



September 1, 2006

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RE: Railyards Specific Plan

Dear Ms. Shearly and Mr. Totah:

WALKSacrimento appreciates the opportunity to comment on the Railyards Specific Plan for infill development on 238 acres. We thank you both for taking the time to make a presentation to our members at our July meeting. WALKSacrimento believes that the project holds great potential for promoting a healthy and active lifestyle, including walking as a primary mode of transportation, but we have serious concerns about the project as presented.

WALKSacrimento is a member of the Partnership for Active Communities, an Active Living by Design project funded by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. The Partnership is working to support increased physical activity such as walking and bicycling in local neighborhoods as well as helping to create community environments that support walking and bicycling. One way that we are doing this is through the review of proposed development projects. The benefits of such active environments include improved physical fitness, less motor vehicle traffic congestion, better air quality, and a stronger sense of cohesion and safety in local neighborhoods.

We are pleased to see that the stated goals of the project include creating a “pedestrian-friendly district that connects to Sacramento’s historic downtown office, retail, government center areas, and existing neighborhoods including the Richards Boulevard area, Old Sacramento and Alkali Flat,” to “create the residential critical mass and transportation links need to establish downtown as a desirable regional live-work hub,” and to “create a strong public connection from the Railyards to the Sacramento River by creating inviting open space and pedestrian linkages.”

After hearing the presentation, reviewing the project’s plans, we offer the following comments and recommendations to help the project achieve it’s admirable goals:

1. Add additional external connections: WALKSacramento is very concerned about the lack of connections to the surrounding area. We understand the connectivity challenges and barriers at the site. However, we believe the current plan lacks the necessary linkages to achieve the project’s stated connection goals, and will not provide easy walking and biking to and from the site. As laid out, the project does not mesh with the City’s existing and effective street grid. If the City’s grid were continued, north/south access would be provided at eleven streets. As proposed, we see three links to the south and three to the north, not counting a few other potential connections for bicycles and pedestrians.

It is highly desirable to have a more direct links from the Intermodal facility to Old Sacramento, from the project to the Richards Boulevard area to the north, between F street and 7th, 6th, and 5th Streets, and from the project to 12th Street. Better connectivity will benefit all street users by dispersing traffic. At a minimum, well-designed bicycle and pedestrian links are needed at these locations.

2. Find an alternative to the 7th Street bicycle and pedestrian overcrossing: By all accounts so far, the proposed bicycle and pedestrian overcrossing of 7th Street will be long and isolated, raising issues of safety and convenience. Such overcrossings are difficult to build with “eyes on the street” and without the necessary passive surveillance it will not be used by the general public and will become backwaters of antisocial behavior. The narrow, cage-like design presented has been used in other areas in the region and have repeatedly proven to be detrimental to the safe movement of pedestrians or cyclists. Much more specific detail and discussion is needed about how this structure would meet needs of those on foot or bicycle.
3. Plan for school children’s transportation needs: If the project goes forward with 10,000 residential units, there will be many school-aged children living within its boundaries. Where and how those children will go to

school needs to be determined. The inclusion of at least one school site within the project area seems appropriate. The current plan seems to ensure that children will have to be driven to a school site which will have significant air quality and traffic impacts.

If all of the students are sent to schools more than ¼ mile away, a distance in which high numbers of children can be expected to walk or bike to school, there will be significant traffic impacts. Where the children will go to school is also important for understanding routes that children will regularly travel and then ensuring that those routes have the appropriate safety features.

The current plan does not include an appropriate route for children to walk to the two closest schools. St Joseph's, a Catholic school that a limited number of children might attend, is the closest and about ¼ mile from many of the proposed residences as the crow flies. However, when the lack of connectivity is figured in, and possible routes are mapped, no homes are within the critical distance of ¼ mile. Getting to Washington Elementary, the next closest school, is even more difficult, given the need to cross 12th Street.

4. Reduce six-lane roadway to four-lanes: The proposed six-lane roadway for a portion of Big Four Boulevard is not appropriate for a downtown that is trying to promote walking, biking, and transit use. Six lanes present enormous challenges to those trying to cross the street on foot. A drawing of the intersection of 6th Street and Big Four Boulevard, the proposed six lanes street, would paint part of the picture. How will pedestrians cross at that intersection and get across other six-lane locations? One pedestrian and bike path is shown across Big Four between the 5th Street Emporium and the Sports & Entertainment District. How will this crossing look? Will it include a pedestrian activated-signal? Additional connectivity and enhanced facilities for modes other than motor vehicles will help make 4-lane roadways possible.
5. Ensure connection between Intermodal Facility and Central Station: At the presentation, we were informed that security concerns at the Intermodal Facility were a potential barrier to a pedestrian link to the Central Station. A connection between those two locations is absolutely critical to successfully integrate transit service into the Railyards. WALKSacramento believes that creative solutions to the security concerns can be found by looking at how other cities around the world handle similar concerns.
6. Improve 5th Street design: For the amount of foot traffic mentioned in the presentation and suggested by the attractions on 5th Street, having the sidewalk occasionally narrow down to 6' poses a problem. At that width, large groups of pedestrians will have to narrow down to one person across

in both directions in order to pass. Because of the highly pedestrian nature we recommend at least 10-14' continuous sidewalks on each side.

We were told that the narrowing would happen only where parking was included and that adjoining plazas will provide additional width were the sidewalk narrowed down, but this then creates a less ideal meandering effect. If this type of pedestrian path is to be included, the plan for the sidewalk and adjoining plazas along 5th Street needs to be included as part of the design standard with adjoining uses, so it is clear from the outset that additional sidewalk width via plazas will be provided and preserved. The 22' sidewalk on the opposite side is excellent and will greatly encourage walking.

The 12' travel lanes for the minor collector street do not match the City's Pedestrian Friendly Street Standards. According to the standards, adopted in 2004, lane widths should be 11'. We recommend that 10' lanes be considered as a way to slow traffic and provide greater sidewalk width.

The street may need bike lanes based upon the projected Average Daily Trips and planned speed. Angled parking poses a threat to cyclists. We recommend using back-in angled parking, which is being used in other cities successfully, to decrease the risk a collision with a cyclist and to point pedestrians towards the sidewalk when exiting the vehicle.

7. Preserve pedestrian and bicycle facilities along 7th Street: While a link between F Street and the project is badly needed, it does not seem appropriate to drop bicycle and pedestrian facilities along 7th Street. It does not support the current national push for "complete streets," streets that provide safe and convenient amenities for all users. WALKSacramento understands that there are challenges with space included the existing design, but the answer should not be to drop the bicycle and pedestrian facilities.
8. Include high quality bicycle parking facilities: Details about bicycle parking are needed. To encourage bicycle use, residents, employees, and visitors require parking facilities that are highly visible, easy to use, and convenient. With the amount of attention and design going into the Sports and Entertainment District, we recommend considering installing unique and well-designed facilities to encourage cycling, such as Bike Trees (learn more at www.biketree.com).
9. Keep plans for secondary levee walk/bike path: If the secondary levee is deemed necessary and remains in the plans, we strongly encourage keeping the bike and pedestrian path along it's top.

10. Include walkable path along rail corridor: The railroad running east/west presents challenges to connectivity, but also provides an opportunity. A pedestrian and bicycle trail along the rail line would provide a helpful connection.
11. Ensure that commercial activities do not encroach on sidewalk space: At some locations in the City, commercial activities intrude upon pedestrian space, such as when a restaurant with outdoor seating encroaches onto the sidewalk with permanent fencing. While amenities that increase outside activity along streets are highly desirable, we request that provisions be made to ensure that they do not interfere with pedestrian travel.
12. Include more varied uses: To encourage a supportive and active neighborhood, multiple uses with a variety of open hours are needed. For example, major uses such as a university campus or a hospital have different hours than offices, attract diverse people, and encourage surrounding retail and services that would support residents. In contrast, an arena, while providing some different hours of activity and being a major draw, does not encourage businesses that will support nearby residents at as high of a level.
13. Ensure affordable housing: WALKSacramento recommends ensuring that a variety of affordable housing be included in the project. It is important to include this in order to attract the diverse population that will make a healthy and energetic Railyards.

Thank you for your consideration of these comments and recommendations. If you have questions or need additional information, please contact Scott Clark or me at (916) 446-9255 or via email at sclark@walksacramento.org or ageraghty@walksacramento.org.

Sincerely,

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Executive Director

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