



## Highway 17 Bicycle and Pedestrian Overcrossing Project Background

*Updated November 23, 2020*

### Project Background, Purpose and Goals

Highway 17 is a barrier for bicyclists and pedestrians wanting to cross from one side of Los Gatos to the other. Within the Town limits, there are five crossings from north to south, Lark Avenue, Blossom Hill Road, Highway 9, an existing pedestrian bridge, and Main Street. The existing Blossom Hill Road bridge is situated near the middle among the five crossings. It provides suboptimal access for a variety of trips: school, work, shopping and recreation. This is a suggested route included in the Los Gatos-Monte Sereno Safe Routes to School “Walk & Roll” program.

At the March 3, 2020 meeting, the Town Council approved the project purpose and need, and authorized staff to proceed with design alternatives for a separate bicycle and pedestrian overcrossing. Establishing the purpose and need at the onset of the project development phase helps to ensure the project reflects the Council’s and community’s vision and priorities. The approved project purpose and need are:

**Purpose:** The project would improve bicycle and pedestrian mobility across Highway 17 in the vicinity of the Blossom Hill Road overcrossing. The project includes a focus on improving safety for all modes of travel and creating a safe route to schools while promoting active transportation. Additionally, the project would result in reduced traffic congestion and greenhouse gas emissions by providing comfortable mobility alternatives.

**Need:** With two travel lanes in each direction, carrying upwards of 63,000 vehicles per day, Highway 17 creates both a physical and psychological barrier for both pedestrians and bicyclists as it divides the Town in two. Blossom Hill Road is one of only a few roadways that provide east-west connectivity across the highway.

### Alternative Selection

The Town’s planning documents, the 2017 Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan and the Traffic Impact Mitigation Fee program, identified three options to address barrier for bicyclists and pedestrians crossing Highway 17. These are the initial alternatives being considered at the start of the Feasibility Study:

Alternative 1: Bicycle and pedestrian bridge connecting to Nino Avenue

Alternative 2: A separate bicycle and pedestrian bridge along Blossom Hill Road



Alternative 3: Widening the existing Blossom Hill Road bridge for bicyclists and pedestrians

Alternative 1, a new bridge connecting at Nino Ave, includes several variations, one of which could provide a direct connection to the Los Gatos Creek Trail.

1A: Los Gatos Creek Trail Connector to Nino Ave – A perpendicular crossing that provides a direct connection between Los Gatos Creek Trail on the west side and Nino Way on the east side.

1B: Blossom Hill Road Skewed Connector to Nino Ave – A skewed main span crossing with a point of connection at Blossom Hill Rd to the West and Nino Way to the East.

1C: Blossom Hill Rd Perpendicular Connector to Nino Ave – A perpendicular main span crossing that provides the same points of connection as Alternative 1B (with the exception of the optional second landing along East Blossom Hill Rd). A switchback alignment is required along the west approach to provide enough distance to conform to existing grades along Blossom Hill Rd with a profile grade of 5% or less that meets ADA requirements.

There are benefits of providing a new connection to Nino Avenue, however, during the early engagement process from both the February community meeting and a community survey, residents on Nino Avenue expressed that the access would be an intrusion to the neighborhood. The Nino connection would provide a convenient path to the back side of Fisher Middle School. However, for travelers going to the commercial area along Los Gatos Boulevard and BHR, this path would require additional walking/biking distance.

Alternative 2 includes two variations.

Alignment 2A – separate BPOC south of the existing bridge

Alignment 2B – separate BPOC north of the existing bridge

Alignment 2B is less desirable due to the following significant setbacks:

Utility impacts: Due to the existing overhead electrical lines located along the north side, this alignment would have significant interference with the overhead electrical lines.

Potential property impacts: There is more public ROW available on south side than on the north side. If a BPOC is built on the north side, it may have private proper impacts and may impact Vasona County Park. Impacts on Vasona Park would trigger a process in the CEQA that requires the Town to demonstrate that other alternatives are not feasible.



Match with the existing pedestrian patterns: Alignment 2A would best match the existing desired travel line. The Town's bicycle and pedestrian counts show that the pedestrian volumes on the south vs. north is 2:1. If the new BPOC is built on the north side, it would require a longer walk for Fisher students and make it difficult to navigate for eastbound cyclists to Fisher and further east.

In addition to the two variations, it was suggested that the Project Team considers putting a crossing below the existing BHR bridge, starting from the north side of BHR on the west and ending on the south side of BHR to the east of Highway 17. Due to the grade difference, such a crossing would have to slope down as it goes from west to the middle of Highway 17, then slope up sharply to match up with the grade to the east of Highway 17. In any design, the crossing has to meet the Caltrans clearance of 16'6" and ADA requirements. The Project Team doesn't foresee a feasible engineering solution.

Alternative 3, widening the existing bridge, would present the most engineering and cost challenges.

The existing bridge is very old and does not meet current design standards. The Caltrans standard for roadways is 16'6". Widening is constrained by the existing nonstandard vertical clearance of 15'2" and would require a design exception. It is highly unlikely that Caltrans will approve a design exception for maintaining or proposing nonstandard vertical clearance, especially since the underside of the bridge was recently struck. Caltrans could require replacement of the entire bridge, which would increase project costs significantly.

A bridge reconstruction would be a different project from building a BPOC and would be led by Caltrans, instead of the Town of Los Gatos. Currently the BHR bridge is not included in the Highway Bridge Program Ten Year Plan (TYP). Furthermore, Caltrans indicated given that most of the bridge assets are rating "good" and there is no target for Goods Movement (Clearance) at this time, no project would be forthcoming in the foreseeable future, ten to twenty years.

Although the good condition rating of the bridge seems to conflict with the non-standard clearance, realistically the two are viewed separately by Caltrans. Ideally bridges with non-standard clearance would be replaced, however the large inventory statewide make replacement for this reason alone unrealistic.

In summary, currently there is no schedule or funding identified for the replacement of the BHR bridge. Due to these challenges and uncertainties, staff recommended not to pursue the widening option (Alternative 3) as part of this project. This alternative was removed from further consideration, as presented to the Town Council at the March 3, 2020 meeting.



It is still possible that the bridge is replaced in the future, so it will be important for the Project Team to understand the Caltrans Right of Way at this location and design the new bridge with a strategic view on the separation from the existing structure.

The Project Team evaluated the alignment alternatives using a set of criteria:

- Community Feedback
- Caltrans Coordination
- Travel Demand and Patterns
- User Experience
- Potential Environmental Impacts: utilities, Right of Way constraints, geotechnical considerations, trees, and visual impacts
- Cost: construction and maintenance

Table 1 summarizes the determinations of the evaluation using the criteria:

Alternative	1A Nino	1B Nino	1C Nino	2A BHR south	2B BHR north	3 Widening
Circulation improvement	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Maintains existing travel patterns	✗	✗	✗	✓	✗	✓
Meets Caltrans standards	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗
Community acceptance	✗	✗	✗	✓	✓	Unknown
Add'l infrastructure cost	High	High	High	Medium	Medium	High
Accommodates future demand	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗
ROW & utility constraints	High	Medium	High	Low	High	High
Environmental impact	Medium	Medium	Medium	Medium	Medium	Medium
Engineering constraints and complexity	Medium	Medium	Medium	Low	Low	High

While all the alternatives are considered feasible, Alternatives 1A, 1B, 1C, 2B and 3 were eliminated from further consideration as a result of the analysis summarized in Table 4 above. The Project Team concluded that Alternative 2A, a separate bridge structure just south of Blossom Hill Road Bridge, is the preferred alignment. The recommended alternative presents several benefits: consistency with the existing desired travel line, shortest distance between key origins and destinations, no or minimum utility impacts, no interference with the existing bridge, enhanced user experience, and neighborhood acceptance. The cost of this alternative is potentially lower than Alternative 1 because it would have a shorter bridge span.



### Community Engagement in Feasibility Study Phase

Community engagement in the Feasibility Study phase followed the framework identified in the Connect Los Gatos Community Engagement Plan, adopted by Town Council in March 2020. This is one of the Connect Los Gatos projects and it is identified as a priority project in the 2020 Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan Update. Starting in the fall of 2019, the project team conducted extensive community engagement, which is documented in the Community Engagement Activities Report. The outreach efforts included:

- A dedicated project website containing the project information, progress updates, a project video, past Town Council decisions and staff reports, and the project manager’s contact information. The relevant project documents are also posted on the project website: <https://www.losgatosca.gov/2556/Hwy-17-Bicycle-Pedestrian-Overcrossing>;
- Regular project updates provided to the former Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Commission, the Complete Streets and Transportation Commission, and Safe Route to School representatives;
- Project information displayed at Back-to-School events in fall 2019;
- An online community survey conducted in March 2020;
- Two community meetings held on February 25 and August 25, 2020. Meeting notices were sent by regular mail, door hangers, social media posts, and flyers placed on the streets and local businesses;
- Notices via the Town’s website, social media and articles to the SR2S and LGUSD electronic newsletters;
- Onsite Ohlone Court neighborhood meeting held on October 19, 2020;
- Email and telephone exchanges between the project staff and residents.