

January 16th, 2025
Sacramento City Council
915 I Street, 5th Floor
Sacramento, CA 95816

Re: Truxel Bridge Transit and Active Transportation Only Alternative Recommendation

Dear Mayor and City Council Members,

On behalf of the City of Sacramento Active Transportation Commission (ATC), we **recommend that the City Council direct staff to evaluate a transit and active transportation-only alternative to the Truxel Bridge proposal.** A car-free Truxel Bridge alternative far better matches the City of Sacramento's stated goals in the Sacramento 2040 General Plan¹, City of Sacramento's Climate Action and Adaptation Plan (CAAP)², Declaration of a Climate Emergency³, Vision Zero Action Plan⁴, and the American River Parkway Plan⁵.

In January 2024, city staff unveiled three proposed alternatives for the Truxel Bridge design, all including personal motor vehicle lanes, light rail, and active transportation links. Later, in November 2024, city staff provided further analysis with minimal changes in the core design of those three alternatives⁶. In that period, there was considerable community input at community forums, stakeholder meetings, and the ATC, where many community members opposed the inclusion of personal motor vehicles on Truxel Bridge. Community members opposed the inclusion of personal motor vehicles due to the increased environmental impact, project costs, negative impact on active transportation, and elimination of VMT benefits of transit and active transportation design⁷.

Below, we wish to highlight how including personal motor vehicles in the design runs directly against many of the City of Sacramento's policy goals while facing large environmental impacts and governmental constraints. Here below, we wish to highlight:

Vision Zero & Negative Impacts to All Users of Truxel Road

Truxel Road is on the high-injury network, and building the bridge for personal motor vehicles will increase car usage and thus the risks for collisions and KSI for all users⁴. The City's analysis of the current designs increases the number of daily car trips by approximately 7,100 daily trips or a 35% increase in car volume at the most impacted section⁶. This area of Truxel Road between San Juan Road and Garden Highway already has many conflict points, with an estimated 17 intersections within a 1.3-mile area. The high number of conflict points greatly contributed to the KSI collisions. From 2014 to 2023, there have, unfortunately, been at least six deaths and nine serious injuries on or near Truxel Road between San Juan Road and Garden Highway⁸. The City's latest work confirmed findings from a decade ago. The 2013 American River Crossing summary report found that including cars on Truxel Bridge would increase vehicle traffic in South Natomas and central city neighborhoods⁹. The report states that traffic calming programs would likely be required to implement the Truxel Bridge. An

additional project, such as a road diet, would be required to reduce KSI. Unfortunately, with a large backlog in the TPP, we can not count on a Truxel Road lane reduction to happen on time.

Sacramento 2040 General Plan

Sacramento passed the Sacramento 2040 General Plan with the ambitious goal of reducing single-occupancy vehicle use¹. Adding personal motor vehicles on Truxel Bridge goes against many of the goals stated below. Measure 1.2 The City shall prioritize mobility, comfort, health, safety, and convenience for those walking, followed by those bicycling and riding transit, ahead of design and operations for those driving. Alternative 2 mixes light rail and personal vehicles in the same lanes, thus prioritizing car drivers over transit users. The median personal vehicle carries a single person while a light rail car can carry dozens; mixing travel lanes with expected peak hour traffic will reduce the speed of transit users to the speed of car travel. Table 2-1 calls for transit to increase from 3% to 11% of all trips and active transit from 4% to 6% by 2030. To accomplish these modal shifts, transportation demand management programs would not be sufficient; capital investments into high-quality, frequent transit services get people where they need to be faster than personal motor vehicles can.

Sacramento Climate Action & Adaptation Plan

Sacramento adopted the Climate Action and Adaptation Plan² and declared a Climate Emergency in December 2019³ in response to the urgent need for climate action. Sacramento is one of the worst cities in the country for air pollution. 57% of our City's greenhouse gas emissions come from transportation. The CAAP set a 2030 target to reduce Sacramento's per capita GHG emissions to 63% of the 1990s levels². Further, it set the goal of achieving carbon neutrality by 2045. The average car produces 5 MT of CO₂e in 1 year, while planting 17 new trees removes about 1 MT of CO₂e from the atmosphere over 10 years². It is physically impossible to achieve our climate targets without reducing car dependency in Sacramento. This would best be done by making alternative modes of travel more efficient, attractive, and competitive compared to driving.

Environmental Impact to the American River Parkway

The 2013 American River Crossing summary report found that the Truxel Bridge will have an impact on biological resources⁹. This proposed bridge crosses Discovery Park, home to many wildlife species such as Swainson's hawk, valley elderberry longhorn beetle, cooper's hawk, and great blue heron. The California Department of Fish and Wildlife lists Swainson's hawk as a threatened species¹⁰, while great blue heron is a species of concern due to its declining population. Valley elderberry longhorn beetle is a federally listed species under the Environmental Protection Act¹¹. Swainson's hawk is particularly threatened by the proposed bridge because it has a nest within a quarter mile of the proposed bridge location. State law requires public projects to protect listed species and their habitat¹¹. Parts of the American River Parkway are designated as critical habitat for the valley elderberry beetle¹¹. The proposed bridge is less than a

mile away from this federally critical habitat. This could significantly disrupt wildlife habitat of protected species. A small bridge is more acceptable for environmental conservation, but building two lanes of car traffic would increase the bridge's footprint and increase habitat degradation. Permitting vehicle access will also increase pollution and reduce air quality through car exhaust and particulate matter 2.5 from tire wear. The current proposals for the bridge are as wide as 96 feet, while previous proposals were less than half as wide at 46 feet wide¹³. The addition of car lanes would expand disturbance impacts and restoration requirements.

Save the American River Alliance (SARA) has litigated with the City previously¹². Recently, SARA litigated over the American River One apartment complex overlooking the American River. Save the American River Alliance was consulted on the light-rail expansion and supports that bridge but explicitly opposes motor vehicle access to the American River Parkway and warned of litigation for the inclusion of personal motor vehicles⁷.

Questionable Benefits - Major Car Access Already Present

Car access is already abundant near the project, with Interstate 5 having 10 car travel lanes and an intersection approximately ½ miles from Truxel Rd and Garden Highway. Conversely, no light rail connection exists for the proposed Green Line extension, and Active Transportation travel is often blocked due to flooding in winter. VMT reduction is claimed in the initial report. However, if traffic congestion is lightened on I-5, this could induce demand for more automobile travel along I-5 through induced demand, encouraging more distant travel, thus increasing VMT. Automobile connections are already abundant, and adding more car lanes only further accommodates personal vehicle travel as the primary and often the only form of transportation, going against many of the City's plans^{1,2,3,4,5}.

Greater Size and Cost of Bridge if Cars Are Included

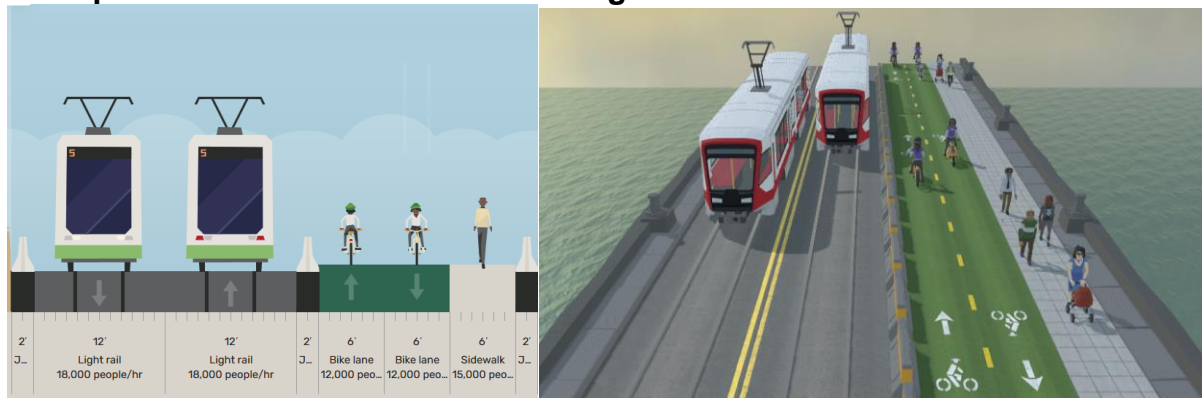
The proposed alternatives presented in November show the bridge being far wider than previous proposals and an ever-increasing cost. The alternatives range between \$179.2M to \$295.3M with widths between 69 feet and as large as 96 feet in Alternative 3B⁶. With an assumed length of one-half mile, that would be between a surface area of 4.2 and 5.8 acres of pavement over the American River and Parkway. A smaller bridge would significantly reduce costs and impacts. Previous options, such as in the Downtown Natomas Airport Transitional Analysis Report, included a single tract with bike lanes and a sidewalk, which could be as wide as 30ft¹³. One community group, Strong SacTown, estimated that a bridge of a width of 45 feet could be done by removing cars, but keeping the other modalities would cost around \$135M, less than half the cost of Alternative 1^{14,6}. Furthermore, an auto-oriented bridge option will require more regular repairs, estimated at \$15M every 25 years, adding to the City's underfunded maintenance obligations¹⁴. For the City Council to make fully informed decisions on costs and design, reassessing the project needs and goals and looking at alternatives are needed. These numbers are a further example of why community

groups have been calling for consideration of transit and active transportation-only alternatives to the Truxel Bridge.

High Quality Active Transportation Links Are Best Without Cars Near By:

Motor vehicles produce loud noises, exhaust fumes, and tires produce microplastics that get caught in the air, making it uncomfortable for active transportation users. The best way to promote more active transportation is to build environments without cars on the road. Alternative 1⁶ is currently designed with just Class 2 bike lanes. Class 2 bike lanes with high-speed travel immediately next to the people biking only have paint for protection, are high-stress, and are categorized as the least comfortable design.¹⁵ The other current alternatives, 2 and 3a/b, do provide a barrier for protection, which does protect from collisions, but it does little to limit the environmental contribution of noise and poor air quality biking adjacent to cars.

Example of Additional Alternative Configuration



An example of a transit and active transportation-only bridge alternative configuration with a width estimated at 48ft.¹⁶ Images produced via Streetmix.net

Closing thoughts:

The City's current Truxel Bridge proposal with two lanes of motor vehicle traffic needs to be reevaluated. Since the 2013 American River Crossing Alternatives Study, the City has three Mayors, adopted the Sacramento 2040 General Plan¹, City of Sacramento's Climate Action and Adaptation Plan (CAAP)², Declaration of a Climate Emergency³, Vision Zero Action Plan⁴, and the American River Parkway Plan⁵. A smaller bridge would be cheaper by tens of millions of dollars, be a better active transportation design, and have less impact on the American River Parkway. We at the Active Transportation Commission believe that a transit and active transportation-only Truxel Bridge would be substantially better to meet our climate and transportation goals.

Sincerely,

City of Sacramento, Active Transportation Commission

References:

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