease rates scored in the upper 50th percentile statewide (California Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment [OEHHA], 2022). Air pollution from motor vehicle emissions can trigger asthma and heart attacks (OEHHA, 2022). By meeting the expected demand for a bicycle/pedestrian crossing (up to 6,000 users/day) (Cities of Alameda and Oakland 2021), mode shift could reduce air pollutant emissions, thereby protecting community health. Sedentary and

inactive lifestyles can contribute to cardiovascular disease, and a mode shift to biking and walking would promote physical activity and its associated health benefits.

5) In the event of a disaster, such as flooding and earthquakes, western Alameda has limited connectivity to downtown Oakland. Only the Tubes provide a direct link between these two areas and are susceptible to flooding from major rainfall events and sea level rise. If closed, the lack of connectivity could delay disaster response and recovery for western Alameda. This would increase traffic congestion and slow emergency services (City of Alameda 2019). Redundant infrastructure would provide the ability to adapt and recover more easily from disasters.

References

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