

Community Impact Evaluation

Description of Existing Facility

Dr. Martin Luther King (MLK) Boulevard is a major east-west arterial in south Stockton. The section of MLK Boulevard between Grant Street and Airport Way has an existing antiquated underpass that was constructed during the 1930s. The underpass has several structures that support vehicle and rail crossings above the underpass facility. In general, the underpass structures are functionally obsolete and the overall facility does not meet geometric standards for vehicles, bicyclists, or pedestrians. The existing MLK Boulevard underpass provides critical passage of Union Pacific Railroad trains (UPR) over MLK to the UPR maintenance yard south. In addition, MLK provides direct access to the City's southern industrial or logistical developments, as well as the Stockton Metropolitan Airport. The existing underpass provides critical access for communities east and west of the underpass, serves as the commercial corridor, and provides a vital emergency response route.

Project Benefits

Reduced Blocking Delay

The project upgrades will greatly assist in reducing delays caused by train travel. The MLK grade separation intersects with the UPRR. The typical speed for trains causing is an average of 30mph. There are 34 freight trains and 8 passenger trains per day, lending to an average of 126 minutes of delay, i.e. "blocking/delay time". There are 26,445 people living within 1.25 miles of the project location.

Traffic data from the City currently estimates that MLK in the vicinity of the UPRR crossing experiences approximately 15,799 vehicle trips per day and is projected to increase as industrial development continues in the crossing vicinity. As traffic and train travel frequency (passenger and freight) increases, congestion at this railroad crossing will increase, resulting in greater risk of collisions.

Enhanced Safety

The project will upgrade local infrastructure to achieve higher levels of safety for both vehicles and pedestrians. The existing underpass from the 1930s was not constructed to par with modern safety standards. The removal of these old structures and reconstruction will help provide safer, more efficient access for all travel modes. Further, upgrades of the grade separation pump station capabilities will secure reliable storm drainage within the underpass, reducing risk of shutdown due to flooding. The project will also include a full upgrade of the underpass to meet ADA accessibility standards for users.

Air Quality and Noise Pollution

The project will reduce emissions in the region by improving train operations and removing antiquated transportation obstacles that have historically slowed down or forced acceleration of trains. The modernization of the grade separation will serve to reduce these barriers previously constructed in the 1930s. This will lead to improved traffic operations on MLK Boulevard, and increased train efficiency with increased ridership. Increased use of public transportation will reduce the emission of greenhouse gases from solo vehicles. Per CalEnviroScreen 4.0, the pollution burden for this area is in the 68th percentile, with high levels of PM 2.5 (79), Diesel Particulate Matter (88), and lead from housing (92).

Emergency Access

The project will greatly improve emergency access for emergency response vehicles, cutting down on critical delays during emergencies. There are multiple hospitals in the region, including St. Joseph's Medical Center. The current 126 average blocking delay travel time further restricts these vehicles from accessing emergency scenes in an efficient manner. In route delays for emergency vehicles are critical concerns for the City and a great justification for the project improvements. Additionally, due to the limited number of grade separated crossings at UPRR's main line in the central Stockton area, funding this project is vital to provide orderly traffic flow and assure effective emergency vehicle access.

Enhanced Transit Service

The project will greatly enhance the movement of goods and pedestrians by removing the physical barriers of the existing underpass. These barriers currently present a blockage to pedestrians on foot, bicyclists, and other modes of traffic.

MLK is a critical east-west connector linking two major freeway facilities on either end. It also connects to the Port of Stockton, Stockton Metropolitan Airport, BNSF Intermodal Facility, and the City's logistical southern core. A substantial business community also exists along this route. Reconstructing the underpass to serve in a multimodal capacity and reduce barriers will help support the economic prosperity and job creation for the area.

Proximity to the Stockton Diamond Grade Separation

The project is a corresponding regional project in support of the Stockton Diamond Grade Separation, which has received great support from both the community residents and elected officials. The project is being spearheaded by the San Joaquin Regional Rail Commission (SJRRRC). The MLK underpass is currently Stockton's oldest underpass, and once updated will provide increased access to the Stockton Diamond Grade Separation project.

Multimodal Travel

The project will increase transportation options for residents, particularly those without access to a vehicle. The project will provide wider vehicle lanes, buffered bicycle lanes, and wider ADA compliant sidewalks. These updated elements will allow pedestrians to walk, bike, job, or scoot to various destinations, including grocery stores, job centers, and vital community resources. The protected bicycle lane will also help reduce risk of collision and injury, allowing a safer and more comfortable environment to commute.

Transportation Equity Investment

The Project will provide improved access for all peoples to vital business centers, job opportunities, and residential areas. The project will serve to reconnect communities that are barred by lack of ADA accommodations and multi-modal forms of transportation. The project will include improved lighting for these individuals, as well as wider sidewalks and full accommodation for pedestrians and bicyclists.

The project area is located within census tract 6077000600. This area includes multiple sensitive populations, including those struggling with high percentiles of asthma, low birth weight, and cardiovascular disease. This area also has unemployment in the 67th percentile, linguistic isolation in the 96th percentile, poverty in the 98th percentile, and a housing cost burden of 93rd percentile. These factors greatly increase the burdens of residents in these communities. The project will help alleviate these burdens via an increase of multimodal travel options, reduction of greenhouse gas emissions, and increased access to other communities and job opportunities.

The City of Stockton has committed to working with community partners to drive workshops to encourage disadvantaged businesses to apply for jobs, receive fair wages, and connect with labor resources. This commitment also includes ensuring proper representation on projects, and special bidding requirements including a percentage of women-owned, minority-owned, and disabled-owned businesses to apply to participate in project activities.

Multiple Funding Sources

Other funding sources have been identified as potentially contributing to funding for this project, such as San Joaquin Council of Governments (SJCOG) Measure K funds, SJCOG's Regional Transportation Improvement Fee, and 2023 SJCOG One Voice grant, applied for 2023. The combined funding from several sources will help the City construct the project by reducing the burden on capital improvement program funding.