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Council balks at proposed bridges to ferry Google buses over Stevens Creek Trail

Majority questions whether transit bridge would ease North Bayshore traffic enough to justify cost

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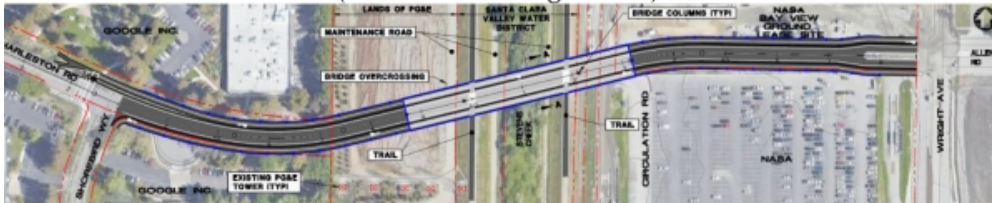
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A majority of council members declined to further study a bridge across Stevens Creek Trail as a way to reduce traffic on city roads. Image courtesy of the city of Mountain View

by Kevin Forestieri / Mountain View Voice

Two proposed transit bridges that would allow Google and other tech companies to carry employees into Mountain View over Stevens Creek Trail got an icy reception Tuesday, with a majority of the Mountain View City Council rejecting the idea.

The Tuesday study session marked an early step toward addressing traffic congestion into the city's North Bayshore tech campus, with a menu of infrastructure projects aimed at reducing the number of solo vehicle drivers clogging bottleneck streets leading into the area. Council members largely supported a complete redesign of the Rengstorff Avenue highway interchange, but were reluctant to back a bridge between the NASA Ames campus and the city.

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Transportation upgrades have been an essential step in allowing North Bayshore to expand in the coming years, with new zoning that allows the development of millions of square feet of offices and thousands of new homes. But even with that growth still on the horizon, the city already appears to be falling behind on its traffic management goals.

More cars are heading into North Bayshore than in prior years, and single-occupancy vehicles still make up about 55% of the commuter trips -- well above the 45% target set by the city. Adding in the [Google Landings](#) office project would likely push commuter traffic over the roadway capacity at both Shoreline Boulevard and Rengstorff Avenue, according to city staff.

Among the proposed projects considered at the May 13 council meeting were two bridges that could allow shuttles and transit buses to cross between North Bayshore and Moffett Field over Stevens Creek Trail, located at La Avenida to the south and Charleston Road to the north. Either bridge would add an alternative to the three traffic bottlenecks into North Bayshore -- Shoreline, Rengstorff and San Antonio Road -- and would give Google another option as it plans to ramp up to 100 buses going in both directions per hour.

The idea of a bridge over Stevens Creek has been kicking around for several years, [backed by Google](#) in 2013 as the company looked to expand its campus across the creek at Moffett Field. City staff recommended Charleston Road as the ideal place to put a bridge, with separate bridges for bicyclists and pedestrians.

Councilman Chris Clark said the city would have 100% discretion over the number and the type of vehicles permitted to cross the bridge, and that it makes sense to have some kind of alternative route for future transit options, whether buses or autonomous vehicles, to get into North Bayshore without getting stuck in a backup on Highway 101.

"I don't think it's feasible to put those on Highway 101, and that's really the only other option that they have right now, and would have in perpetuity if we don't at least study whether an alignment is possible there," Clark said.

But for a majority of the council, planting a big bridge for vehicles over Stevens Creek was a tough pill to swallow. Councilman John McAlister said he worried about potential environmental impacts to the creek itself -- which had yet to be studied -- as well as the aesthetic impacts to Stevens Creek Trail, which is heavily used for recreation and by bicycle commuters. Councilwoman Alison Hicks said she supported a bike bridge, even multiple bike bridges, but worried about tarnishing one of the city's natural resources.

"The Stevens Creek Trail is really, in some ways it's our only linear park, and I just want to make sure we retain it as the gem that it is," she said.

Another cause for concern was the price tag. The staff's pick for the bridge design was expected to cost around \$70 million, and it's not clear who would be paying for the construction. Mayor Margaret Abe-Koga said she has long been opposed to the idea of a bridge over Stevens Creek, and that it's still unclear whether such a project would be needed to effectively mitigate traffic.

"Quite honestly, I question the necessity of it," she said.

Rengstorff/101 interchange

What did get the council's blessing to move forward Tuesday was a complete reconfiguration of the Rengstorff Avenue interchange with Highway 101. An early design shows the project could cost between \$15 million and \$25 million, and would provide a direct link to Landings Drive for cars exiting northbound Highway 101.

Council members also generally agreed to have staff consider more ways to get more cars off the road, including paid parking and potentially even [congestion pricing](#), which has been a controversial subject opposed by Google in the past. If approved, the city could impose a fee on thousands of employees of Google, Intuit and Microsoft who choose to commute during peak hours.



Water flows down Stevens Creek by Google's new Bay View campus on Moffett Field on March 4. A proposal to build a bridge that would link Bay View with North Bayshore failed to generate much support from the City Council at a May 12 study session. Photo by Magali Gauthier.



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Councilman Lucas Ramirez said both paid parking and congestion pricing should be studied as a way to bring down vehicle trips and has the potential to be a much cheaper solution than a major infrastructure project. Abe-Koga agreed, and said the idea has gained traction since it was written off as a "crazy" idea in 2014.

"I would much rather do that then spend \$70 million on this (bridge) project," she said.

Comments

Posted by **Tele-commute**
a resident of Shoreline West
20 hours ago

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More tele-commuting will reduce traffic. If Google wants more infrastructure to return to business as usual, Google should start by offering to pay all costs.

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a resident of Rengstorff Park
19 hours ago

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Google is giving some employees \$800 per month to take Uber/Lyft from their house to the Google offices so they don't have to drive and also artificially decreasing the single-person commuter vehicles. What else is Google <sic> falsifying to benefit Google?

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Posted by **kgirl**
a resident of Rex Manor
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Now that Twitter and some other tech companies are coming out with more telecommuting policies, which make perfect sense by the way, this issue may end up partly solving itself. It's a shame that it took a pandemic for these companies to figure out that people could be just as effective working from home and possibly even more so. Instead of cities trying to bare the burden of trying to pack more people in like lemmings into their communities, yes that is a swipe at our and other city counsels, this is a much simpler solution. Technology is there in terms of being able to support employees from locations just about anywhere. This opens up talent pools outside of the Bay Area to ease some of the hiring issues companies face here only trying to hire people in Silicon Valley. I understand people need to be seen for important meetings but not everyday. Just my \$.02.

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Posted by **Proud Taxpayer**
a resident of Willowgate
19 hours ago

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Sorry. No. This should not happen.
There is no way they could build a bridge without ruining the experience of the trail, creek, and wildlife.

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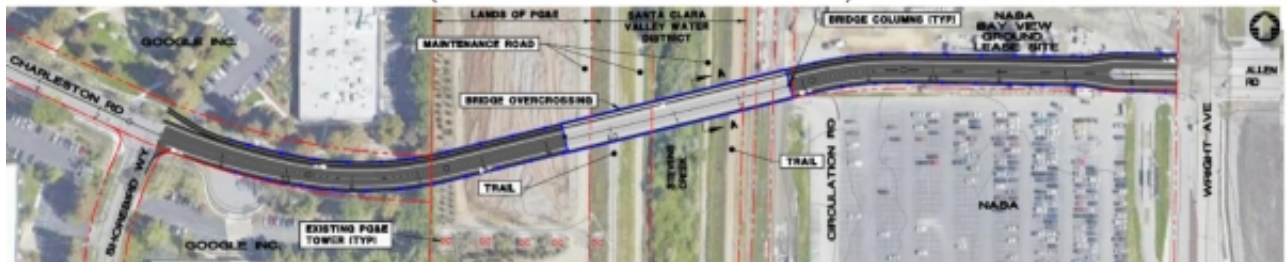


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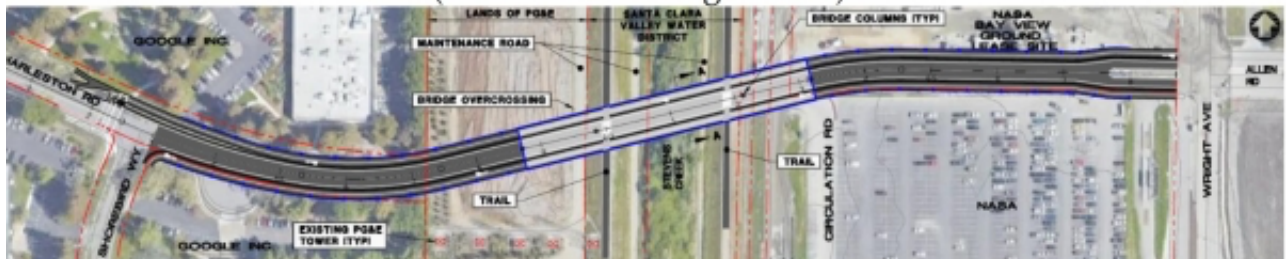
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The Mountain View City Council supported a redesign of Rengstorff Avenue's connection to Highway 101, aimed at better managing traffic off the freeway and into North Bayshore.

Image courtesy of the city of Mountain View