

Temporary Churchill Ave. Rail Closure Review

Project Fact Sheet



Several safety priorities have been implemented and others evaluated in response to renewed calls for enhanced safety measures at Palo Alto's four train crossings.

A review of a temporary rail crossing closure of Churchill Ave. at Alma St. is underway with staff initiating the necessary analysis to evaluate what would be required to implement a temporary closure with possible City Council consideration and action anticipated within 60 days, tentatively set for April 13.



The City and Caltrain met with staff from the California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC) in mid-February on steps needed to evaluate a temporary closure of the Churchill/Alma rail crossing.

This effort includes community engagement (listening session on March 12 and online website form to gain community feedback, plus the City Council meeting on April 13 is open to the public to share input. Other work plan items include an assessment of potential impacts such as emergency response (including police, fire and ambulance), rerouting and safety of pedestrians and bicyclists, vehicular traffic circulation, and definition of potential closure elements including signage, signal changes, fencing and closure materials for diagnostic review by CPUC staff.



Share Feedback

An online input form is available for the public to share input.

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FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

What are the steps ahead?

The information gathered at the listening session and online feedback allows staff and local/regional partners to identify key issues and concerns. Staff will develop a summary of feedback gained on how to proceed for the City Council's consideration, available after March 26 at www.paloalto.gov/councilagendas.

Does the City have a traffic study on the impacts of this potential crossing closure?

Due to a quick turnaround time, staff will analyze existing traffic data to prepare for an April 13 City Council meeting on this topic. Staff will also review information from consultants related to other transportation projects like grade separation and assess the applicability. If the City Council directs staff to conduct additional traffic analysis on the potential rail crossing closure impacts, that would take place after the April 13 meeting.

What does temporary closure mean?

In consultation with Caltrain, the City discussed whether a closure would need to be complete fencing off of the crossing or if the crossing could be open before and after school and closed at other times. Based on complexity and effectiveness to limiting means, we are assuming the crossing would need to always be closed.

Who needs to approve a temporary closure?

If the City Council wishes to close the crossing, approval is required by the California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC). Our current work is meant to provide the City Council with information from the evaluation and community feedback to provide staff direction on whether to seek CPUC approval. We've also received an initial indication that train horns could be silenced during a closure.

Who represents Palo Alto on the Rail Safety Ad Hoc Committee?

Chair Council member Julie Lythcott-Haims, Council member Pat Burt, and Vice Mayor Greer Stone.

What are the City's long-term safety measures currently being explored?

- The City in collaboration with PAUSD, added a human presence at all local rail crossings as of Feb. 23.
- To enhance mental health by reducing the reminder of lethal means, staff is evaluating implementing quiet zones through deactivation of train horns at all Palo Alto rail crossings.
- Enhanced safety improvements have been installed at the Churchill, Meadow and Charleston crossings. These improvements include high visibility markers, delineators, striping, and the Rail Sentry system (camera/video, Lidar-Light Detection and Ranging- and AI technology).
- In December, Council reaffirmed the partial undercrossing for motor vehicles at Churchill with a pedestrian/bicycle undercrossing at Seale Avenue as the locally preferred alternative for grade separation at Churchill Avenue, and the hybrid alternative at Meadow Drive and the direct ramp underpass alternative for the Charleston Road crossing.