

April 12, 2021 email to Fanny Yu (fyu@ci.milpitas.ca.gov)

Subject: feedback on the Draft Trail, Pedestrian, and Bicycle Master Plan

Ms. Yu,

I fully support the vision of a “complete, connected, all ages and abilities network that expands access to and use of transit in Milpitas.” So, I was surprised to find zero pedestrian over-crossings (POCs) in the Draft Plan. As you know, the [Bikeway Master Plan](#) was last updated in 2009; the Trails Master Plan was last updated in 1997. Given the city’s record of updating these documents every 10 years or more, this year’s [Milpitas Trail, Pedestrian, and Bicycle Master Plan](#) (MTPBMP) should be a plan for at least the next 10 years. We must include infrastructure that enhances safety and connectivity across major barriers for pedestrians and cyclists.

“The Milpitas Trail, Pedestrian, and Bicycle Master Plan provides a vision and action plan for the City to create a complete and connected network of bicycle and pedestrian facilities.” However, based upon my 40+ years living in Milpitas, 25 years cycling in Milpitas, and 10 years on the Bicycle Pedestrian Advisory Commission, I see 3 major barrier-crossing omissions in this plan.

Our problem is clearly stated on page 55: “The existing active transportation network in Milpitas ... is often disconnected and incomplete. ... Major barriers ... limit safe, comfortable, and direct travel for people traveling by foot or by bike.” Likewise, the solution is stated on page 85: “Spot improvements identify opportunities to prioritize bicycle travel across the city. ... site-specific spot improvements are crucial to providing safe and connected routes.” The MTPBMP repeatedly calls for improved active transportation infrastructure that includes greater separation from motor vehicles and increased safe crossing opportunities that support the Plan’s vision. This strategy is supported by statements on page 88, and by Policies CIR 4-5, 4-6, and 4-7.

However, this strategy is barely apparent in the map of Priority Bicycle Spot Improvements (page 138). For example, the crossing of the railroad tracks between Yosemite Drive and Curtis Avenue is noted, but rated as low priority and low feasibility even though it provides much-needed connectivity. The map does not show an east-west crossing of Montague Expressway at Lower Penitencia Creek, nor does it show an east-west crossing of the railroad tracks between the Cedar Way and the Lower Penitencia Creek trail. Both POCs will provide connectivity to a park, a school, and the BART Transit Center).

**I request that these 3 crossings be included in the Plan.** Following is supporting documentation.

#### **BART Tracks Crossing to Connect Yosemite Drive with Curtis Avenue**

Starting nearly 25 years, the City has called for a crossing of railroad tracks (which now includes BART tracks) to connect Yosemite Drive with Curtis Avenue. Planners and residents have long

known that "... opportunities for travel east-west across the city are limited." That is why Figure 18 (page 62) shows 9 comments located at the missing connection between Yosemite Drive and Curtis Avenue. The City has already created a Class II bicycle lane along Yosemite Drive between I-680 and Milpitas Blvd. This Draft Plan extends that link between Milpitas Boulevard and the UPRR tracks (page 96). Although page 140 includes a crossing of the railroad tracks between Yosemite Drive and Curtis Avenue, it is rated as low priority and low feasibility. That "low priority" assessment seems odd given the history of this proposed crossing.

For example, page 13 of the [Milpitas Trails Master Plan](#) (1997) identifies various potential off-street trails including Yosemite Drive / Curtis Avenue as a 1.5-mile on-street connector. Page 27 supports the crossing saying "A grade-separated pedestrian and bicycle crossing of the railroad tracks is proposed in this location to connect the neighborhoods in the eastern portion of the city with the retail opportunities of the Great Mall, the employment centers west of Highway 880 and the transportation facilities provided by the Tasman Light Rail."

Furthermore, page 21 of the City of Milpitas Bikeway Master Plan (1999) calls for a Pedestrian/Bicycle Bridge "Connecting Curtis Avenue to Yosemite Drive over the UPRR railroad tracks." As mentioned in the 2013 [Sierra Club Milpitas Cool Cities Team Comments on the Circulation Element of the Milpitas General Plan](#), "The Yosemite/Curtis crossing has been on City and regional plans for 15 years. Although the Trails Master Plan calls for a crossing of the RR tracks on pages 13 and 27, this Circulation Element makes no mention of it. A crossing is also identified in the Milpitas Midtown Specific Plan under Street System Policies (Figure 4.4, Bicycle and Pedestrian Trail, page 4-6) as an "Off Street Path". The crossing was listed in the previous Bikeway Master Plan (1999), VTP's Countywide Bicycle Plan (2000), and as a "keystone project" in the Midtown Specific Plan (2002). Although still in the Trails Master Plan, all references have been deleted from the documents updated during the time our previous Traffic Engineer was employed with the City. *Removal of this project from the Bikeway Master Plan was particularly egregious because, in reviewing the draft in 2009, every member of the BPAC requested that the overcrossing be included.*"

### **Montague Expressway Crossing at Penitencia Creek**

This is a safety issue! As noted on page 35, most of the severe injury crashes involving cyclists or pedestrians occurred along major roadways like Montague Expressway, and is "particularly pronounced in the southern area of Milpitas near BART and light rail". During 2014-2018, multiple bicycle collisions occurred in close proximity to the BART Transit Center along with the City's only bicycle fatality (page 37). As Metro Area population grows and BART ridership approaches 20,000 daily passengers, we can expect more collisions – and deaths. The solution is on page 45: "Support for improved bicycle and pedestrian connections to and from the station has the potential to dramatically change the transportation landscape in Milpitas."

Much is already in place to support this POC. At both ends of it are trails along Lower Penitencia Creek (page 19). As noted in *Metro Linear Trails* (Project #2012) of the CIP ([Capital Improvement Program for 2021-2026](#)) a "majority of the linear trail segments have been completed." The eastern

end of that trail connects to the *S. Milpitas Blvd. Vehicle Bridge at Penitencia* (Project #2016). As page 88 says, expanding “Milpitas Boulevard to Tarob Court can improve connections to the station for all modes.” This Montague Expressway POC is mentioned as “Planned” on the Milpitas Metro Specific Plan web page: <https://www.milpitasmetro.org/>

The POC itself is already in the CIP as *Montague Ped. Overcrossing at Penitencia* (Project #2018, pages 172/173). The description says: “This project provides for the design and construction of a pedestrian overcrossing (POC) over Montague Expressway at the east levee of Penitencia Creek. The pedestrian overcrossing is part of the Metro Specific Plan circulation infrastructure plan to provide safe and convenient pedestrian connectivity between Metro residential developments, schools, parks, Great Mall, and the BART Station. Notes: Developer (Lennar) to provide 100% design documents for POC as part of a reimbursement agreement. City will start the CEQA process in 2021 and administer construction of POC. (TASP ID: DB#7) Design will cost \$1.4M, while the total cost is \$15M.” This crossing of Montague has been in Milpitas CIPs since at least 2016. Thus, its absence from the MTPBMP is surprising.

### **Railroad Tracks Crossing to Connect Cedar Way with Penitencia Creek Trail**

The Starlite Pines neighborhood of Milpitas has been somewhat isolated from the rest of the city since it was built in the 60’s. Now is the time to invest in its inclusion. Policy CIR 4-5 on page 69 is supportive: “Support building bridges or undercrossings across creek channels, railroad lines, and roadways to improve network connectivity ...” Likewise are statements on pages 23, 43, 47, and 53.

The Draft Plan makes the case for this crossing on page 87: “However, to successfully expand transportation options and encourage greater use of transit, it is important to consider how complete, connected, and comfortable the active transportation network near the [BART] station is. Low-stress infrastructure, including separated bikeways, safe crossings, complete and wide sidewalks, and **direct routes** [emphasis added] are imperative to maximizing the benefit of BART. ... With the station located at the intersection of two high-stress roadways, there are significant barriers to travel to and from the station; improvement such as this pedestrian bridge provide a vital link for people navigating this complex area. ... As Milpitas re-imagines this area, there are opportunities to explore new connections ... to prioritize bicycle and pedestrian activity to and near the station.”

This POC, combined with infrastructure plans for the Penitencia Creek Trail, satisfies all 4 criteria mentioned in the Connectivity category (page 137): “Connectivity to Transit, Schools, Parks, and Employment Centers”.

### **Boxed-In Thinking**

Although pages 34 and 55 promise to identify gaps in the existing network and summarize “key opportunities for improved active transportation infrastructure”, none of the 3 POCs identified above are mentioned. The map of Priority Bicycle Spot Improvements (page 138) includes the Yosemite

Drive to Curtis Avenue POC, but rates it low priority and low feasibility even though it provides badly-needed east-west connectivity to parks, a middle school, an employment center, the Great Mall and U. S. Post Office. Did the “the existing conditions and needs analysis process” cause these results?

Or did the prioritization process (page 8) that includes at least 7 factors, but withholds their individual weighting values and the rating process itself. One is left to simply wonder why these 3 barrier crossings have been omitted from the vision of a “complete, connected, all ages and abilities network that expands access to and use of transit in Milpitas.”