



CITY OF OAKLAND

AGENDA REPORT


TO: Jestin D. Johnson
City Administrator

FROM: William Gilchrist
Director, Planning and
Building

SUBJECT: Informational Report Regarding the
Caltrans Vision 980 Project

DATE: January 27, 2025

City Administrator Approval


Jestin Johnson (Feb 13, 2025 18:24 PST)

Date: Feb 13, 2025

RECOMMENDATION

Staff Recommends That The Community and Economic Development Committee Of The City Council Receive An Informational Report On The Caltrans Vision 980 Study.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) is conducting the Vision 980 Study (Study) to hear from the community about ways to establish trust and reimagine the Interstate 980 (I-980) corridor. The I-980 freeway divides neighborhoods in West Oakland from Downtown Oakland and is a barrier to travel and economic opportunities. The Vision 980 Study aims to improve the quality of life for impacted residents through a community-led and equitable visioning process that seeks to reimagine the freeway to create new opportunities for land uses such as housing, businesses, open space, recreational, and cultural facilities.

Caltrans acknowledges past injustices related to the planning and construction of I-980, including racially discriminatory decisions resulting in major displacement of homes and businesses. The Vision 980 Study seeks to document economic disinvestment, environmental impacts, safety challenges, and other harms to once-thriving Black communities in West Oakland.

This report provides the Community and Economic Development Committee (CED) an informational update and opportunity to comment regarding the Vision 980 Study with information provided by Caltrans District 4 (D4) staff. The Study area is bounded by I-880 to the west, W. MacArthur Boulevard to the north, Broadway to the east, and 3rd Street to the south. The Study is divided into two phases: Phase 1 involves a community-driven visioning process, and Phase 2 includes conceptual design and implementation strategies. Beginning in April 2024 and lasting until the end of 2025, Phase 1 of the Study will identify a new collective land use and transportation vision for the entire I-980 corridor (from I-580 to I-880) based upon a robust collaboration with partners, community organizations, and the public. Phase 2, which is currently planned to begin in early 2026 and last through late 2027, will build upon Phase 1 work to

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develop a more comprehensive feasibility analysis, including modelling and forecasting, conceptual alternatives, an equity assessment, and strategies for implementation.

This report was developed by the Planning and Building Department in coordination with the Oakland Department of Transportation (OakDOT) and Caltrans D4 staff.

BACKGROUND / LEGISLATIVE HISTORY

After two decades of planning, construction of I-980 began in 1968. The freeway was intended to connect the recently completed Grove-Shafter Freeway (SR-24) and Cypress Freeway (I-880) with a new eastern approach to a proposed second San Francisco Bay Bridge crossing, which was ultimately never built. Before construction of the I-980 freeway, West Oakland was a vibrant and active community featuring a prosperous business district along 7th Street. Due to policies that created and maintained segregated neighborhoods by limiting housing choices for the African American community and other people of color, the West Oakland area was predominantly home to members of the city's African American community across various socio-economic levels, ranging from lower-income residents to more affluent members of the Black community. By the 1960s, West Oakland had suffered from decades of disinvestment as a direct result of federal redlining policies and regional suburbanization reflected by white flight after World War II. Other major infrastructure projects, such as the construction of the Bay Area Rapid Transit (BART) system and the United States Postal Service processing facility (both initiating construction in 1966) contributed to displacement and disruption of a thriving community that had little political power to stop, or even to influence, these developments.

Caltrans has noted that ultimately the I-980 freeway construction involved taking over 42 acres of property, including the removal of 503 houses, 155 trees, four churches, 22 businesses, and 142 jobs.

In the early 1970s, development of I-980 paused after the northernmost elevated portion was completed (with ramps beginning at 18th Street), as community members sued the State of California to demand replacement of the 503 housing units that were demolished. Community leaders, including the Black Panthers and Mayor Lionel Wilson, eventually urged Caltrans and Governor Jerry Brown to complete the highway with a below-grade connection to reduce impacts on the neighborhood while also committing to employing a percentage of racial minorities in the construction of the freeway and City Center redevelopment projects. When I-980 was finally completed in 1985, it completed encircling West Oakland with freeways along with the existing I-880 and I-580. Today, I-980 extends two miles in length to connect I-880 with I-580 and CA 24. It is a 560-foot-wide, partially recessed and partially elevated freeway that bisects West Oakland and Downtown Oakland. When the I-980 freeway was completed, it facilitated access for suburban communities to reach Oakland's central business district and the redeveloped City Center complex, a move that local political and business leaders saw as economically beneficial. However, its construction separated West Oakland from downtown and the rest of the city, contributing to ongoing disinvestment, air and noise pollution, a decrease in land and property values, and an increase in street safety concerns for pedestrians, cyclists,

and transit users. The I-980 freeway cut a swath through West Oakland the width of a city block. Out of approximately 30 pre-existing cross streets, only around half of those connections remained after freeway construction, where many were designed with limited pedestrian infrastructure and no bicycle facilities. The I-980 freeway's excess width, which would have allowed for eventual expansion if needed, created extra-long crossings for pedestrians walking between West Oakland and Downtown, adding to an unpleasant and often unsafe experience. I-980 also has ten on- and off-ramps in its short length, increasing the complexity of many on-grade intersections, there by discouraging people from crossing outside of a motor vehicle.

West Oaklanders were promised new housing and other civic improvements, which were not commensurate with their losses; moreover, broader economic benefits for the community failed ever to materialize. The construction of I-980 also resulted in significant displacement of African American residents and contributed to ongoing disinvestment, disconnection, and pollution in West Oakland.

More recently, there is increasing agreement that I-980 is not essential to the highway system and that the land it occupies could be better utilized. In 2015, Connect Oakland, a non-profit group of professionals and advocates began proposing ideas to transform the I-980 right-of-way into a dynamic, transit-oriented corridor that would also function as a multi-modal hub for BART, Caltrain, and High-Speed Rail. The Connect Oakland vision gained significant traction and attention by community members, with City endorsement for the study of I-980 freeway removal from then-Mayor Libby Schaaf and through the Downtown Oakland Specific Plan.

In 2021, Caltrans and the City of Oakland began collaborating to explore the possibility of reimagining the I-980 corridor. With guidance from Oakland's Department of Race and Equity, Caltrans applied for two grants to involve the community in planning for the future of I-980, particularly West Oaklanders who were directly affected by the freeway's construction. The City was a co-applicant for the federal Reconnecting Communities Pilot grant, which will fund Phase 2 of the Vision 980 Study. Prior to being awarded Reconnecting Communities grant in 2022, U.S. Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg visited West Oakland with Congresswoman Barbara Lee and Mayor Schaaf to learn more about the project.

Caltrans has continued to work closely with the City of Oakland, including staff from the Planning and Building Department, the OakDOT, and the Mayor's Office, through Vision 980 Partner Meetings.

ANALYSIS AND POLICY ALTERNATIVES

The United States Department of Transportation developed the Reconnecting Communities grant program to support local jurisdictions in repairing the community harms perpetuated by freeways or other transportation infrastructure.

The Vision 980 Study is a two-phase study to develop a "reconnecting communities" plan for the I-980 freeway corridor running between West Oakland and Downtown Oakland. The Study is

funded, in part, by the Reconnecting Communities Pilot (RCP) Program, which is a federal initiative aimed at addressing the negative impacts of transportation infrastructure that have divided communities. The program offers Planning Grants and Capital Construction Grants for work focused on removal or mitigation of barriers such as highways and railroad tracks, prioritizing projects that benefit economically disadvantaged communities.

The City of Oakland has adopted policies in the Downtown Oakland Specific Plan (DOSP), including Policy M-3.11 (I-980 Replacement Feasibility Study), to invest in connectivity, public realm, and complete streets improvements; encourage infill development and leverage publicly owned land for housing; and study the long-term feasibility of capping or replacing the I-980 freeway to better connect West Oakland and Downtown, while creating opportunities for new housing, green space, and other uses. Under this policy, revenues from public land along the I-980 corridor would be used to repair inequities caused by the creation of I-980, and support walking, biking, and transit. The City of Oakland is committed to working with Caltrans on a plan that equitably reconnects West Oakland with Downtown Oakland, including repairing harm done to West Oakland under I-980's initial construction.

The Downtown Oakland Specific Plan calls for reimagining the design and function of this corridor to better serve all Oaklanders, suggesting options such as near-term multimodal improvements to overpasses and long-term transformations that could include a new street-level boulevard lined by potential new land uses such as housing, mass transit, and open space. Potential transformation could include connections with the regional Link 21 project, which is studying developing a second transbay crossing for passenger rail, as well as other improvements to the regional transit system.

In collaboration with the City of Oakland and local communities, Caltrans is exploring all ideas for reconnecting neighborhoods divided by the I-980 corridor and delivering more equitable outcomes for the City, the Bay Area region, and the State of California. Caltrans is open to a wide range of options for reimagining the I-980 corridor. The vision could include minor improvements to the existing freeway overcrossings and ramp alignments, the addition of a freeway cap/deck park or other community-serving facility on top of the existing sunken freeway segment, the removal and redevelopment of some on/off ramps, removal and redevelopment of the I-980 mainline, or other options suggested during the study's community engagement process. The community vision in Phase 1 may include a combination of short-, medium-, and long-term improvements for the corridor and the feasibility analysis in Phase 2 will identify short-, medium-, and long-term implementation options.

FISCAL IMPACT

Phase 1 of the Study, which officially began in April 2024, will identify a new community vision for the I-980 corridor, and is funded by a \$500,000 grant from the Federal Highway Administration's State Planning & Research (SP&R) program. Phase 2 of the Vision 980 Study, anticipated to begin in early 2026, will analyze the feasibility of the vision identified in Phase 1. Phase 2 is funded with a Federal Reconnecting Communities Pilot (RCP) grant of \$680,000 and matching state funds of \$170,000.

PUBLIC OUTREACH / INTEREST

Caltrans is coordinating closely with three partner agencies to develop the Vision 980 Study: the City of Oakland, Alameda County Transportation Commission (Alameda CTC), and the Metropolitan Transportation Commission (MTC). Caltrans staff began meeting regularly with these agencies in 2023 and began a “soft launch” for the Study that same year by presenting the planned study to, and answering questions from, nearby Neighborhood Councils and relevant City commissions, including the Bicyclist & Pedestrian Advisory Commission, the Mayor’s Commission on Persons with Disabilities, the Youth Commission, and the Planning Commission.

This report and presentation to the CED is intended to provide an introduction and overview of the Vision 980 Study, solicit input from councilmembers and members of the public that can help guide the ongoing community engagement process, develop a continued partnership between Caltrans and the City that will help leverage the best outcomes for I-980 and provide public outreach.

Building on robust collaboration and outreach to partner agencies, community organizations, and the public, Phase 1 of the Study will identify a new community vision for the I-980 corridor. To assist with this work, Caltrans is contracting with WSP, who has engaged with subconsultants RBA Creative, Urban Strategies Council, West Oakland Environmental Indicators Project (WOEIP), West Oakland Health Council (WOHC), and Arup.

Phase 1 of the Vision 980 Study (Spring 2024 through the end of 2025) began formally in April 2024 after onboarding WSP and establishing a Technical Advisory Committee (TAC). The Phase 1 TAC includes 10 members from public agencies and 6 members from community benefit organizations (CBOs). The public agency representatives include the City of Oakland’s Race & Equity Department, City of Oakland’s Planning & Building Department, OakDOT, Alameda CTC, MTC, AC Transit, Alameda County Public Health Department, BART/Link 21, Bay Area Air Quality Management District (BAAQMD), and the Port of Oakland. The CBO representatives include the West Oakland Environmental Indicators Project (WOEIP), the West Oakland Health Council (WOHC), Urban Strategies Council, West Oakland Cultural Action Network, ArtEsteem, and Capacity 4 Equity & Success Program (C4ES). Phase 1 Study tasks include corridor definition, a baseline assessment of existing/future conditions for the corridor, development of an evaluation framework (including equity performance measures), scenario development/ visualization/ evaluation, and extensive outreach and public engagement. The final Phase 1 Study Report (due at the end of 2025) will include a recommended corridor concept/vision and identify next steps.

Phase 2 of the Vision 980 Study, anticipated to begin in early 2026 and last through late 2027, will analyze the feasibility of the vision identified in Phase 1, using the evaluation framework established during Phase 1. Phase 2 of the Study will recommend specific corridor concepts, determine future implementation strategies, and provide next steps toward project development/implementation, including cost estimation and identification of potential funding sources. The Vision 980 Study received a Federal Reconnecting Communities Pilot (RCP) grant of \$680,000 for Phase 2 with the City of Oakland as a co-applicant. Phase 2 is funded with the RCP grant and matching state funds of \$170,000.

Phase 2 will also include determination of the legal and legislative needs to implement the community's vision, including the potential for relinquishment, particularly if some or all of the I-980 right-of-way is envisioned for redevelopment. Although the Study will establish a future vision that may include new land uses within the I-980 corridor, the transportation agency does not develop its own excess land; instead, Caltrans would work with the City of Oakland to establish a Specific Plan that aligns with community priorities, similar to the Transbay Redevelopment Project in San Francisco. Following the completion of both Study phases, Caltrans and its partner agencies would begin work on locating funding for near- and long-term elements, developing additional plans (including Project Initiation Documents, environmental documents, and/or specific plans), and establishing project phasing.

Thus far in Phase 1 of the Study, WSP and Caltrans have drafted an Outreach & Engagement Plan, convened the TAC, began preliminary outreach, held three TAC meetings, and hosted three public workshops, both in-person and online. Led by RBA Creative, which has longstanding connections to the West Oakland community, public engagement thus far has also included focus groups with longtime West Oakland residents, popup outreach at pre-existing community events like the Juneteenth celebration, mobile workshops at events like First Fridays, and a virtual public workshop. Two more rounds of engagement are planned for Phase 1, first to gather comments on potential scenarios in mid-2025 and then to share the results of the Study in late 2025.

Early engagement has focused on explaining the potential Study outcomes and alternatives, gathering feedback on previous harms resulting from I-980's original installation, understanding methods for establishing trust between Caltrans and the public, and listening to community concerns and ideas for the existing freeway corridor. Future outreach will present conceptual visualizations of project alternatives for specific input and will include Caltrans-hosted open houses and mobile workshops/walking tours near the I-980 corridor. Public engagement is focusing on outreach to current and displaced residents of the I-980 corridor in several neighborhoods of West Oakland and Downtown Oakland. Phase 1 will also include wider outreach and surveying of the entire Oakland community.

During the preliminary "soft launch," Caltrans received constructive feedback from community members, including a desire for increased multimodal transportation options, open space/parks, and affordable housing. Community members wanted to ensure Caltrans recognized previous feedback given on many plans/projects for the area, and many are concerned about the potential impacts a freeway transformation project could have on rent/housing prices, gentrification, displacement, and existing unhoused residents.

Planning staff and/or the Caltrans Vision 980 team intend to provide updates to the Planning Commission and the CED at key milestones, such as during the options selection process and once a vision is identified. The Vision 980 team will send councilmembers all public engagement announcements, provide briefings by request and present to the full City Council if recommended by the CED. Phase 2 of the Vision 980 Study will involve Caltrans, City staff, and elected officials in a detailed feasibility and technical analysis of the concept/vision identified in Phase 1. The results of Phase 1 will guide the scope of work for Phase 2. The Vision 980 team invites interested staff, councilmembers, and the public to join their mailing list to receive meeting and study updates.

Website link: www.vision980.org, or <https://dot.ca.gov/caltrans-near-me/district-4/d4-projects/vision-980>.

COORDINATION

Caltrans has been coordinating with the City of Oakland through Vision 980 Partner Meetings since October 2021. These meetings have included staff from OakDOT, Department of Race and Equity, the Planning and Building Department, and the Mayor's Office as well as partners at MTC and Alameda CTC.

Caltrans has presented Vision 980 to the Oakland Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Committee, Mayor's Commission on Persons with Disabilities, the Youth Commission, and the Planning Commission, and will be working with youth commissioners during Phase 1.

Prior to the study launch, Caltrans reached out to 7 Neighborhood Councils (NCs) to provide a study information sheet and offer to schedule an informational presentation. Caltrans was invited to present to the Prescott and West Oakland NCs. Hoover Foster, Old Oakland, Ujima Friends, and Uptown/Gold Coast NCs received study information sheets and did not schedule a presentation. Caltrans shared information about the study's outreach efforts, including mobile and virtual workshops and a public survey. Additionally, an informational presentation for Councilmember Carroll Fife was given in November 2023.

SUSTAINABLE OPPORTUNITIES

The I-980 freeway crossings separate the downtown core from West Oakland and create a barrier to walking or bicycling safely to downtown from surrounding neighborhoods. The Vision 980 Study supports Oakland's Economic, Environmental, and Race & Equity goals by assessing the feasibility of capping or replacing the I-980 freeway, including the option of replacing it with a street-level boulevard with a highly walkable and bikeable design, including intersections and crosswalks that better connect downtown to West Oakland. The I-980 alignment is also a potential option for the second transbay crossing.

Economic:

Projects resulting from the Study have the potential to be transformative and provide new development and revenue to the City. The area along the I-980 freeway has been identified as a future mixed-use district within the DOSP; repurposing the freeway would unlock potential for commercial and residential development, and provide a long-term, transformational economic opportunity for Oakland. If converted to a surface grade boulevard or capped, the excess freeway right-of-way could be repurposed to serve the needs of the West Oakland and Downtown residents with new housing, jobs, commercial spaces and public green space, prioritizing improvements to redress damage done to the West Oakland community in the creation of the freeway.

Environmental:

Projects resulting from the Study could reduce car dependency and vehicle miles traveled, supporting the City's climate and air quality goals. The Vision 980 Study seeks to improve access via walking, biking, and transit between West Oakland and Downtown, at a minimum. The Study includes the potential of freeway removal and the reallocation of this space to better serve Oaklanders with housing, green space, and other community-serving uses. Safety improvements, transit-oriented development, and improved access between West Oakland and Downtown would reduce car dependency.

Specifically, the Vision 980 Study supports Oakland's Land Use and Transportation Element (LUTE) of the General Plan through alignment with several mobility goal implementation policies asserted in West Oakland Specific Plan (2014) and the Downtown Oakland Specific Plan (2024), including but not limited to the following:

- West Oakland Specific Plan, Complete Streets-2: Improve existing connections across or under freeways to activity centers, in particular on Mandela Parkway at I-580 and on West Grand Avenue at I-980, using lighting, public art, way-finding signage, acoustics, and other design features.
- Downtown Oakland Specific Plan, M-2.7 New Transbay BART Crossing & 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.
- Downtown Oakland Specific Plan, M-3.11 I-980 Replacement Feasibility Study: Study the long-term feasibility of replacing I-980 with a multi-way boulevard or "lid" park over the freeway to better connect West Oakland and downtown and increase climate change mitigation and resilience while creating opportunities for new housing, green space, and other uses, using the revenues from public land to repair inequities caused by the creation of I-980, and supporting walking, biking, and transit.

Race and Equity:

The Vision 980 Study is directly addressing the harm done to Black communities in West Oakland with the construction of Interstate 980 by integrating Racial Equity Impact Assessment at every phase and focusing community outreach to current and displaced residents of the I-980 corridor, led by RBA Creative, which has longstanding connections to the West Oakland community,

In September 2023, the City of Oakland adopted an Environmental Justice Element (EJ Element) as part of Phase 1 of the General Plan Update, 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 project is consistent with the goals and policies outlined in the EJ Element including, but not limited to the following:

- EJ-7.2 Accessible Neighborhoods. Encourage active modes of transportation and transit accessibility by supporting neighborhoods that provide access to a range of daily goods, services, and recreational resources within comfortable walking or biking distance. Encourage transit providers to prioritize, establish and maintain routes to jobs, shopping, schools, parks and healthcare facilities that are convenient to EJ Communities.
- EJ-7.5 Bicycle- and Pedestrian-Friendly Design. Prioritize designs that protect people that are biking and walking, such as improvements that increase visibility of bicyclists and pedestrians, traffic calming, and safer intersection crossings and turns. Improvements should also prioritize universal design so that improvements are usable by all people, to the greatest extent possible, without the need for adaptation or specialization.
- EJ-8.1 Meaningful, Relevant Engagement. Design and implement public engagement processes and events that emphasize participation from low-income communities and communities of color; that are driven by resident priorities, that are easily accessible and understandable and that provide meaningful opportunities for participants to influence outcomes.

In addition to the EJ Element, Downtown Oakland Specific Plan M-3.11 (I-980 Replacement Study), shown in the section above, specifically addresses using revenues resulting from changes to I-980 to “repair inequities caused by the creation of I-980.”

CALIFORNIA ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY ACT (CEQA)

The Vision 980 Study is a planning study and is not considered a project under the California Environmental Quality Act.

The Vision 980 Study is currently in a conceptual stage and no specific land use changes, freeway re-alignments or new transit stations have yet been identified. At this time, it is too early to determine any proposed impact to or from the corridor’s existing zoning. If the community vision developed in Phase 1 includes proposed new land uses, staff recommends the City of Oakland develop a new Specific Plan for this area.

ACTION REQUESTED OF THE CITY COUNCIL

Staff Recommends That The Committee on Economic Development Of The City Council Receive An Informational Report On Caltrans Vision 980 Study.

For questions regarding this report, please contact Michelle Matranga, Planner III, at (510) 847-8025.

Respectfully submitted,

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