



# AGENDA REPORT


**TO:** Jestin D. Johnson  
City Administrator

**FROM:** Josh Rowan, Director  
Oakland Department of  
Transportation

**SUBJECT:** Link21 Program  
Update

**DATE:** May 15, 2024

City Administrator  
Approval

  
Jestin Johnson (May 31, 2024 10:46 PDT)

Date: May 31, 2024

## **RECOMMENDATION**

**Staff Recommends That The City Council Receive An Informational Report Regarding An Update On Link21, A Program Led By San Francisco Bay Area Rapid Transit District (BART) and Capitol Corridor Joint Powers Authority (CCJPA).**

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

This Informational Report will provide the Oakland City Council, the Mayor's Office, City staff, and the community with an update regarding the Link21 Program. Link21 is a program to connect and improve the passenger rail network in the Northern California Megaregion. A "megaregion" is a large network of cities or metropolitan regions that share common features, such as a similar environment, interconnected infrastructure systems, economic ties, and a shared culture and history. This update includes a comparison of train technology (track gauge), considerations specific to Oakland, a summary of public engagement to date, and the next steps.

## **BACKGROUND / LEGISLATIVE HISTORY**

The Link21 Program and its partners will transform the BART and Regional Rail network (including commuter, intercity, and high-speed rail) 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 the 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](#).

Public Works & Transportation Committee  
June 11, 2024

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: 1. addressing the then-growing issue of crowding on the BART system that was projected to exceed capacity in the near future; and 2. improving access to frequent, reliable, and time-competitive rail service in the Northern California Megaregion.

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

### **ANALYSIS AND POLICY ALTERNATIVES**

City staff from OakDOT, the Planning and Building Department, and the Port of Oakland have engaged with the Link21 team during a monthly meeting series. Oakland staff provided feedback to align Link21 with the General Plan and Vision 980 planning efforts. **The Link21 Program aligns with these City priorities in the following ways:**

- **Housing, economic, and cultural security:** The Link21 Program will result in a faster, more integrated rail system that provides a safe, efficient, equitable, and affordable means of travel for all types of trips. This program will enhance livability, community stability, economic opportunity, and environmental quality while improving the passenger experience.
- **Vibrant, sustainable infrastructure:** Key investments will be made to leverage the existing network and increase capacity and system reliability.

### ***Train Crossing Technologies***

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

- Provide a second rail crossing between Oakland and San Francisco with Regional Rail and/or BART technology.
- Provide more comprehensive 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 benefits for Oakland that are dependent on each technology are outlined below under Oakland Considerations.

The formal recommendation will go to the BART and Capitol Corridor Boards of Directors in the fall of 2024. Following this train technology crossing decision, 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 in the next phase of work, which will include an Environmental Review.

### ***Oakland Considerations***

Overall, a second crossing using either technology will 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.

In terms of train crossing technology, the benefits for Oakland for each option are outlined below:

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 intercity services would expand accessibility across the megaregion.

- Potential for direct (one seat) rides between Oakland and the SF Peninsula, Alameda, Emeryville, and West Berkeley
- Faster, better rail connectivity to Sacramento, Stockton, and the I-80 corridor
- A new rail transfer station in Downtown Oakland
- Additional potential stations in West Oakland, and/or Jack London Square.

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.

- Potential for direct (one seat) rides between Oakland, Alameda, Mission Bay, and SOMA.
- Higher frequency service on existing BART lines in the East Bay.
- A new rail transfer station in Jack London Square.
- Additional potential stations in Downtown Oakland, and/or San Antonio.

Both options:

- Include a new transfer station between BART and Regional Rail within Oakland.
- Allow for underground alignment in West Oakland and Downtown Oakland.
- Provide benefits beyond Justice 40 requirements.
- Result in estimates that the majority of new trips would be taken by low income households.
- Support economic opportunities through improved access to stations and job centers.
- 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.

Early Link21 work analyzed potential markets and considered potential alignment and station opportunities throughout the entire 21-county Megaregion, including in Oakland. While not meeting specific planning requirements for the Link21 Program, findings from the market analysis showed heightened Transbay demand northeast of Lake Merritt and along the I-580 corridor.

City of Oakland staff requested that the Link21 team consider an alignment to the east of Lake Merritt (San Antonio). It was determined that locating a station in San Antonio is not crucial for the new crossing, but it would not be excluded due to the train technology decision, because it would be compatible with either. The Link21 team further determined that the City could consider opportunities to expand rail or other transit to that area as a future study, potentially through BART's new System Development Policy. **Attachment A** November 29, 2023 Memo. Lake Merritt and I-580 Corridor Considerations for the Link21 Concept Development describes the outcome of this request in more detail.

### **FISCAL IMPACT**

No fiscal impacts are associated with this Informational Memo.

### **PUBLIC OUTREACH / INTEREST**

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 had 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, and Port of Oakland; Oakland representation at both Equity Advisory Council and Jurisdictional Working Group meetings; and engagement with 22 community-based organizations and leaders in Oakland:

- Asian Pacific Environmental Network (APEN)
- Black Arts Movement Business District
- Black Cultural Zone
- Causa Justa: Just Cause (CJJC)
- Center for Employment Opportunities (CEC)
- Creating Restorative Opportunities and Programs (CROP)
- Ella Baker Center
- East Bay Asian Youth Center
- East Oakland Youth Development Center
- Friends of San Antonio Park
- Jack London Business Improvement District
- Longfellow Community Associations
- Oakland Asian Cultural Center
- Oakland Chinatown Chamber
- Prescott Neighborhood Council
- Rose Foundation
- St. Columba Catholic Church
- Trybe
- Unity Council
- We Lead Ours (WELO)
- West Oakland Environmental Indicators Project
- West Oakland Neighbors

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.

In April 2024, The Link21 Team gave a program update briefing to Oakland Department of Transportation and Planning and Building Directors. Department leadership provided feedback, including the request for careful consideration of future station interfaces with surrounding communities and urban transportation modes like walking, biking, and transit connections.

In May 2024, Link21 gave an informational presentation to the Bicyclist & Pedestrian Advisory Commission (BPAC) Infrastructure Committee. BPAC Commissioners provided questions about future 24-hour service potential, user cost, and operator and alignment details.

Link21 is planning public and stakeholder engagement in the upcoming months. There will be a series of Virtual Community Webinars that are being prepared and dates will be shared with Oakland staff when scheduled. In addition, there will be an online open house on the [Link21 website](#), which will remain available 24 hours a day 7 days a week for a month starting in 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.

## **COORDINATION**

This report was developed by staff in coordination with the Link21 Program team and the Strategic Planning team in the Oakland Planning and Building Department.

## **SUSTAINABLE OPPORTUNITIES**

***Economic:*** The Link21 Program aligns with the OakDOT Strategic Plan Goal Area of Vibrant Sustainable Infrastructure Goal 9. Plan and Implement Fast, Frequent, and Reliable Transit, and Goal 11. Coordinate Land Use with Transportation Planning.

***Environmental:*** The Link21 Program aligns with the OakDOT Strategic Plan Goal Area of Vibrant Sustainable Infrastructure Goal 13. Improve transportation choices and minimize parking demand, congestion, and pollution.

***Race & Equity:*** The Link21 Program aligns with the OakDOT Strategic Plan Goal Area of Equitable Jobs and Housing Goal 5. Improve access to jobs, education, training, and essential services.

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**ACTION REQUESTED OF THE CITY COUNCIL**

**Staff Recommends That The City Council Receive An Informational Report Regarding An Update On Link21, A Program Led By San Francisco Bay Area Rapid Transit District (BART) and Capitol Corridor Joint Powers Authority (CCJPA).**

For questions regarding this memo, please contact Acacia Dupierre, Senior Transportation Planner, at (510) 631-2314

Respectfully submitted,

*Jamie Parks*

Jamie Parks (May 31, 2024 09:54 PDT)

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Josh Rowan,  
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Major Projects Division

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Attachments (1)

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