CITY OF SAN JOSE
CAPITAL OF SILICON VALLEY

Memorandum

TO: TRANSPORTATION AND ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE

FROM: John Ristow

SUBJECT: **At-Grade Station Alternative and Diridon Program**

DATE: May 12, 2025

Approved

Date: 5/22/2025

COUNCIL DISTRICT: # 6

RECOMMENDATION

(1) As recommended by the Diridon Station Steering Committee on May 21, 2025, accept the At-Grade Station Alternative and Diridon Program for environmental review, which includes the following:
- At-Grade Station Alternative (platforms, tracks, historic station, concourse, plazas, bus facility, light rail station, other affected improvements);
- West Virginia Street closure at the rail crossing with new pedestrian and bike undercrossing;
- Auzerais Avenue grade separation;
- San Carlos Street bridge replacement;
- Park Avenue reconfiguration;
- Noise/sound barriers at select crossings/locations;
- Stockton Avenue/The Alameda reconfiguration; and

(2) Refer and cross-reference the Diridon Station at Grade Station and Diridon Program Report to the June 10, 2025, City Council Meeting.

SUMMARY AND OUTCOME

On May 21, 2025, the Diridon Station Steering Committee accepted the staff recommendation of the Diridon Partner Agencies (Partner Agencies) to approve the At-Grade Station Alternative and the Diridon Program for environmental review, the next phase of work. The Partner Agencies are recommending that the City Council accept the decision of the Steering Committee.

BACKGROUND

The Partner Agencies – the City of San José, the Peninsula Corridor Joint Powers Authority (Caltrain), the Santa Clara Valley Transportation Authority (VTA), the California High-Speed Rail Authority (CHSRA), and the Metropolitan Transportation Commission, have been working together since 2018 to plan for the transformation of San José's downtown transit hub, Diridon Station. The station currently serves Caltrain, Capitol Corridor, Altamont Corridor Express (ACE), and Amtrak passenger rail, as well as VTA light rail (LRT) and bus services. In the future, the station will need to accommodate increased service by existing operators (Caltrain, ACE Capitol Corridor) as well as new ones, including CHSRA, BART, and the San José Diridon to Airport Connector. To effectively accommodate planned and future services, Diridon Station must be reconfigured, expanded, and upgraded to provide adequate capacity, functionality, and interconnectivity for passengers.

In order to plan for this substantial growth, the Partner Agencies formed a public agency partnership via a Cooperative Agreement in July 2018. Through 2018-2020, the Partner Agencies produced a vision for redeveloping Diridon Station, the "Concept Layout," through an effort called the Diridon Integrated Station Concept Plan. The Concept Layout is shown in Figure 1. The governing bodies of the five Partner Agencies accepted the Concept Layout in 2020. In 2021 and 2022, the Partner Agencies worked together with station area property owners to refine the boundaries of the project. During this same time, CHSRA made important progress in environmental review, certifying the environmental document for the Northern California segment of their project in August 2022.

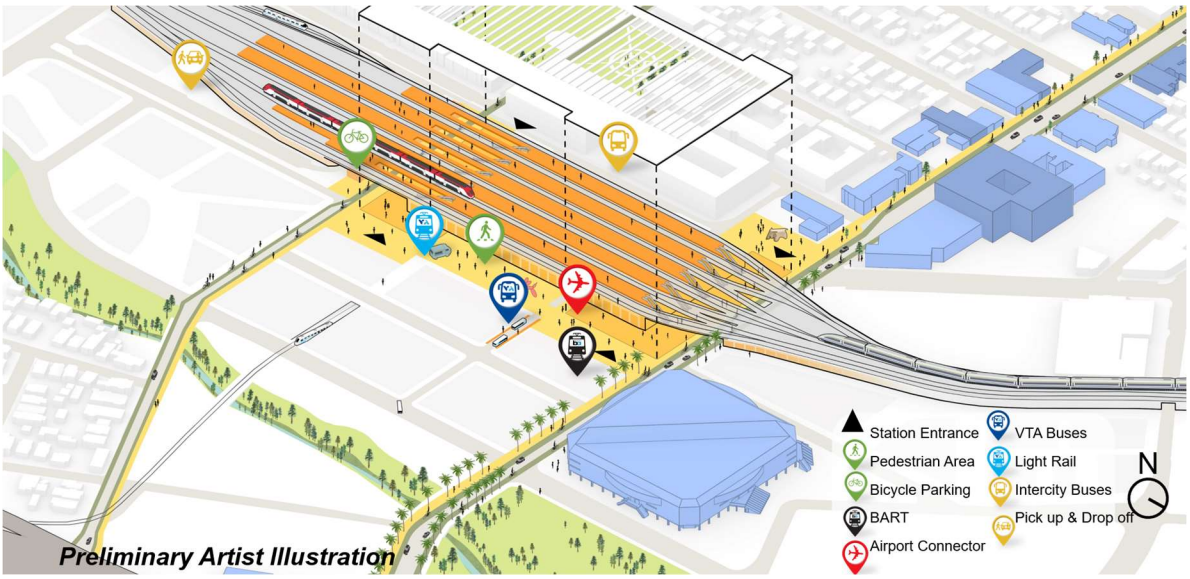

Figure 1- The Concept Layout was the vision produced in an earlier phase of work, the Diridon Integrated Concept Plan.

In 2023, the Partner Agencies initiated the current phase of work – the Business Case.

The Business Case is a comprehensive approach for evaluating the costs and benefits of station design alternatives. Its purpose is to identify a preferred alternative that is cost effective, implementable, and in alignment with the goals and objectives of the Partner Agencies and the greater community. Those goals are shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2 - The goals that the Partner Agencies developed for evaluating station alternatives in the Business Case.

Building on the vision set forth in the Concept Layout, the Partner Agencies developed station design alternatives to reduce impacts and costs while continuing to prioritize customer experience. Using a thorough evaluation process based on the goals shown above in Figure 2, the Partner Agencies first developed three alternatives: an at-grade option, an elevated option, and a stacked option.

The At-Grade Alternative (Figure 3) rebuilds the station with the tracks and platforms at approximately street level, which is the same vertical position where the tracks are today.

Figure 3- The At-Grade Alternative keeps tracks in the same vertical position as today. This option improves east/west connections by creating a gently sloping ground plane on either side of the station

The Elevated Alternative (Figure 4) rebuilds the station with the tracks above street level. Finally, the Stacked Alternative (Figure 5) puts high-speed rail on a higher platform

level above the other heavy rail modes.

After technical and urban design studies, the Partner Agencies decided to eliminate the Stacked Alternative from consideration because it would be difficult to construct and would have significant negative visual impacts on the neighborhoods to the west of the station. This left the At-Grade and Elevated options, which the Partner Agencies developed in greater detail and discussed with the community in late 2024 and into 2025. The City Council held a study session in August 2024 to learn more about these options and to kick off public engagement.[1]

Figure 4 - Elevated Alternative. This option elevates the tracks roughly 25 feet above the surrounding street level to provide better street connections through the station and across the tracks. This option is most like the 2020 Concept Layout.

For the remaining two alternatives, the concourse level is located just below the rail tracks and platforms.[2] Access to LRT and the future BART tunnel is below the concourse level. The concourse layout is shown in Figure 6.

Figure 5 - The Stacked Alternative. This option allows for a narrower station footprint by putting high-speed rail on a higher platform level above the other heavy rail modes. The Partner Agencies discarded this option in August 2024 considering engineering and constructability concerns, as well as its perceived visual impacts on neighborhoods west of the station, as shown in this rendering.

[1] The memorandum and presentation for the August 16, 2024 City Council Study Session is available at https://sanjoseca.primegov.com/Portal/Meeting?meetingTemplateId=42447.
[2] In a railway station, a concourse is an open area or hall where many people gather, where multiple paths or hallways converge. It's a common area within the station for passengers to wait, purchase tickets, and access other amenities like food and beverage vendors.

The staff report that the Diridon Partner Agencies produced for the May 21 Steering Committee meeting is provided as Attachment A.

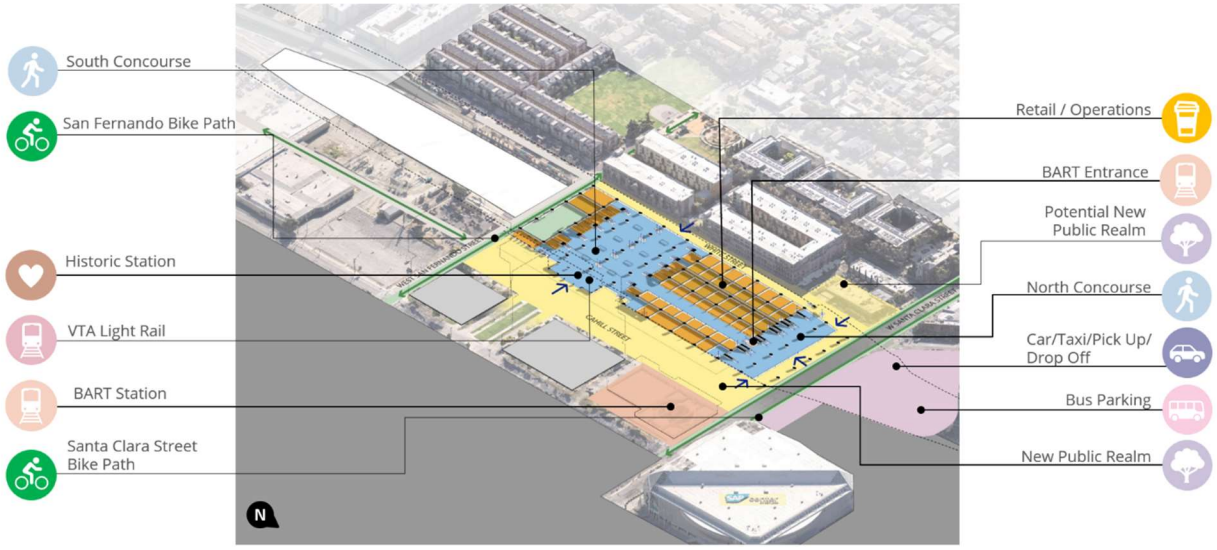

Figure 6 – Layout of the concourse level and access to key station elements. This layout is common to both the At-Grade and Elevated Station Alternatives.

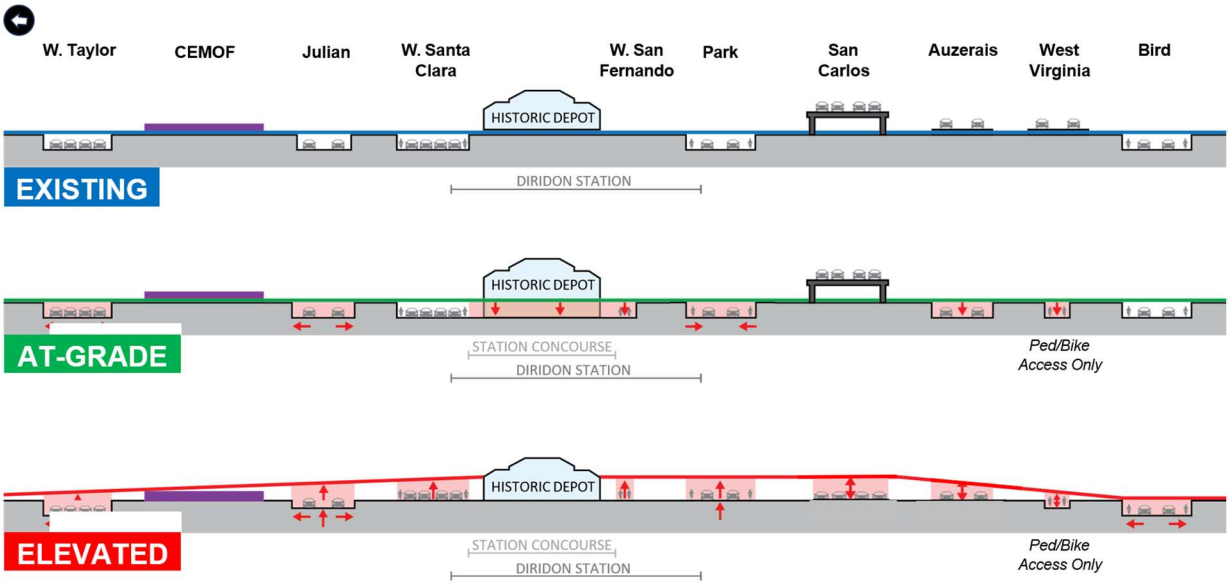

Figure 7 -Vertical profiles of the At-Grade and Elevated station alternatives with proposed grade crossings.

Changes to Project Organization and Governance under the Business Case

In parallel with advancing station design, the Partner Agencies have made changes to the organization and governance of the project as part of the Business Case. This has included both short-term and long-term actions that will put the project on firmer footing as it progresses toward delivery.

In the short-term, the Partner Agencies have disbanded the Diridon Joint Policy Advisory Board – the entity that formerly provided direction to the project but didn't have any formal decision-making power and have replaced it with the Diridon Steering Committee, a body with voting authority. The Partner Agencies memorialized this change in an updated cooperative agreement that all parties signed in fall 2024.[3] This organizational and governance model will remain in place for up to four years, through the conclusion of the environmental phase of work.

Over the longer term, the Partners believe that a dedicated entity is needed to successfully carry out a project of the magnitude of the Diridon Station Project, and therefore are recommending the development of a station development authority. The details of this new governing structure will be developed in the next phase of work.

[3] Attachment A, p. 10, https://santaclaravta.iqm2.com/Citizens/FileOpen.aspx?Type=1&ID=4083

ANALYSIS

Station Alternatives

The Partner Agencies undertook a constructability analysis in 2024/25. The table below summarizes the key findings of this analysis:

Considerations	At-Grade Alternative	Elevated Alternative
Construction Period & Rail Service Impacts	7-10 years	10-12 years
Cost in Billion ($2023)	$3B-$6B	$5B-$10B
Existing Rail Corridor	Modest encroachments outside existing corridor	Significant encroachments outside existing corridor
Caltrain Maintenance Facility	Maintains access	FATAL FLAW Lose access

Overall, as compared to the At-Grade Alternative, the Elevated Alternative would cost significantly more and take longer to build. It would also involve more encroachment outside of the existing Caltrain rail right-of-way. The constructability analysis also revealed a fatal flaw related to the Caltrain Maintenance Facility: the southern access tracks into Caltrain maintenance facility would be severed for the entire duration of construction. This disconnection results from not having enough linear distance between the elevated tracks and platforms and the Caltrain Maintenance Facility to return to ground level at the Caltrain Maintenance Facility within allowable grades and curvatures. In the final configuration, the southern lead tracks into the facility are removed, resulting in a permanent condition that would be compromised from an operational perspective. By contrast, the tracks into/out of the Caltrain Maintenance Facility would not be impacted with construction of the At-Grade Alternative.

Other findings include the following:

- Historic Depot: Both alternatives preserve and adapt the main Historic Depot building and facade of the Annex.
- PG&E Substation: The Elevated Alternative significantly encroaches onto PG&E's Substation A property. It would require reconfiguration and reconstruction of the substation on site or relocation to another site nearby, which would require land acquisition. By contrast, the At-Grade alternative would not encroach into the PG&E facility. Further engineering will be prepared near the PG&E site to confirm this finding and establish an appropriate construction buffer. PG&E and the project team are currently coordinating on this issue.
- Rail Crossings: Under the Elevated Alternative, construction impacts would occur along the entire length of the elevated track, including at all rail crossings from West Virginia Street in the south to Taylor Street in the north. Existing grade separations would be completely reconstructed, bringing roadways up to street

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- level under the elevated tracks. There would be some construction impacts related to the reconstruction of the San Carlos Bridge and permanent access changes resulting from the closure of the current road crossing of the railroad tracks at West Virginia Street.

  Unlike the Elevated Alternative, the At-Grade does not by design require new or replace existing grade separations. The At-Grade Alternative generally conforms to the existing/CHSRA-planned tracks south of the San Carlos Bridge and north of Caltrain Maintenance Facility. While the San Carlos Bridge would not need to be reconstructed as part of the station project, there is still a need to replace it. Additionally, given the future projected train traffic and associated noise and gate downtime, there is a desire to grade separate Auzerais Avenue beneath the rail tracks and to close West Virginia Street to vehicular traffic. Both changes will have land use and road circulation impacts that the City and Partner Agencies plan to address as part of an access study discussed below.

It is also important to note – and as many community members remarked through the course of engagement activities – that the Elevated Alternative included large swaths of elevated track that would have been difficult to maintain and to keep active. Many likened the elevated rail viaduct to the State Route 87 viaduct, a facility that has been difficult to keep safe, clean, and attractive.

For all the reasons stated above, the Partner Agencies determined that the At-Grade alternative was the best and only viable alternative.

Diridon Station Program Elements

It is important to note that the primary reasons why the Diridon Partner Agencies proposed elevating the tracks in the 2020 Concept Layout was to improve neighborhood connections across the tracks – the desire to turn the station into a connector rather than the barrier that it is today. The reasons for this are two-fold:

- To make crossing the tracks safer and more comfortable, especially for people on foot or on bike. These connections are key to making the most of the high-capacity transportation investments at the station. The elevated station option achieved this by elevating the tracks above the surrounding grade level, bringing streets with deep underpasses (e.g. Park Avenue, Santa Clara Street, Julian Street), as well as the steep San Carlos Street Bridge overpass, down to grade.
- To reduce train horn noise in the station area. This is a goal that can be achieved by creating new grade-separated crossings where streets currently cross railroads at grade.

The At-Grade Station Alternative seeks to achieve the same objectives as the Elevated Station Option at a lower cost and with less construction disruption. It does this by introducing new grade crossings where none exist today (at Auzerais Avenue and West

Virginia Street) and by improving underpasses that are poorly designed today so that crossing the tracks is more comfortable, especially for those on foot or bicycle, as well as for people using wheelchairs and parents pushing children around in baby strollers.

As such, the Partner Agencies recommended a program of projects – in addition to the Station itself – to improve connectivity, safety, and quality of life, while reducing noise in the neighborhoods around the track. The following crossing improvements are therefore included in the Diridon Station program, in addition to crossing improvements that are inherent in the station/track improvements:

- **Park Avenue:** Alter the roadway and improve multimodal connectivity, in line with the Diridon Station Area Plan.
- **San Carlos Street**: Replace the existing aging roadway bridge with a new, multimodal bridge.
- **Auzerais Avenue**: Create a new grade separation by lowering the roadway under the rail track, reprofile the roadway, add new pedestrian and bike facilities, and address neighborhood access.
- **West Virginia Street**: Close the road to vehicles at the rail crossing and create a new pedestrian and bike undercrossing, with associated neighborhood access improvements.

Noise barriers at select crossings and other locations along the rail corridor, as well as the reconfiguration of Stockton Avenue at The Alameda are also part of the Diridon Station program.

Next Steps

- The Partner Agencies will pursue the following immediate next steps:
    - Select and award environmental consulting contract (summer 2025).
    - Additional technical work (spring/summer 2025):
        - Follow-up community engagement, as noted above.
        - Construction impact strategies/phasing: further consider strategies to reduce impacts related to construction, including to rail operations, and explore potential project phasing options.
        - Project delivery options: explore the best contracting method to be used to implement the Diridon Station program.
- The environmental review process is expected to take up to three years to complete. This will be followed by preliminary final design and funding commitment. Finally, construction is expected to take up to 7-10 years. Given that the method of construction and funding strategy is yet to be determined, this is a best guess at a longer project timeline.
- As part of the environmental review process, the Partner Agencies will further study of the interfaces of the station and program investments in the central station area with neighboring sites, particularly related to Plant 51 and Laurel Grove Lane.
- The City will conduct an access study on the impacts of the proposed changes at

W. Virginia Street and Auzerais Avenue to local circulation. This study, which has been scoped and will advance in summer and fall of 2025, will consider access (both for everyday and emergency needs) into and out of the Hannah and Gregory Plaza neighborhoods. It will consider a range of options beyond those presented to the Steering Committee on May 21, 2025 and vet these with the community.

EVALUATION AND FOLLOW-UP

As of 2025 and per the strengthened cooperative agreement signed by the Diridon Partner Agencies, the Diridon Steering Committee is the official decision-making entity for the Diridon Station Project. The Partner Agencies will meet quarterly with the Steering Committee and provide updates on the project as it enters the environmental review phase of work. City staff working on the Diridon Station Project, with support from the Partner Agencies as appropriate, will continue to provide updates to City Council and/or to the Transportation and Environment Committee at key points during the environmental review process.

COORDINATION

This memo has been coordinated with City Attorney's Office and Planning, Building and Code Enforcement CEQA team.

PUBLIC OUTREACH

This memorandum will be posted on the City's Council Agenda website for the June 10, 2025, City Council meeting.

Community Engagement

The City of San José led engagement activities on behalf of the Partner Agencies for the Business Case. Engagement began with conversations with key stakeholders in late 2023. In summer 2024 and into 2025, the effort broadened to include broader engagement with the public, focusing on the neighborhoods most affected by the project. A full summary of community engagement activities is provided as Attachment B to this memorandum.

Overall goals of the engagement effort were to:

- Build on past outreach efforts, including for the Diridon Integrated Station Concept Plan[4] and the Diridon Station Area Plan,[5] and to seek input on priorities for the station and adjoining public spaces;
- Inform the community and seek feedback;
- Build excitement, awareness, and ownership; and
- Inform the recommended project to progress into the environmental review process.

The engagement strategy prioritized equity, inclusivity, and accessibility by meeting communities where they were and using culturally sensitive and multilingual approaches.

The engagement team held 40 events and interacted with over 2,200 community members at these events. Activities included in-person meetings, walking tours, pop-ups at the station and in the surrounding area, as well as an online open house and online workshops.

Specific activities included a San José launch party for Caltrain Electrified Service at Diridon Station, tabling at Viva CalleSJ, and an exhibit housed in the lobby of Diridon Station. The team also partnered with community-based organizations like the Vista Center for the Blind and Prosperity Lab to receive input from blind and low-vision residents and minority business owners in the greater downtown area.

The team used a broad range of promotional tactics to reach diverse groups, including mailers, flyers at local businesses and public areas, tabling, email blasts, social media, and distribution of flyers on Caltrain and Capitol Corridor trains. Over 800 individual comments were captured from approximately 760 community members from late 2023 through April 2025. The feedback highlighted several key themes:

Primary Feedback Received

- The project will bring big regional mobility benefits. It could also bring big local benefits (station as destination in its own right) if it is well-designed and has the right amenities within it.
- The impacts of the project are likely to be felt more locally; it will be critical to address safety, noise, and connectivity as part of the program to create a neighborhood and citywide asset, rather than a liability.
- The sense that a blend of historic and modern is successful in both alternatives. The arrival experience at station, both by train and from downtown, is improved over status quo in both alternatives.

[4] https://www.diridonsj.org/disc
[5] https://www.sanjoseca.gov/your-government/departments-offices/planning-building-code-enforcement/planning-division/citywide-planning/area-specific-plans/diridon-station-area-plan

- Broad support for prioritization of modes at station (which is in line with City's adopted access hierarchy in the Diridon Station Area Plan.[6]
- Appreciation that spaces closest to rail concourses are devoted to pedestrians.
- Acknowledgement that this is a big project that will cost a lot of money, and will take a long time, and that has big inherent impacts. Appreciation about the Partner Agencies' transparency regharding this.
- Appreciation for the broad and thoughtful public engagement process conducted to date.

Construction Considerations Feedback

- Concerns about increasing rents / business displacement.
- Reliable access to businesses by all modes, both during construction and afterwards, for customers.
- Need for reliable loading, building servicing.
- Clear communication, including signage, to explain construction activities and interim access.
- Apply lessons from past transit construction projects like Alum Rock Bus Rapid Transit.
- Need for clear communication, including signage, appropriate for all modes, whether those on foot, bike, or car.
- Need for affordable rents, partnerships and support during construction phase.

COMMISSION RECOMMENDATION AND INPUT

No commission recommendation or input is associated with this action.

CEQA

Not a Project, File No. PP17-009, Staff reports, assessments, annual reports, and informational memos that involve no approvals of any City action.

PUBLIC SUBSIDY REPORTING

This item does not include a public subsidy as defined in section 53083 or 53083.1 of the California Government Code or the City's Open Government Resolution.

[6] https://www.sanjoseca.gov/home/showpublisheddocument/74711, p. 129.

/s/
John Ristow
Director, Department of Transportation

For questions, please contact Eric Eidlin, Station Planning Manager, Department of Transportation, eric.eidlin@sanjoseca.gov or 408-643-5147.

ATTACHMENTS
Attachment A: Diridon Station Recommended Alternative and Community Engagement
Attachment B: Community Engagement Report – Diridon Station Business Case