







## **5** POLICIES AND REGULATIONS

*HOW IS THE CURRENT ENVIRONMENT A RESULT OF EXISTING POLICIES  
WHO ARE THE KEY PLAYERS IN THE PICTURE  
WHAT ARE THE CURRENT IMPRESSIONS/OPINIONS ABOUT EL CAMINO*

## SETTINGS AND OPPORTUNITIES POLICIES & REGULATIONS

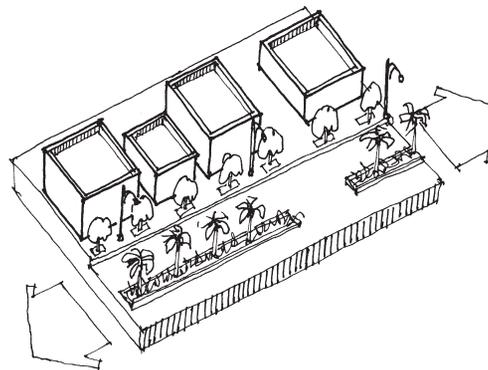
The policy framework that directs and informs many of the decisions shaping the corridor study area is a multi-jurisdictional one. In addition to the City of San Mateo, it includes Caltrans, the Metropolitan Transportation Commission (MTC), SamTrans and, under one administrative staffing entity, CalTrain, the Peninsula Corridor Joint Powers Board (JPB), and the San Mateo County Transportation Authority. The lead agency in terms of control over the highway right-of-way is the state transportation department, Caltrans.

The following section provides an overview of the policies established for El Camino by each of these separate jurisdictions. The multi-jurisdictional nature of the corridor makes coordination of projects very difficult. To some extent, current conditions along El Camino are the result of this multi-jurisdictional policy framework. In the context of the various transportation agencies, including the lead agency Caltrans, the policy framework for El Camino is heavily weighted to maintain full capacity of the roadway for a smooth flow of through traffic. Apart from the City's policies to make it an attractive corridor for commercial and mixed-use development, El Camino is first and foremost seen as a regional highway serving cars and trucks.

### CITY OF SAN MATEO

The fourth major proposal of the City's General Plan is to "beautify and improve El Camino" (SR 82). The principal concern, especially along the southern portions of El Camino south of 9th Avenue, is for three conditions that are said to contribute to the "visual chaos" that is felt to characterize the street: (1) excessive signage, (2) poor building design, and (3) lack of landscaping.

Major City policies specific to El Camino can be summarized under five general categories, city image, land use, height, parking, and setbacks. The following policy overview for each of the five categories also identifies adopted implementation mechanisms, describes existing conditions, and makes some general observations.



**Figure 5.1** Diagram of the elements that comprise the identity of a street; the median, sidewalk, street lights, building facades street trees and plantings, etc.

### A. CITY IMAGE

#### POLICY:

The appearance of El Camino, in particular south of Ninth Avenue, is recognized as being of the highest importance to the overall image of the City. Improving the visual image of El Camino is a citywide concern. Three major types of projects are promoted at a policy level: (1) Master Plan for south portion of the corridor (this study), (2) Tree planting and coordinated public and private improvements, (3) Gateway element located at the south edge of the City (Belmont city limit) in the vicinity of 42nd Street.

#### ZONING:

New signs are controlled through the City's sign ordinance, which is good in being relatively restrictive on the amount and size of signs on El Camino and in requiring that signs be made to "fit" the architecture of the building. All new building design is subject to staff level site plan and architecture review (SPAR).

#### EXISTING LANDSCAPING AND DEVELOPMENT:

There are only a small number of trees planted in the public right-of-way and there is no consistency in the type of trees that have been planted, both within the sidewalk area and along property frontages. El Camino's right-of-way is

typically 100 feet, which includes up to six travel lanes and, in some areas, on-street parking. Typical sidewalk widths are 5-7 feet. There are no sidewalks on the east side of El Camino for most of the frontage between the Belmont City limit and 42nd Avenue. Many signs are older and in need of maintenance or replacement. Most of the buildings are older, perhaps pre-dating zoning, and some are not well maintained. The newer buildings and remodels are, generally speaking, larger scale projects and tend to be designed to stand apart from the rest of the street.

**OBSERVATIONS:**

New development and rehabilitation of older buildings represents only a small percentage of the properties along El Camino. The primary public sector concern becomes one of promoting reinvestment in some of the smaller properties, especially for facade and sign improvements. Small loan and grant programs, together with design consultation programs, are one mechanism that might be considered for improving the appearance of a majority of the businesses. Finally, the narrow public sidewalk right-of-way makes it very difficult, if not improbable, to introduce street trees without narrowing the roadway or eliminating either a travel lane or on-street parking. Planted medians also may

require comparable modifications. Tree planting within the front setback may be constrained by the building facade and, because the setback is not a consistent condition, will have significant gaps. Finally, tree planting in the setback area will be incremental over a relatively long period of time, meaning that tree size and age will vary significantly along the corridor.

**B. LAND USE**

**POLICIES:**

The City’s General Plan promotes the concentration of commercial and higher density residential along the southern portion of El Camino.

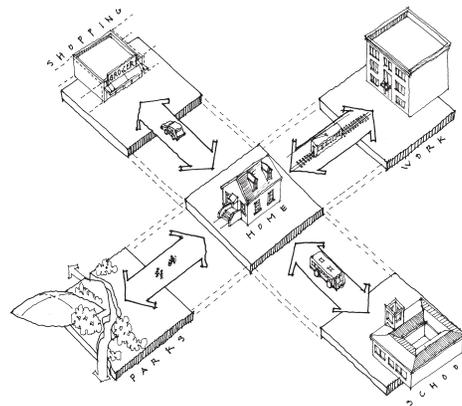


Figure 5.2 Diagram of the types of land uses take make up a community.

**ZONING:**

Community/Regional Commercial (C-2 and C-3); Higher Density Residential (R-4 and R-5); FAR bonus as incentive for residential development and mixed-use residential

**EXISTING DEVELOPMENT:**

El Camino is a built out corridor with a diversity of uses, including small independent retailers, convenience centers, fast food, destination specialty retail (furniture, office supply, florists), Hillsdale Shopping Center, auto service commercial (car wash, lube center, gas stations), small and medium size office buildings, motels, neighborhood shopping (25th Avenue, 37th Street), some medical services and some multi-unit residential.

**OBSERVATIONS:**

Smaller lots and multiple ownerships make increased commercial and residential development more difficult although some parcel assembly may occur given strong commercial market. Some larger sites in the vicinity of Hillsdale Shopping Center and at 42nd Avenue are important opportunities for more intensive development; obsolescence of small retail spaces could create blight.

## SETTINGS AND OPPORTUNITIES POLICIES & REGULATIONS

### C. HEIGHT

#### POLICIES:

Promote heights of 40 feet with provision for heights of 55 feet height where additional amenities can be provided; maintain lower buildings that do not block views of the bay and hills.

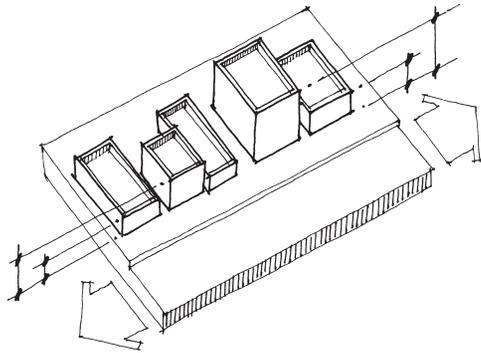


Figure 5.3 Diagram showing the variety of buildings heights that comprise the street wall.

#### ZONING:

40-55 feet. Current height restrictions are subject to reconsideration in 2005 (Measure H).

#### EXISTING DEVELOPMENT:

The buildings along El Camino comprise mostly one and two story structures although portions of Hillsdale Shopping Center may exceed 40-55 feet within the two stories. Although there are a

few 3-4 story buildings, there is only one building of significant height in the area, the BayView mid-rise building. (10 stories over a podium or approximately 130 feet). Within the study area, the adjacent residential areas typically do not exceed 2-3 stories.

#### OBSERVATIONS:

The small size and configuration of numerous properties makes buildings over 2 stories very improbable, especially given parking requirements. The general 4-story height limit may make parcel assembly difficult for larger scale development. Without increased height limits, at least for larger properties, any significant increase in development intensity along the corridor for residential uses may be very limited.

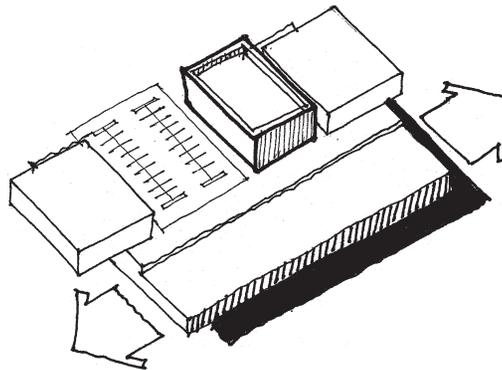


Figure 5.4 Diagram showing how parking can take up a large portion of the street wall when removed off-street.

### D. PARKING

#### POLICIES:

New development is required to make its fair contribution to maintaining City standards for parking.

#### ZONING:

The standards for parking are extensive and generally reinforce the limited nature of the pedestrian environment. Generally speaking, the standards require a significant number of on-site parking spaces for most types of commercial and residential development. Some allowances are made in the case of smaller parcels for a percentage of the parking requirement to be met with on-street parking as is found within the 25th Avenue shopping area.

#### EXISTING DEVELOPMENT:

Several areas, including 25th Avenue, are constrained by very limited on-site parking. There are no public parking lots and the majority of parking is located along the street. Larger scale commercial development is dependent upon the availability of on-site parking.

**OBSERVATIONS:**

In general, parking requirements are the major consideration in the economic feasibility of most types of new development. As such, many owners of businesses that are naturally turning over have little opportunity to reinvest or redevelopment their parcels.

**D. SETBACKS**

**POLICY:**

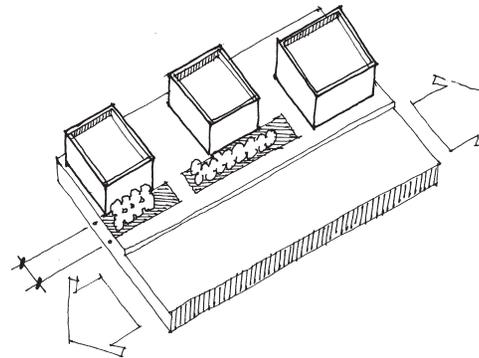
Setbacks along El Camino are encouraged as being part of a coordinated effort to make both public and private improvements to the visual character of the corridor.

**ZONING:**

A 10-foot frontage setback is required for new development on El Camino that is greater than 2 stories.

**EXISTING DEVELOPMENT:**

Much of the older development is built to the property line. In some cases, setbacks have been made to accommodate on-site parking in front of part or all of the building. There is no uniformity in how the setback area, where it exists, has been treated.



*Figure 5.5* Diagram showing the introduction of a landscaped setback onto a street.

**OBSERVATIONS:**

Most new development, especially on the smaller parcels, probably will not be higher than 2 stories and will not be required to provide the 10-foot setback. In some cases, the setback has provided a more generous street edge for pedestrians. In most cases, the sidewalk width remains relatively narrow (5-6 feet) and there is a narrow (5-8 feet) area of landscape space between the sidewalk and the building or on-site parking lot. The setback is most effective when it separates functions such as surface parking from the back edge of the sidewalk. In most other cases, it is of questionable purpose. To be effective in contributing to a more coherent streetscape character, there should be established guidelines or standards for landscape treatment of the setback area.

**II. CALTRANS**

El Camino is designated as State Route 82 and, as part of the state highway network, is under the jurisdiction of the state transportation department, Caltrans. Caltrans administers state and federal funds for all roadway improvements as well as for ongoing maintenance. All roadway projects are subject to Caltrans review and approval according to established highway design standards and criteria. Improvement projects with budgets less than one million dollars are assigned to a standard review process. Projects with budgets greater than one million dollars are subject to review under the direct direction of the District Office Chief who may consider alternative designs that meet specific performance criteria.

Generally speaking, Caltrans policies for El Camino reflect its status as part of the state highway infrastructure that has been supplemented by the more recent freeway network. Highway 101 and I-280 are the first and second generation, limited access alternatives to El Camino that Caltrans has built through the peninsula.

Caltrans considers El Camino a "conventional" highway. From a Caltrans policy perspective, it

does not meet many of the contemporary design standards that are based on the preferred freeway model. In particular, on-street parking and driveway access to development sites are tolerated only as remnants of the old order. Current Caltrans policies promote uninterrupted traffic flow and tend to view land use considerations and landscape improvements in a generally negative light.

There are numerous established funding sources for roadway and related traffic movement improvements. Compared to other types of funding for frontage improvements, including landscaping and pedestrian related facilities, it is clear that policies serving traffic congestion management and automobile use are of the highest priority.

### III. SAMTRANS

As stated in the introduction, Sam Trans (the San Mateo County Transit District) is also the staffing entity for the Peninsula Corridor Joint Powers Board (CalTrain/JPB) and the San Mateo County Transportation Authority, which is a congestion management agency. The arrangement represents a cost savings and improved operating efficiency compared to having separate and duplicate administrative staff for each of the three County-serving agencies. Despite public concerns that such an

administrative arrangement favors one mode of transportation over another, courts have ruled that the agencies serve in a fair, equitable and even-handed manner.

However, there is occasional confusion that results from having the same individuals serve on different boards which, while having separate legal authority and responsibility, appear to the general public to have similar functions. Efforts are underway to provide clearer and more explicit policies to define the duties of the members of each of the three separate boards.

SamTrans operates and maintains both local, express and commuter bus service in San Mateo County. The highest level of service is provided by the several routes that serve all or portions of El Camino corridor. Although some of the local routes (such as the 5-M & 7-B) appear well-used, ridership is far less than capacity with significant subsidies used to supplement cost shortfalls.

### IV. CALTRAIN

The Joint Powers Board facilitates operation and maintenance of the peninsula rail service that more or less parallels El Camino for much of the corridor. Within the south corridor study area of the City of San Mateo, the railroad right-of-way is almost immediately adjacent to El Camino from the Belmont city limit to the area in the immediate vicinity of Hillsdale Boulevard. Under Union Pacific policy, the current surplus portion of the right-of-way between El Camino and the railroad tracks is leased on a short-term basis for commercial use.

In other cities along the CalTrain route, larger surplus railroad property is being planned for joint development projects under new JPB policies. However, long range planning for policy-directed fast train service may require railroad use of much of this property and development within the surplus right-of-way is uncertain.

CalTrain commuter ridership is very high and a number of new support facilities are in the planning, design or construction stage along the corridor. JPB policy to promote increased ridership is supported by the policies of several other County and Bay Area transportation management agencies, including those serving environmental interests.

**V. SAN MATEO COUNTY TRANSPORTATION AUTHORITY**

The San Mateo County Transportation Authority provides policy leadership and administers local funds for congestion management throughout the County. El Camino is part of the highway network that qualifies for congestion management project funding. While congestion management policies include other modes of transportation such as rail, bus, bicycle and even pedestrian traffic, the clear priority in terms of project implementation is to serve automobile circulation. However, multi-modal projects do receive special attention under current policies and may be placed ahead of pure roadway projects on many of the available funding lists managed by the Authority.

**VI. MTC**

The Metropolitan Transportation Commission (MTC) is the transportation planning, coordinating and financing agency for the nine-county San Francisco Bay Area. It was created by the State Legislature in 1970 to serve transportation interests at the regional level and is one of several such agencies in the state. For federal purposes, it serves as the region's metropolitan planning organization (MPO). As such, it is responsible for the Regional

Transportation Plan, which is a comprehensive blueprint for the development of mass transit, highway, airport, seaport, railroad, bicycle and pedestrian facilities. The Commission also screens requests from local agencies for state and federal grants.

Since the 1950s, increasingly significant tax revenues have been directed to building and maintaining state and federal highway infrastructure. In recent years, new laws have given authorities like MTC an increasingly important role in financing regional transportation improvements. One of the more significant pieces of federal legislation was the 1991 Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act (ISTEA), which gave MPSs such as MTC powers to determine the mix of transportation projects best suited to meet regional needs. The current generation of ISTEA funding, known as TEA-21, emphasizes policies and the resulting projects that serve multi-modal facilities and that address transportation program and congestion management as well as air quality.

MTC also administers state monies, such as that provided by the Transportation Development Act. Legislation passed in 1997 gives MTC decision making authority over the selection of projects and allocation of funds for the State Transportation Improvement Program (STIP).

In addition, MTC now has the responsibility, through a new agency the Bay Area Toll Authority (BATA), for administering revenues from the Bay Area's seven state-owned toll bridges, including the San Mateo Bridge.

Given its authority over regional transportation funding, MTC has come to have a primary role in coordinating and overseeing the regional transportation system, which includes El Camino. It has become a major lobbying interest at both the state and federal level.