



Google takes a lashing over bridge idea

Proposal for bridges over Stevens Creek draws mixed opinions from council

by **Daniel DeBolt**

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City council members acted as the protective parents of the Stevens Creek trail Tuesday as Google pitched a plan for a pair of private bridges over the creek to a planned Google campus at NASA Ames.

While a bridge is a simple thing, it gets complicated when crossing the city's beloved Stevens Creek trail.

"Priority 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5 is the trail, make no mistake about it," said Mayor Jac Siegel, who said it didn't matter that the new Google campus could bring \$700,000 in new property tax revenue annually. He said the city spent 20 years and went through hundreds of meetings to build the trail.

The city will have to eventually approve the environmental impact report for the two bridges, which extend from the ends of Charleston Road and Crittenden Lane to Google's 42-acre NASA Ames site.

In illustrations presented by Google consultant Peter Ingram, the bridges are low enough that the trail must be moved down off its levee to go under the bridge. That creates several new ups and downs on the trail north of Highway 101, which users don't like, said Aaron Grossman, director of the Friends of the Stevens Creek Trail.

Google is on an accelerated schedule to build 1.2 million square feet of offices on northwestern NASA Ames, which will house 5,000 employees in Google's "Planetary Ventures" division, said Google's John Igoe on Tuesday. The plan includes recreation facilities, a child care center and cafeteria services. Igoe said 105,000 square feet may be housing or offices, it hasn't been decided yet. The campus will no longer be built in a phased approach and the whole place will be under construction in 2013, he said.

A series of gates would keep out anyone, including Google employees, who are driving cars, Igoe said. Google would allow only bikes, pedestrians, police, fire and "high occupancy vehicles" over the bridges. Illustrating bridge width, Ingram presented diagrams showing a lane for vehicles, bikes and sidewalks in each direction on each bridge. The Valley Transportation Authority has some interest in the bridges because it would keep its buses to NASA and Shoreline off of Highway 101, Igoe said.

NASA Ames employee Patrick Grant said the bridges should be one lane "so later on there won't be an incentive to turn this into a highway."

==B Private or public bridges?==

The fact that the bridges will be privately owned by Google wasn't welcomed by council members Ronit Bryant, Margaret Abe-Koga and Laura Macias, who reminded everyone that the council recently required a developer to pay for a public tunnel under Central Expressway. But if the bridges were to be public, the cost to build and maintain them would shift to the city, Igoe said.

Macias said the bridge should be open to anyone, "not just a certain group or class of people. That doesn't feel like Mountain View at all."

"My gut feeling is extremely negative on this," said Councilwoman Bryant. "I don't think it is of any benefit to Mountain View. I don't see anything particularly convenient about it for us. I hate private streets. I can't imagine a private bridge."

The new campus would be built on federally controlled land within city limits. While the city will receive property taxes and may provide fire and police services to the new campus, the city won't have authority over bridge design because the bridges are over PG&E, NASA and Santa Clara Valley Water District jurisdictions. The city has an easement on Water District property for the trail.

Member Abe-Koga said the bridges would ruin the feeling of the trail north of Highway 101, which is a nice change from the urban feel on southern portions. Council member Tom Means had a different view, calling it the "boringest" part of the trail.

Council member Mike Kasperzak said the bridge could be made to look "elegant" as a cable suspension bridge, which Google illustrated.

Some council members questioned the need for any new bridges at all. One bridge already exists for light vehicles at the end of Crittenden Lane, used by duck hunters and some NASA employees. Some said it was sufficient to have buses use the main entry to the new campus on the eastern side of the creek from RTE Jones Road, which extends from Moffett Boulevard.

Abe-Koga brought up the concern that future companies that build at NASA Ames near Google may also want bridge access over the creek. "The question is, why don't we just have one public bridge?" Abe-Koga said.

Abe-Koga and other members also questioned the need for Google to have two bridges instead of one bridge. Igoe said the two bridges would allow for better circulation. "Connectivity" is important to Google, he said.

Council members Means, Kasperzak and Inks appeared most supportive.

"If we are going to use Fire Station 5 (located near Crittenden Lane), you probably do need to do this," Kasperzak said. A fire truck going around on 101 would be "a joke."

The Google campus will be built over an upper wetland area, which Mayor Siegel and Bryant harshly criticized. "This is a very clear step away from protecting the environment," Bryant said.

Zoning Administrator Peter Gilli said the council would have some influence over the bridge project because it would have the authority to determine whether the design really addressed impacts identified in the environmental impact report.

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