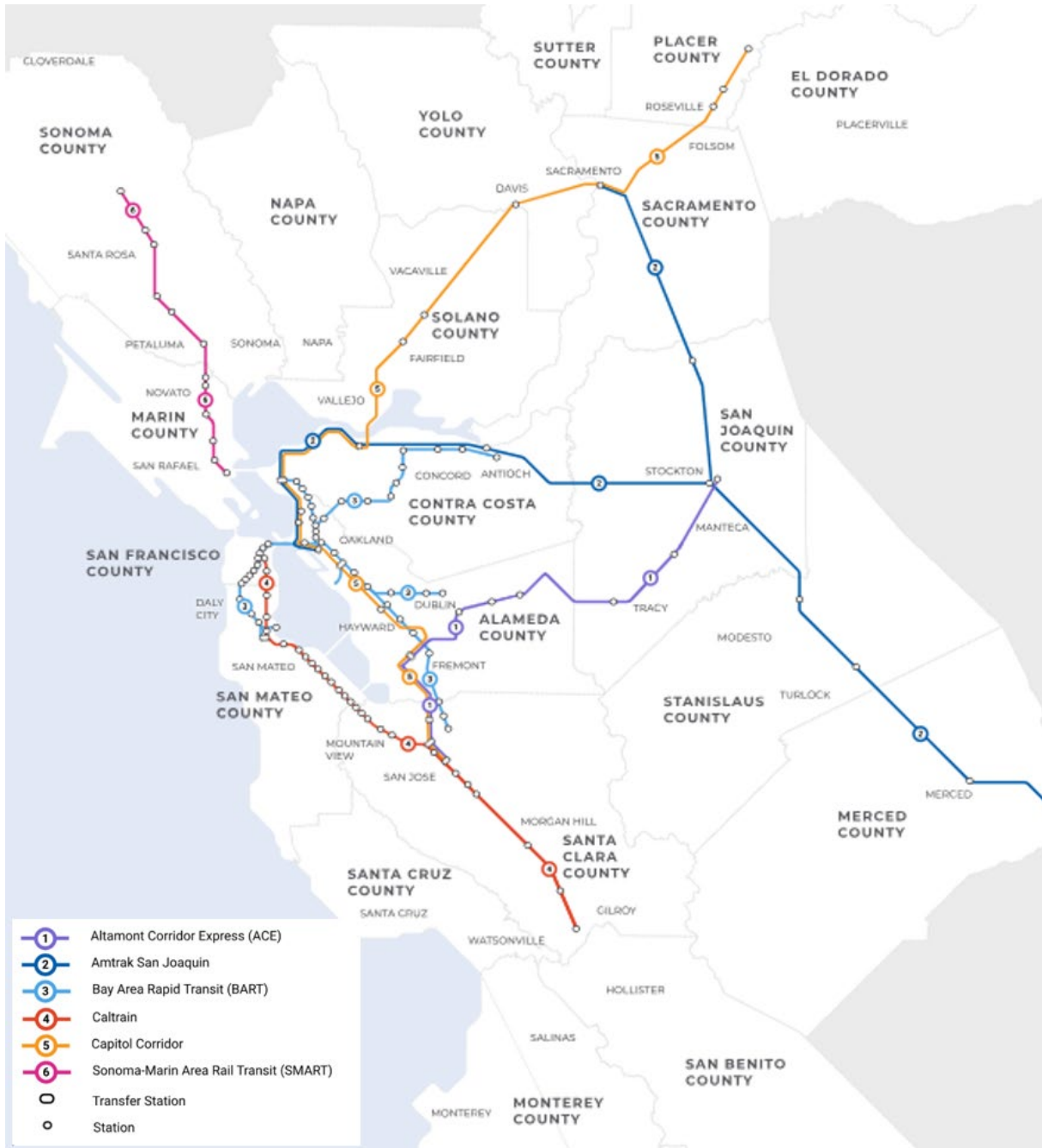


Location:	Preliminary concepts for the Link21 Program include improvements at the following existing or potential station locations within the City of Oakland: MacArthur BART, Downtown, West Oakland, Jack London, San Antonio, and Coliseum BART.
Assessor’s Parcel Number(s):	N/A
Proposal:	The Link21 Program will better connect rail systems and improve rail service in the Northern California megaregion, comprising of the Greater San Francisco Bay Area, the Monterey Bay area, the Sacramento area, and the Northern San Joaquin Valley, as well as provide new stations and enhance passenger experience. While locations in Oakland are yet to be determined, the Link21 program concept includes a second Transbay rail crossing between Oakland and San Francisco, a potential connection in the City of Alameda, and potential new rail alignments and rail stations in Oakland and elsewhere. The new alignment and stations would tie into the existing BART and/or regional rail system. Possible crossing locations are still under study and will be open for public feedback. Link21 Program staff will present an overview of the Project Identification update.
Applicant:	Link21 Program; Bay Area Rapid Transit (BART) and the Capitol Corridor Joint Powers Authority (Capitol Corridor)
Contact Person/ Phone Number:	Website: https://link21program.org/en/contact Phone: (855) 905-5465
Owner:	N/A
Case File Number:	N/A
Planning Permits Required:	N/A
General Plan:	Citywide
Zoning:	Citywide
Proposed Environmental Determination:	Not a project under the California Environmental Quality Act.
City Council District:	All council districts.
Finality of Decision:	PC to receive the report, make comments, and receive public comments.
For Further Information:	Contact Case Planner Michelle Matranga at (510) 238-3550 or by email at mmatranga@oaklandca.gov

MAP OF EXISTING TRAIN SYSTEM – NORTHERN CALIFORNIA MEGAREGION



SUMMARY

Link21 staff will provide the Oakland City Council, the Mayor's Office, City staff, and the community with an informational update regarding the Link21 program, which is a program to connect and improve the passenger rail network in the Northern California Megaregion. This update includes project identification based on a comparison of train technology (track gauge), program considerations specific to Oakland, a summary of public engagement to date, and next steps.

This report was developed by staff in coordination with the Link21 Program team and the Major Projects Division of the Department of Transportation (OakDOT).

BACKGROUND

The Link21 Program and its partners will transform the BART and Regional Rail (including commuter, intercity, and high-speed rail) network in the Northern California Megaregion into a faster, more integrated system that provides a safe, efficient, equitable, and affordable means of travel for all types of trips. This Program, including a new train crossing between Oakland and San Francisco, will enhance livability, community stability, economic opportunity, and environmental quality in the Megaregion while improving the passenger experience. With key investments that leverage the existing network and increase capacity and system reliability, train service will better meet the travel needs of residents throughout the Megaregion.

With the passage of BART Bond Measure RR in 2016 and Regional Measure 3 (RM3) in 2018, transportation agencies and residents of the Bay Area provided funding to progress planning and development for a new Transbay passenger rail crossing. The need for, and importance of, a new crossing was further reinforced by its inclusion as a key element in two important long-range planning documents, Plan Bay Area 2050 and the California State Rail Plan.

The Link21 Program was established in 2019 to carry out the mandates of Measure RR and RM3 to identify, plan, and ultimately deliver a new crossing and associated improvements within the context of the larger rail network. Led jointly by the San Francisco Bay Area Rapid Transit District (BART) and Capitol Corridor Joint Powers Authority (CCJPA), the program had two broad objectives for the crossing: addressing the then-growing issue of crowding on the BART system that was projected to exceed capacity in the near future; and improving access to frequent, reliable, and time-competitive rail service in the Northern California Megaregion.

Since 2019, the program has completed Phase 1 of project planning, which encompasses concept development and analysis, service planning, evaluations of options, and community outreach. Based on Phase 1 activities, next steps include identifying the type of track gauge to be used in the crossing, which will provide parameters for further project planning, including possible alignment and future station locations.

Public Outreach

Link21 conducts public outreach and engagement activities throughout the 21-county Megaregion to share information and updates and to solicit input to inform the development of the program, meeting with government agencies, community-based organizations, and the general public. To date, the program has conducted nearly 300 meetings with government agencies, including local jurisdictions and transportation agencies, and has participated in over 230 public/community meetings and events.

Advancing equity is a priority goal of Link21, which includes emphasizing equitable community engagement. The program prioritizes engaging with communities that have been systemically marginalized (called “Priority Populations”) in order to advance equitable outcomes. It created an Equity Advisory Council comprised of 18 community members with lived and/or professional experience from Priority Population communities that meets bi-monthly to advise the Link21 team.

Targeted engagement in Oakland has included monthly meetings with City staff from OakDOT, the Planning and Building Department (PBD), and Port of Oakland; engagement with 22 community-based organizations and leaders in Oakland (see Attachment A); Oakland representation at both Equity Advisory Council and Jurisdictional Working Group meetings; as well as interviews, local events, and open houses.

Key themes expressed by Oakland community members include the following:

- *Rider Experience*: Desire for improved reliability, access, affordability, and frequency of transit; underground tracks; rail stations in Jack London and San Antonio; transit connections to Link21 system; improved access in West Oakland; and improved transit serving seniors, persons with physical disabilities, and other transit-dependent community members.
- *Infrastructure*: Concerns regarding surface and underground rail infrastructure impacts; impacts of construction to small businesses and places of worship; gentrification; and long-distance commuting due to housing affordability.

Link21 is planning public and stakeholder engagement in the upcoming months. There are two Virtual Community Webinars scheduled for June 6 and 10. In addition, there will be an online open house on the Link21 [website](#), which will remain available 24 hours a day and 7 days a week for a month starting in mid-June.

In the future, as Link21 continues to plan for potential future station locations and alignments, it will continue to engage with local jurisdictions, communities, and other stakeholders.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The Link21 Team has identified concept options based on two different crossing technologies. This is either Standard-Gauge (the technology used by Caltrain, Capitol Corridor and most rail systems globally, otherwise referred to as ‘Regional Rail’) or Broad-Gauge (the technology used across most of BART’s current network). The two technologies are not interoperable, and a decision is needed to select the technology for the crossing to focus further work on developing a Project for Environmental Review.

The below planning requirements were used to guide the process for developing Standard-Gauge (Regional Rail) and Broad-Gauge (BART) concepts. These planning requirements include the need for any potential Link21 crossing project to:

- Provide a second rail crossing between Oakland and San Francisco with Regional Rail and/or BART technology.
- Provide wider improvements to the Regional Rail and/or BART networks that enhance the performance of the crossing.
- Demonstrate independent utility, achieve Link21’s goals and objectives, be economically and financially viable, and be deliverable.
- Build upon existing adopted plans and support other relevant projects that are programmed in the megaregion.

There are similarities between the Standard-Gauge (Regional Rail) and Broad-Gauge (BART) technologies but there are many factors that differentiate these choices from each other. Comparing these trade-offs is an essential part of the crossing decision that Link21 is working toward now.

The Link21 team will be identifying a Preliminary Project that includes the train technology (Standard-Gauge [Regional Rail]) or (Broad-Gauge [BART]) that would operate in the new crossing. This train technology milestone, which will be driven by the Program’s Goals and Objectives and desired service outcomes, will be shared with the program stakeholders in fall of 2024.

Following this train technology crossing milestone, Link21 will continue collaborating with key agency partners and community stakeholders to refine the Project including station locations, track alignments, and supporting infrastructure improvements. The Preliminary Project will be advanced and refined to define a Proposed Project, which will then be advanced into Environmental Review.

PROPERTY DESCRIPTION

The current status of planning is conceptual, and no specific parcels have been identified at this time.

GENERAL PLAN ANALYSIS

The Link21 Program aligns with Oakland’s racial equity, environmental and economic goals by promoting actions identified within the Oakland General Plan, as well as actions identified in the Final Draft Downtown Specific Plan (DOSP) and the Oakland 2030 Equitable Climate Action Plan (ECAP).

Land Use and Transportation Element (LUTE)

The LUTE contains policies designed to improve transit access, reduce environmental impacts of automobiles and support the development of and access to jobs centers. The Link 21 Project supports the following LUTE policies:

- General Plan (Land Use and Transportation Element): Enhance the existing transit system, encourage reduced traffic congestion and dependency on the automobile, and improve air quality and reduce exposure to traffic noise.
- General Plan (Land Use and Transportation Element): Work with regional planning agencies and other jurisdictions to direct funding and planning efforts towards parts of the region - such as Oakland and other Bay Plain cities - that support high levels of transit ridership.
- General Plan (Land Use Transportation Element): Promote downtown as a regional hub and provide support amenities near employment center.

Environmental Justice (EJ) Element

In September 2023, the City of Oakland adopted an Environmental Justice element as part of Phase 1 of the General Plan update (EJ Element), which constitutes the baseline against which the Race and Equity Impact Assessment for this project is determined. The EJ Element “serves as the foundation for achieving equity and environmental justice when planning for future growth and development in Oakland.” The EJ Element identifies communities that are disproportionately impacted by environmental justice issues and proposes goals, policies, and objectives to reduce the unique or compounded health risks in these communities. It also contains a comprehensive table of actions to achieve those goals and objectives, many of which have already been implemented.

The Link 21 Project supports the following EJ Element policies:

- General Plan (Environmental Justice Element) Policy EJ-1.1: Reduce the public’s exposure to toxic air contaminants through appropriate land use and transportation strategies, identified through the LUTE update in Phase 2 of the GPU process, particularly in Environmental Justice Communities and other areas most burdened by air pollution.
- General Plan (Environmental Justice Element) Policy EJ-6.1 Ensure equitable distribution of beneficial public safety, civic, and cultural facilities. Prioritize new facilities, resilience hubs, and creative spaces in traditionally underserved areas. Locations for these public facilities should be identified in collaboration with local schools and neighborhood groups.

Other City Plans

The DOSP and ECAP also contain policies to enhance transit systems to support City goals such as reducing automobile emissions, expanding the ability of more neighborhoods to access transit, and supporting environmentally sustainable economic growth. Link 21 Project supports the following policies from the proposed Final Draft DOSP and adopted ECAP:

- DOSP Policy M-2.6 - Regional Transit Expansion Opportunities: Capitalize on potential regional transit expansion opportunities for BART, Capitol Corridor, and ferry service.
- DOSP Policy M-2.7 - New Transbay Crossing/BART Station: Consider locations for a second transbay crossing and new BART Station in downtown. Evaluate locations such as, but not limited to, I-980, Broadway, Franklin, Webster, Clay Street or Washington Street
- ECAP Action TLU-4: Work with public transit agencies to replace autos with public transit as a primary transportation mode for trips beyond walking distance, ensuring convenient, safe, and affordable public transit access within Oakland and to neighboring cities for all Oaklanders.

As with past infrastructure projects that have devastated communities of color economically, culturally, environmentally and in terms of public health, Link 21 has the potential to detrimentally impact neighborhoods of color if racial equity is not a priority consideration. However, the consistency with Oakland’s existing Environmental Justice and other policies coupled with Link 21’s attention to equity, including incorporation of an Equity Advisory Council, points to the possibility that the Project could have a more socially just outcome than past projects of this type and scale.

ZONING ANALYSIS

The Link 21 Project is currently in a conceptual stage and no specific alignments or stations have yet been identified. At this time there is no proposed impact to or from zoning. At such time as alignments are suggested, zoning analysis will be conducted.

ENVIRONMENTAL DETERMINATION

Link21 is a multi-phased, long-range rail infrastructure program that will improve our Northern California transportation network and meet the needs of our projected population by creating a faster, more integrated system and providing safe, efficient, equitable, and affordable travel for all types of trips. Since 2022, Link21 has worked on the Project Concept Development Phase and has obtained stakeholder input and conducted analyses to weigh strategic, economic, financial, and deliverability objectives for multiple

project concepts. In 2024, the Link21 Program will reach the milestone of deciding whether the new crossing should have BART-gauge tracks or Regional Rail (standard-gauge) tracks. This decision on train-technology in the crossing is an important step toward defining a preliminary project for further analysis in the Environmental Review Phase.

The Environmental Phase will occur over the following two years during which Link21 will continue collaborating with agency and community partners, such as the City of Oakland and its residents, to assess options for new or improved connections, service improvements, and rail alignments. This will include developing and refining new station locations and access, existing station improvements, and land use opportunities around stations.

KEY ISSUES AND IMPACTS

A second crossing would bring more rail access to Oakland with opportunities for new stations, a new hub for intercity and urban metro rail connections, and faster and more direct transit service to Bay Area destinations.

The Link21 team developed initial concepts that included potential stations and alignments to solicit feedback and understand constraints and opportunities. All alignments and stations are conceptual at this stage and will require further refinement with community engagement in the next phase of work.

Potential stations for the Regional Rail concepts include Downtown Oakland, West Oakland, and/or Jack London Square. All concepts include a new transfer station between BART and Regional Rail within Oakland. The Regional Rail concepts allow for an overlay of “urban service” and “intercity service” and provide improved connectivity across the mega-region. The urban services would feature higher frequency trains within the Bay Area core, and the less frequent longer distance intercity services would expand accessibility across the megaregion. Both services would improve train travel times between Oakland and parts of the Bay Area, and with cities such as Sacramento and Stockton.

Potential stations for the BART concepts include Downtown Oakland, San Antonio, and/or Jack London Square. The San Antonio station is not necessary for the new crossing and is independent of technology; therefore, it could be included with either crossing technology. This potential station was analyzed to better understand the benefits it might provide given public interest. Potential rail alignments for the BART concepts expand Oakland’s connectivity to adjacent cities, adding a new station in the City of Alameda and a new station within the Mission Bay neighborhood in San Francisco. The BART concepts would also provide higher frequency, improving existing and future travel times for BART.

Within Oakland, new alignments are proposed to be below-grade (underground) through Downtown and West Oakland areas, and in other locations may use or connect to existing at-grade tracks.

Oakland staff has provided and will continue to provide Link 21 with ongoing feedback. Staff feedback provided to date includes:

- Aligning efforts with the Downtown Oakland Specific Plan (DOSP), General Plan Update (GPU) and Caltrans Vision 980 planning efforts;
- Minimizing disruption to neighborhoods, particularly residents in neighborhoods with high percentages of Black, Indigenous and other people of color that have borne the brunt of transit infrastructure impacts without realizing proportionate benefit;
- Exploring undergrounding existing rail lines where possible to minimize noise, pedestrian and urban design impacts; and

- Exploring possible stations and alignments, such as stations at San Antonio, Pill Hill and Jack London Square and alignments that would connect with the regional ferry.

Opportunities for a new BART station at San Antonio within the Regional Rail concept and potential for a new station at Pill Hill within the BART concept have been explored. Early Link21 work analyzed potential markets, including markets for these stations, and considered potential alignment and station opportunities throughout the entire 21-county Megaregion, including in Oakland. An assessment was then undertaken to screen the potential markets for inclusion in the Link21 concepts (see **Attachment B**).

Findings from the market analysis showed heightened Transbay demand northeast of Lake Merritt and along the I-580 corridor. However, these extensions were not included in the selected concepts because they did not meet the Link21 Program's planning requirements: they are not along a potential transbay crossing alignment, would not add connections between existing passenger rail networks or facilitate new transfer opportunities between BART and Regional Rail, nor would they enable more frequent and reliable service through the crossing. In addition, extensions to the northeast of Lake Merritt and along the I-580 corridor would increase Link21's scope, scale, and complexity related to deliverability and fundability considerations. While a new station at Pill Hill is not included in the Link21 concepts, a San Antonio Station is still being considered.

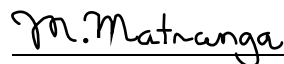
The Link21 team shared information with the City of Oakland staff to consider opportunities for future study beyond the scope of Link 21, potentially through BART's new System Development Policy (see **Attachment B**).

RECOMMENDATIONS:

Staff recommends that the City Council receive an informational report on the Link21 Program Project Identification update.

For questions regarding this memo, please contact Michelle Matranga, Planner III, at mmatranga@oakland.ca.gov or (510) 238-3550.

Prepared by:



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Approved for forwarding to the Planning Commission:



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Bureau of Planning

ATTACHMENTS:

- A. Link21 Presentation
- B. November 29, 2023 Memo: Lake Merritt and I-580 Corridor Considerations for the Link21 Concept Development