

## Community Event #1 Questions and Responses

### Community Event Description

The City of Fresno held the first Community Event for the BNSF Blackstone McKinley Grade Separation Project on Wednesday, March 30, 2022, from 6:00 to 7:30pm. The Event was held virtually via the Zoom platform and included simultaneous Spanish and Hmong interpretation services for Event attendees. A presentation was made and is available for review elsewhere in the Virtual room.

### Question | Answer and Comment Session

The following questions were asked at the meeting. Responses were provided for all questions either verbally or in writing via the Chat feature of Zoom. The responses provided at the meeting are shown in *Italics*. Additional information has been added to some of the responses and is shown as underlined. Questions asked regarding the meeting format or how to function within the meeting have been deleted since they are not germane to this follow-up summary of community questions.

1. **Will this signal a more efficient use of land on Blackstone with more high-density, multi-use development along with safe accessibility for those of us who need to use bikes to commute?**
  - *As we have shown tonight, the project does enhance the bicycle and pedestrian facilities along the corridor. It is part of the greater vision along the entire Blackstone corridor to have this cycle track separated bikeway available, as well as wider sidewalks along the entire corridor. This is the first of many projects that will be utilized to develop that vision. We are heading the in the right direction, so there is definitely a great emphasis on safe and efficient bicycle and pedestrian travel.*
  - *As far as proper utilization, the project does require some impact to existing property uses. The City will need to acquire some of those parcels and in the after condition, there will be an opportunity to have some of those parcels redeveloped once those parcels are no longer needed for either stage construction or contractor access for materials.*
  - This link to the Fresno General Plan - Land Use map should be useful: [https://www.fresno.gov/darm/wp-content/uploads/sites/10/2021/01/Official-General-Plan-Land-Use\\_20210302.pdf](https://www.fresno.gov/darm/wp-content/uploads/sites/10/2021/01/Official-General-Plan-Land-Use_20210302.pdf).
  
2. **Interested in the quiet zones. This relieves for the subject intersection.....I would like to know that the additional crossings north of the intersection will become quiet zones as well! The city did not address our neighborhood when the REST of the city gained quiet zone status. We are the one gap within the City limits, and it needs to be addressed now.**
  - *A little background, the first City quiet zone was between Ventura and Olive and was largely driven by Community Regional Medical Center who helped fund that quiet zone with the hospital spending about a million dollars in total. That was in the downtown area and was our first phase. To implement a quiet zone, basically the crossings have to receive additional safety improvements in order that the railroad, the State, California Public Utilities Commission, and the Federal railroad administration can all reach some concurrence that there is enough safety in place to offset the safety benefit of train horns being used. The City was able, fortunately, to implement a second quiet zone north of Shaw Avenue because of the Shaw and Marks Grade Separation. With Herndon Avenue already going over the railroad, we only had one railroad crossing to the deal with which was the Fig Garden Loop. The City spent about \$25,000 at the Fig Garden Loop crossing to make some upgrades and then we had a second quiet zone.*

*The Central section is one that Jesus Avitia our Deputy City Engineer has been managing and working through. That one is also in the millions, not just 1 million. Yes, the goal, our goal would be that Blackstone McKinley being grade separated will enable a quiet zone in that area, but also then going North towards Clinton, Maroa, Shields, that we would be able to implement there as well. We are working actively with the BNSF railroad and the other agencies on that project.*

**3. Why green? How will people who are blind or have low vision be able to tell the difference between the path for cyclist and the path for pedestrians?**

- *We will utilize textured surfaces to allow visually impaired members of the Community to cane and feel that separation of the path as well as the tactile devices that are used at the entrance of the sidewalk from the street. There are standard applications that we can apply in the design of this particular project that will allow visually impaired users to safely negotiate the roadway.*
- Green is the standard color adopted in the State and National Design Guidelines for Class IV Bikeways (Cycle Tracks).

For additional information on the State Design Guidelines refer to Caltrans Design Information Bulletin 89 at

<https://dot.ca.gov/-/media/dot-media/programs/design/documents/dib-89-01-a11y.pdf>

or the Federal Highway Administration Separated Bike Lane Planning and Design Guide at

[http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/environment/bicycle\\_pedestrian/publications/separated\\_bikelane\\_page00.cfm](http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/environment/bicycle_pedestrian/publications/separated_bikelane_page00.cfm)

**4. How do you plan to protect pedestrians from conflicts with cyclists? What cyclists calming methods are you including in the design?**

- *Cyclists are to remain in the cycle track, which is that lime green painted zone and the pedestrians would be in the adjacent cross-sectional area, which is an 11-foot sidewalk.*
- *There are specific locations where we would encourage pedestrians to cross over whether they are crossing the street or accessing one of the bus stops. At each of the bus stops there is a separated pedestrian waiting area with canopies and other information regarding the transit service that is outside of the bikeway. There are a few conflict points, and we try to have the conflicts minimized and cross safely at specific locations.*
- *This is the first of the major cycle track projects along the Blackstone Corridor and certainly there would be a need for traffic calming or cyclist calming in order to keep the speeds of the cyclist down. Within the limits of our project, which is a fairly short stretch, there is several turns that are required in order to transition from one side of the roadway to the other. As a result, that will definitely slow the traffic down on cyclists. But the long stretches outside of this project would need to incorporate planters and other traffic calming devices to slow the traffic.*

**5. Have there been previous public meetings about this project?**

- *This is really the first of the public meetings, there has been some public testimony and dialogue at the City Council meetings, regarding this project. There's also been dialogue at the County Tax Measure Authority meetings, but this is really the first of a series of public meetings. We value these meetings immensely and really seek your input on not only the nature of the project, the design, and specially tonight we really want to focus on aesthetic treatments and stage construction.*

**6. In Alternate 2, where is McKinley re-routed to at the North?**

- *It would be starting on the west and McKinley would be rerouted through the former City College parking lot and have a temporary railroad crossing through a parcel that would be acquired by the City of Fresno. It would be crossing maybe 100 feet north of the existing intersection and then transition back over to existing McKinley. We are really just relocating it far enough outside the construction zone to allow unimpeded construction to occur. This would provide both time savings and cost savings to the contractor and the City.*

**7. What kind of detectable warnings will be used? I worry about people who are blind or have low vision wandering off into traffic?**

- *I am assuming that this question is referring to the detectable warning devices for the visually impaired members of the community.*
- *We will utilize the standard detectable warning devices at each pedestrian crossing as well as a tactile device that can occur between the sidewalk and the cycle track to detect the change in facility.*
- *None of those details have been worked out yet, but we will be incorporating that into the design, as we get into more detail.*
- *We will share these details at the next public meeting*

**8. When will advanced utilities relocation begin? Will these plans or the impact of these plans be posted?**

- *We haven't scheduled that yet, but I would imagine that about a year from now we would probably see the first of the utility relocations begin.*
- *We are sorting out where the utilities will get relocated and which ones can be advanced before the larger bridge contract.*
- *There may be some utilities that must get relocated as part of the larger bridge construction contract just because there's simply not access or room to do the relocations in advance. We are still working out those details, but I would say the earliest utility relocation may start about a year from now.*
- *Yes, we will continue to add additional information to the City website as we progress in the development of the project. There will also be noticing to the public in advance of construction.*

**9. What were the main problems with current traffic on that intersection?**

- *The primary issue is really related to the length and frequency of the freight train. Each time a train runs up or down the BNSF corridor it stops traffic on both McKinley and Blackstone for a number of minutes and that causes the traffic to queue up causing businesses not to be accessed, students not to getting to school on time. Once this project is completed, there will no longer be these delays.*

**10. What streets will be permanently closed or blocked off? I live on Calaveras Street.**

- *There will be a need for new access off of McKinley into the transit-oriented development that is being developed. The first street to the west (Calaveras) of the transit development would be blocked off, but there will be an access road connected over to Glenn Avenue for ingress and egress out onto McKinley.*

**11. Was a rail tunnel considered? What were the challenges associated with that option?**

- *A rail tunnel was not considered. The two concepts that were considered were an overhead grade separation, where in this case, we would build Blackstone and McKinley over the BNSF railroad tracks. This concept was extremely challenging because there would be a much larger impact to the businesses and the parcels within the area.*

- *The best option that was considered is the one that we are presenting today, which is to have Blackstone and McKinley go under the railroad.*
- *Adjusting the grade or elevation on streets makes more sense as it is easier for cars to go up and down than a long, long freight train. Railroads have very strict criteria about how quickly you can go up or down so even if a railroad were open to a rail tunnel going below, their standards may require that to start several miles out in each direction leading to a multi-billion-dollar project.*

**12. Will the train no-horn zone extend to Clinton and Blackstone?**

- *A quiet zone extending through Clinton and Blackstone is part of a separately proposed project that has been approved for funding by our City Council. The City is working with BNSF, CPUC and Federal Railroad Administration on the studies and approval process.*

**13. Are you removing any businesses?**

- *There will be some businesses immediately adjacent to the project that are directly impacted because of the retaining walls with access restricted in the after conditions. Those businesses will be assisted in terms of relocating to a new location. That process will start in the coming months.*

**14. What is the width of the cycle track, and what is the separation between the cycle track and the sidewalk for pedestrians?**

- *The cycle track is seven (7) feet.*

**15. If you end up closing the intersection for 3-weeks, can you time the closure so that it is between semesters at Fresno City College? (Like summer break or winter break)**

- *Yes, we have been in close coordination with City College throughout the development of the project and will continue to work with them. We will look for the best opportunities for these closures to minimize the effect to the College.*

**16. How will they reroute the traffic at Dutch Brothers?**

- *That is a detail that we have not completely worked out. There will be a new driveway access built to the west of the Dutch Bros near the existing driveway. The first driveway closer to Taco Bell will not be able to be retained, but the one closest to the Dutch Bros can be retained with a slight modification.*
- The driveway access to Dutch Bros from Peralta Way will remain.

**17. Can we expect more separate cycle tracks in the future for better bike access throughout the surrounding area?**

- *This question has been addressed in another response. See Question 19.*

**18. Option 3 routing is a no go for us. I will lead street protests before agreeing to routing Blackstone through our historic neighborhood.**

- Thank you for your comment. No decision has been made on which staging option will be chosen. Option 3 is just one of the traffic handlining/stage construction themes under consideration. The streets shown for this detour are just one possible scenario and the city is open to other possible street choices if the community prefers to accelerate the construction schedule. The city will evaluate other optional detours and post updates for Option 3 if more suitable streets are determined to be feasible. The city is seeking input on the choices provided and requests community members to complete the survey contained at the end of the Stage Construction Slides.

**19. Why weren't cycle tracks chosen for McKinley? Don't regular bike lanes further enable the lack of safety for cyclist?**

- *The City has a Bicycle Master Plan that they develop every few years. This project is implementing a larger vision. The Blackstone Corridor has been established as a cycle track corridor where along McKinley it is an on-street bike lane, or a class two bike lane.*

**20. Will the alternate routes/detours provide safe bicycle and pedestrian access during construction?**

- *Yes, as we work through the details of stage construction, we will have to accommodate both pedestrians and bicycles as well as the vehicular traffic through the construction zone. A lot of these details depend on which of the three variations is ultimately selected by the City and the Community.*
- *Those details will come, and we will be able to share more information at subsequent meetings once a final alternative has been selected.*

**21. "Smart Mobility" was an interesting effort, but nothing concrete happened. Money went to engineering and consultants, not trees and street marking. How can we have faith this is not the same?**

- The City has this project as a high priority. The city has entered a contract with AECOM to complete the design and ready the project for construction. The city is working with FCTA and other funding sources to secure construction funding before the scheduled start of construction in Fall 2024.

**22. How will businesses who aren't property owners be affected?**

- *Tenants, if they are going to be displaced, have rights under Federal and State real estate laws. They will have the opportunity for relocation and the City real estate team will be working with them on those transitions.*

**23. A similar project in Mountain View along the Caltrain corridor includes stairways and a bridge for pedestrians and wheelchair users to use. Are there plans to include them in this project? Otherwise, it looks time consuming for pedestrians and bikes to get in and out of the trench.**

- *Currently we do not have plans for stairwells to come up from the depressed intersection adjacent to the property. As those properties are redeveloped, there may be an opportunity to incorporate stairwells if the adjacent property owner so desires.*

**24. Was putting the railroad in a trench (like San Gabriel) studied and compared with this proposal? How would that compare in terms of cost, construction, and long-term impacts?**

- *This question has been previously addressed. See Question 11.*

**25. What will the slope be on the sidewalk and how will it affect wheelchair users?**

- *All sidewalks will maintain not greater than a 5% longitudinal slope and no greater than a 2% cross slope which meets all ADA standards and accessibility guidelines.*

**26. In Option Number 2, can you say where Blackstone will be rerouted South of McKinley? Which parcels will be affected?**

- *South of McKinley, Blackstone would be routed to the east side of existing McKinley and it would be predominantly relocated through parcels that will need to be acquired by the City because of severed access due to the required retaining walls. We don't anticipate much, if any, additional property would be required to implement Option 2.*

**27. Will the college access from McKinley be modified in any permanent way given one of the access roads is in close proximity to the railroad?**

- *The first access road west of the McKinley crossing which runs diagonally from McKinley in a northwesterly direction, a portion of this would be reconstructed due to grade changes. It would still function in the after condition as it does today. There would also be a few parking stall adjustments in the parking lot between the access road and the railroad to perpetuate the right turn lane that exists today for that access road.*

**28. It seems like this could be easily fixed by relocation of the BNSF corridor to run parallel to the Union Pacific. Was this ever a consideration?**

- *Most definitely yes. Actually, Measure C, as approved by the Voters back in 2006 included a category for rail consolidation. The hope and vision was, can we get the entire Burlington Northern rail line moved over and parallel to the Union Pacific rail line. It could never be actually on the Union Pacific rail tracks because they are two separate companies. As competitors, they don't necessarily play well together, so BNSF would have needed its own parallel tracks.*
- *The Union Pacific tracks run along Golden State Boulevard and into downtown along G Street, so closer to 99. A number of studies completed by the Fresno Council of Governments, the regional planning agency, concluded that it was infeasible. The final that occurred that really made it infeasible is the High-Speed Rail project. The High-Speed Rail project is acquiring about a 60- to 100-foot-wide swath parallel to the Union Pacific line and there's just no option for the BNSF line to go.*
- *This option was thoroughly evaluated and there's no way to move that over.*

**29. Will the 4 corner businesses be affected, meaning demolished on Blackstone and McKinley?**

- *These details are still being worked out. There will be right-of-way acquisition that will be required on all four (4) corners. As you might imagine with a 17- to 20-foot-tall retaining wall between the roadway and the existing businesses, the access to the businesses will be cut off so therefore most of those business will be acquired in full.*

**30. The Heaton Elementary cross walk on the corner of San Pablo and McKinley is currently a very dangerous cross walk and motorists most times do not stop for pedestrians. How will this project consider this risk to elementary students trying to cross?**

- *The City of Fresno has received a State grant to upgrade the flashing beacon at San Pablo & McKinley with a full traffic signal, meaning McKinley traffic will receive a red light when San Pablo pedestrians get a "walk" signal. We are finalizing the design plans and headed towards construction & installation in 2023.*

**31. This project will create a very long area where the sidewalk is against a wall with no alternative exit, creating a prime opportunity for crime. Was this considered and what can be done to address this?**

- *This is typical of a street corridor. The street will be wider than it is today, and we will make sure that there is adequate lighting to promote the safe passage for pedestrians.*
- *As far as being to exit the sidewalk laterally, the retaining walls will prevent that, but with the lighting and visibility that will be provided with the wider cross section, we believe that it will be a safe facility.*

**32. Can pedestrians climb stairs at the corners instead of walking down the street and around to access shopping centers?**

- *This question has been previously addressed. See Question 23.*

**33. By when will businesses have to relocate?**

- *Ideally, we would have the right-of-way completed by the summer of 2024 so those relocations would probably occur during 2023 and early 2024.*

**34. Are the double left turn lanes and right turn lanes needed? Wouldn't removing some cut the cost of the project? Is the City concerned with the cost?**

- *As a result of the columns in the median that support the railroad bridge for the Blackstone crossing, it is necessary to have dual left turn lanes to convey enough traffic through the intersection on each green signal cycle. Dual left turn lanes are essential to the project from Blackstone to McKinley, but they are not needed from McKinley to Blackstone.*

**35. How would a gas station business be relocated?**

- *The City Real Estate Team will follow up with the gas station owner in the coming months to provide a more detailed discussion about that process.*

**36. For those driveway access points to businesses and Fresno City College within the depressed grade separation areas, how will access be maintained through construction, specifically for Alternative 1?**

- *Alternative 1 will always maintain traffic with one (1) lane in each direction on McKinley and two (2) lanes in each direction on Blackstone. They will either be on one side of the roadway or the other within the project limits. It may not be possible to cross over and provide access to the next adjacent property, so we will have to look at detours around the construction zone for those access points.*
- *Those details will be worked out with a more detailed traffic handling plan in the next phase of design.*

**37. Can the railroad bridge include a pedestrian component so pedestrians can cross the roads without having to go down and use the crosswalk?**

- *The railroad company would not want pedestrians in their corridor, they already have that problem today. While the pedestrians may have a lit bit of a grade, it will be less than 5% down and less than 5% back up. It will be a much safer location to travel then it would be along and adjacent to the railroad.*

**38. Mayor Dyer spoke about pedestrian safety in his message. A lot of the presentation focused on cyclists. Why is that? Also, I still don't feel that folks who are blind or have low vision, or anyone else will be well protected from cyclists or will be able to navigate the difference between the cycle track and pedestrian walkway well. Do you plan on putting detectable warnings all over the pedestrian side? That sounds like a mess.**

- *There are tactile warning devices that will be utilized in the final design and those details have not been fully worked out yet. We will be advancing those details in the coming months and will be able to share those details at subsequent meetings.*

**39. How will pedestrians be able access the bus stop? Especially those with vision loss? It all sounds complicated and dangerous. Over the cycle track? So, they will have to wait for cyclists to cross-over?**

- *Pedestrians will come down the 11-foot sidewalk either along McKinley or along Blackstone and cross over the cycle track into a bus stop pedestrian only area and those conveyances across the cycle track would utilize the detectable warning devices to direct them across at that location.*
- *There will be a short cross over location, and we will work out the details on how that would look and operate and function and provide that information at the next meeting.*

**40. Via call-in, California Council of the Blind – from your presentation it sounds like we are talking about a raised cycle track instead of a cycle track at grade, which is much safer for pedestrians with visual impairments to have it, when you could have a solid buffer between the cycle track and the street and have a sidewalk with a curb. That would be far superior to any tactile surface even the trapezoid indicator that I believe you are referring to instead of a detectable warning. Could you please respond on that? Thank you.**

- *Excellent question and excellent suggestions, those details have not quite been worked out, but we will be developing further details on that. There will be some form of detectable warning device between the sidewalk and the cycle track following State and National Design Guidelines for this facility type. We may also consider curbs, but we need to look at that in greater detail and develop something that fits within the guidelines and standards. We will present additional information to the Community at the next meeting.*
- This project is following the themes established in the Southern Blackstone Avenue Smart Mobility Strategy. This Report can be found at  
<https://www.fresno.gov/darm/wp-content/uploads/sites/10/2019/01/SouthBlackstoneSmartMobilityStrategyDRAFTREPORTUpdate012120191.pdf>

**41. Will the project include one or two railroad tracks? If one, will this create problems in the future as the railroad seems to be wide enough for two or three tracks.**

- *The current location of the railroad is in the center of the right-of-way. The design does provide for future tracks either to the east of the existing track or a future track to the west of the existing track. We don't know if the BNSF will ever add those additional tracks, but the design will be set-up so that the vertical clearance and profiles would accommodate the future addition of tracks either East or West.*

**42. Have you considered placing the southbound Blackstone bus stop north of the intersection instead of south of it? It would provide a better connection to the McKinley bus route and the college.**

- *All bus stops have been set-up downstream of the intersection on all four (4) corners. We worked closely with Fresno Area Express (FAX) to establish the details that we have shown tonight and will continue to work with them in the details that we are still developing.*
- *Some of those stops are needed for current service that is already operating and they anticipate that other stops will be needed for future and an alternative service that has been developed.*

**43. Will there be any utilities relocation on Home or Effie, or any relocation of power or sewer running under parcels on the southeast side of the intersection?**

- *There is a sewer line that runs north/south down Blackstone and we did look at a couple of different alternatives, but the decision has been made that a pump station would be required and constructed as part of the project to keep the sewer line maintained within the Blackstone corridor.*
- *We are still working through a lot of the details about how the utilities will get relocated, if that person wants to follow up, we will be happy to have a conversation and share what we have today and as the project gets developed further to provide additional details.*



**44. In option 3, will all traffic be diverted around the intersection or just truck and commercial traffic? how will residents or property owners access property during this time, if option 3 is chose?**

- *The primary detours are really for the through traffic, the traffic that is not destined for stopping within the project zone. Those businesses and those people who access those businesses or residents would be allowed to come into the construction zone. We would have to accommodate those, but that would be a small percentage of the traffic in comparison to the through traffic that runs up and down both Blackstone and McKinley.*

**45. I apologize if I missed it, but what is your goal start date for this project?**

- The start of construction is scheduled for Fall 2024 and the completion of construction is anticipated in Fall 2027.

**46. Will the medians on McKinley be extended so people don't turn illegally on a double yellow line? Like Dutch Brothers?**

- *There will be a raised median especially within the vicinity of the new structures, the new bridges. Those will be fairly wide to accommodate the columns that are necessary to support the bridges. Both the current bridge that is planned to be built as well as any future bridges that BNSF might add in the future.*
- *Details on how we are going to extend or transition those medians have not been completely worked out.*

**47. Has there been any consideration given to permanently realigning the railroad tracks to the location of the proposed shoo-fly alignment? Would there be any notable benefits or drawbacks to doing this as part of the project? (e.g., differences in noise impacts, increased/decreased engineering complexities)**

- Good question. While your suggestion to permanently realign the railroad to the proposed shoofly alignment would save money, BNSF would not approve this realignment. The shoofly alignment is designed at reduced operating speeds and sharper curvature than permanent facilities are designed.