



Memorandum

AGENDA ITEM 6

DATE: June 18, 2021
TO: Transportation Authority Board
FROM: Hugh Louch - Deputy Director for Planning
SUBJECT: 06/22/21 Board Meeting: Adopt the Upper Great Highway Concepts Evaluation Report

<p>RECOMMENDATION <input type="checkbox"/> Information <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Action</p> <p>Adopt the Upper Great Highway Evaluation Report</p> <p>SUMMARY</p> <p>As part of the District 4 Mobility Study, Transportation Authority staff have been evaluating long term options for the Upper Great Highway. The evaluation demonstrates that full closure or partial closure concepts are possible under pre-pandemic traffic conditions but would require additional network improvements and monitoring of safety, traffic patterns, transit impacts, and emergency response.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Fund Allocation <input type="checkbox"/> Fund Programming <input type="checkbox"/> Policy/Legislation <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Plan/Study <input type="checkbox"/> Capital Project Oversight/Delivery <input type="checkbox"/> Budget/Finance <input type="checkbox"/> Contract/Agreement <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____
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BACKGROUND

As part of the city’s response to the COVID pandemic, San Francisco temporarily repurposed the Great Highway to be a promenade for recreational use. The road was closed prior to the start of the pandemic for regular sand removal and has been closed ever since.

At the time the pandemic began, Transportation Authority staff was conducting the District 4 Mobility Study at the request of Commissioner Mar, to identify improvements to transit, walking, and biking in the Outer Sunset and Parkside neighborhoods. Commissioner Mar requested that an evaluation of future options for the Upper Great Highway be incorporated into the work on the District 4 Mobility Study.

The Upper Great Highway is a four-lane roadway and coastal trail under the jurisdiction of the Recreation and Park Department (RPD) and maintained by Public Works. Traffic on the Upper Great Highway and the surrounding street network and multimodal transportation system is managed by San Francisco Municipal Transportation Agency (SFMTA).



The District 4 Mobility Study, which includes the Upper Great Highway evaluation work, was funded through the Transportation Authority's Neighborhood Transportation Improvement Program or NTIP. The NTIP was established to fund community-based efforts in San Francisco neighborhoods, especially in underserved neighborhoods and areas with vulnerable populations (e.g., seniors, children, and/or people with disabilities). The NTIP is made possible with Proposition K local transportation sales tax funds.

We anticipate presenting the final report for the remaining District 4 Mobility Study work, other than the Upper Great Highway evaluation work, to the Board for approval at the July 27 meeting.

DISCUSSION

The Upper Great Highway evaluation includes identifying feasible options, development of an evaluation framework based on study and city goals and policies, and outreach. The study includes detailed review of the potential traffic impacts of concepts under typical pre-pandemic travel patterns.

Options. The study evaluated five options:

- Concept 1: Four-lane Roadway
- Concept 2: Promenade/Two-way Roadway
- Concept 3: Full Promenade/Complete Vehicle Closure
- Concept 4: Timed Promenade (Weekends)
- Concept 5: Promenade/One-way Roadway

Evaluation. To evaluate future Upper Great Highway concepts, staff considered several factors related to several City policies and goals. These included:

- Climate change/Resiliency
- Recreation, well-being and health
- Transit first/sustainable mode choices
- Vision Zero/Safety
- Economic Vitality/Mobility
- Costs (capital and operating)

We used a variety of data sources and tools to support this evaluation, including counts of bicycle and pedestrian use of the current promenade, traffic collisions records for the last five years, and transportation modeling and microsimulation that describe how changes in the transportation network (i.e., closing the Upper Great Highway) lead to changes in travel patterns and performance at select intersections.



A full promenade/closure (Concept 3) would require significant additional network improvements to minimize the impacts of traffic diversions and other potential safety and transit impacts. Key impacted locations include:

- Chain of Lakes. Both our analysis and community observations indicated significant traffic volumes and delays on Chain of Lakes through Golden Gate Park.
- Lake Merced Boulevard. For vehicles diverted to Sunset southbound, Lake Merced Boulevard to Skyline is the most direct connection to replace the Upper Great Highway to Sloat to Skyline movement that is anticipated with a closure.
- Sunset/Sloat Intersection. While this presents the most direct path of travel to Skyline Blvd, improvements may be needed to help facilitate and encourage safe travel between Sunset and Sloat southbound.

The Timed Promenade (Concept 4) is expected to impact the same areas but only on the weekends when in operation. Under the Promenade/One-way Roadway (Concept 5), Chain of Lakes and the Sunset/Sloat intersection are somewhat impacted and would require additional improvements though at a lower cost and overall risk (funding/schedule).

Outreach. Two primary outreach events related to the Great Highway Concepts Evaluation were hosted in November 2020 and March 2021 to provide the community an opportunity to learn about the concepts and share their feedback. There were approximately 500 attendees who participated in the November event and 190 attendees at the March event.

Following the November 2020 outreach event, the Transportation Authority conducted a survey to gain an understanding of community preferences for the future of the Great Highway. The survey was distributed at the event, through newsletters, and via a texting survey and received nearly 4,000 responses. Overall, a majority of respondents (53%) supported a promenade including a majority of respondents from the Sunset (52%). Respondents of the Richmond supported reopening the road to vehicles by a similar margin and nearly two thirds of respondents from other parts of the City (not the Richmond or Sunset) supported a promenade.

In addition, staff has documented hundreds of emails received and petitions regarding the Upper Great Highway.

Key Findings and Recommendations. Based on cost and safety, the two-way roadway on one-side (Concept 2) was deemed to be infeasible and is not recommended. The remaining options all appear feasible but have different strengths and weaknesses. A full or partial closure is feasible long term:

- Full closure would provide recreation, wellness and bicycle/pedestrian network benefits but requires significant improvements to address traffic and transit impacts from diversions. There is also greater schedule and delivery risk associated with the unknown site conditions and higher cost of this option.



- The Timed Promenade is expected to provide some of the benefits of the full promenade, but would require most of the cost of the full promenade. A weekend only promenade is only recommended as a potential interim option if a full promenade is pursued long term.
- The Promenade/One-way Roadway concept also has some of the benefits of the full promenade and slightly reduced costs and risks for delivering transportation improvements.
- For any closure concept, there may be additional traffic calming needed on Outer Sunset streets, depending on results of the traffic calming conducted to date as well as design efforts to ensure Muni 28 and 29 line operations are not adversely affected at traffic hotspots.

If the Upper Great Highway remains fully or partially closed in the interim, we recommend monitoring a number of metrics to help shape ongoing improvements:

- Safety:
 - Collision incidents and trends on streets associated with the project Upper Great Highway, Lower Great Highway/La Playa, and other adjacent streets.
 - Emergency response times.
- Traffic: Volumes and traffic issues at key intersections and corridors where Upper Great Highway traffic is expected to be diverted.
- Transit: Performance of 29 Sunset, 28 19th Avenue and 18 46th Avenue bus lines.
- Parking: availability of parking for local and visitor use.
- Public feedback

In addition, for any interim closure, clear metrics and thresholds of performance should be identified to monitor effectiveness or the need for re-design as warranted.

Next Steps. SFMTA and RPD will be considering the concepts and findings in this report and are developing an outreach process to gather more public input for near-term design options for the Upper Great Highway. This effort began with a joint hearing of the Recreation and Park Commission and SFMTA Board of Directors on June 10, 2021.

Any near-term or long-term action would need to be approved by the San Francisco Board of Supervisors.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

The recommended action would not have an impact on the adopted Fiscal Year 2020/21 budget nor on the proposed Fiscal Year 2021/22 budget.



CAC POSITION

The CAC will consider this item at its June 23, 2021 meeting.

SUPPLEMENTAL MATERIALS

- Enclosure 1 - Upper Great Highway Concepts Evaluation Study Final Report
- Enclosure 2 - Appendices