



City Council Agenda Report

From: Katie Banister, Associate Planner

Subject: Adoption of the Mitigated Negative Declaration for the Niblick Road Complete and Sustainable Bike and Pedestrian Enhancements Project (P25-0012)

CEQA: In compliance with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), an initial study and mitigated negative declaration (SCH 2024120426) were prepared for the project and circulated between December 12, 2024 and January 10, 2025.

Location: Niblick Road between Spring Street and Creston Road

Date: March 18, 2025

Facts

1. The Niblick Road Corridor is one of three main east west corridors within the City. The corridor serves a mix of residential, educational, commercial, and industrial uses. Niblick Road has a general accident rate that is higher than statewide averages, experiences rush hour delays, and does not efficiently serve all modes of transportation.
2. According to the Federal Highway Administration, “pedestrian and bicyclist fatalities comprise about 19 percent of all traffic fatalities with approximately 6,000 pedestrian deaths and 850 bicyclist deaths. Another 76,000 pedestrians and 47,000 bicyclists are injured in roadway crashes annually.”
3. Nationwide, pedestrian deaths from vehicle collisions have been on the rise for more than a decade. The Governors Highway Safety Association’s 2023 report, Pedestrian Traffic Fatalities by State, indicates there were 7,318 pedestrian deaths in 2023, up from 4,302 in 2010, a 70% increase in 13 years.
4. On May 11, 2018, the City was awarded a \$212,472 Caltrans Sustainable Communities Grant to develop an improvement and implementation plan for Niblick Road. On July 17, 2018, the Council approved [Resolution 18-103](#) accepting the grant and allocating \$50,000 to match grant funds and pay for miscellaneous expenses associated with grant development.
5. With the Caltrans Sustainable Communities grant funding, City staff held seven events to collect public input for envisioning improvements to Niblick Road.
6. Three alternatives were developed based on accident history, speed, and traffic volume, existing corridor physical conditions, and most importantly, public input. On July 9, 2020, the City Council approved [Resolution 20-116](#) identifying their favored option, which would maintain the existing number and width of vehicle travel lanes, while repurposing the westbound bicycle lane and sidewalk on the north side of the road into a 10-foot wide elevated bicycle and pedestrian path.
7. In December 2022, the City applied for a Cycle 6 Active Transportation Program (ATP) Grant. The California Transportation Commission (CTC) awarded the City a \$13.9 million grant. The grant requires the City to contribute \$3.4 million for a project total of \$17.3 million.

8. On December 5, 2024, the City held a public open house to share [preliminary concept plans](#) for the Niblick Road Corridor and gather further input from the community.
9. Pursuant to Section 15071 of the State CEQA (California Environmental Quality Act) Guidelines, Initial Study and Mitigated Negative Declaration (MND) SCH 2024120426 for the Niblick Road Complete and Sustainable Bike and Pedestrian Enhancements Project was prepared by Stantec Consultant Services.
10. Pursuant to Section 15072 of the State CEQA Guidelines, on December 9, 2024, a Notice of Intent to adopt Mitigated Negative Declaration SCH 2024120426 was mailed or emailed to the public, responsible agencies, trustee agencies, transportation planning agencies and public agencies which have transportation facilities within their jurisdictions which could be affected by the project, and the San Luis Obispo County Clerk. On December 12, 2024, the Notice of Intent was printed in the San Luis Obispo New Times, a newspaper of general circulation.
11. Pursuant to Section 15205 of the State CEQA Guidelines, on December 11, 2024, a Notice of Intent to adopt Mitigated Negative Declaration SCH 2024120426 was submitted to the State CEQA Clearinghouse.
12. Pursuant to Sections 15073, 15105, and 15205 of the State CEQA Guidelines, the 30-day public review period for the mitigated negative declaration was between December 12, 2024 and January 10, 2025. During the circulation period, 7 comments were received.
13. On February 11, 2025, the Mitigated Negative Declaration and Preliminary Design Concepts were presented to the Planning Commission. The Commission received 3 comments from the public, and voted to adopt Resolution PC 25-001 to recommend the City Council adopt the MND for the project. The Planning Commission also provided comments and recommendations for desired changes to the Preliminary Design Concepts.
14. On February 11, 2025, the Planning Commission voted to recommend the City Council review additional methods to increase traffic capacity on Niblick Road.
15. Both the Olsen–South Chandler Specific Plan and Beechwood Specific Plan are required to make certain intersection improvements along the Niblick Road corridor to mitigate traffic impacts resulting from the developments. The first of these improvements projects will be starting in Spring 2025.
16. On March 4, 2025, the City Council awarded a contract to GHD Engineering Group for a Citywide Traffic Signal Master Plan. This plan will serve as a strategic guide for operating, managing, and maintaining traffic signals throughout the City to create a more efficient, safe, and responsive traffic management system. Objectives of the plan include better coordination between traffic signals so signals work seamlessly together and reducing vehicle idling/wait times at intersections.
17. Beginning in the 2021-2022 school year, the Paso Robles School District cancelled most general-education bus service within the district, reducing alternative transportation mode options for families with school aged children.
18. The 2023 San Luis Obispo Council of Governments (SLOCOG) Regional Transportation Plan identifies Niblick Road as an Active Route of Regional Significance.

Community Outreach

The City conducted extensive outreach in designing the Niblick Corridor Plan including:

1. November 4, 2019: [“Walk Niblick with Design Experts and Workshop to Develop Solutions”](#)
2. November 4, 2019: [Niblick Road Complete Streets Community Design Workshop at Paso Robles High School](#)
3. November 5, 2019: “Walk Niblick with Design Experts”
4. November 6, 2019: “Try a Protected Bike Lane and Crosswalk” demonstration
5. November 7, 2019: [Preliminary Designs Meeting](#)

6. January, 2020: Hosted on online [Community Survey For Improvements to Niblick Road](#) (913 responses collected)
7. January 16, 2020: Niblick Corridor Advisory Committee Meeting
8. February 6, 2020: [City Council study session](#)
9. December 5, 2024: Open House to share the [Preliminary Design Concepts](#) and Project Approval and Environmental Documents

Options

After consideration of any public testimony, the City Council should consider the following options:

1. Take no action (which could result in loss of grant funding if project benchmarks are not achieved); or
2. Adopt the Mitigated Negative Declaration and Mitigation Monitoring and Reporting Program (SCH 2024120426) for the Niblick Road Complete and Sustainable Bike and Pedestrian Enhancements Project, which would establish the maximum physical extent of the project as analyzed in the mitigated negative declaration; or
3. Option 2, but with additional feedback on the design options and to indicate any features Council desires to see in the final design of the project; or
4. Refer the project back to staff for additional analysis.

Analysis and Conclusions

Project Setting

The project encompasses the 1.7-mile length of Niblick Road between Spring Street and Creston Road. The 4-lane arterial road connects residential, commercial, educational, and recreational uses. The existing road includes a Class II bike lane in each direction (westbound and eastbound). The existing bicycle lanes are incomplete in both directions between the stoplight to the Walmart and Albertson's shopping centers and River Road. There are existing sidewalks on the north and south sides of the road with a 2,640-foot gap on the south side of the road between Rambouillet Road and Creston Road. There is currently no separation between the bike lanes and the high volumes of multi-lane arterial traffic. In addition, there are many conflicts and mixing areas between bicyclists and turning motorists at commercial intersections and driveways along the corridor. Curb ramps are mostly outdated and require reconstruction to meet current ADA standards.

Niblick Road between Spring Street and River Road carries the highest City traffic volumes of all City roads. The most recent traffic counts showed an average daily traffic volume of over 30,000 vehicles per day on the Niblick Bridge and approximately 20,000 vehicles per day east of River Road. The City's Local Roadway Safety Plan, which includes data from 2015 to 2019, identifies Niblick Road as one of the highest incident corridors. According to the Statewide Integrated Traffic Records System, 4 bicycle collisions were reported on Niblick Road between 2020 and 2024 including one each at Spring Street, River Road, Melody Drive, and Creston Road.

Compared to other areas of the City, the Niblick Corridor also carries a high volume of pedestrians and cyclists. There are 6 public schools within ¼-mile walking distance of Niblick Road (Pat Butler Elementary, Paso Robles High School, Liberty High School, Independence High School, Almond Acres Charter Academy, and Winifred Pifer Elementary). There are at least eight multi-family developments within half-mile walking distance of Niblick Road as well as several single-family neighborhoods.

The local transit route is heavily used by the residents of the multifamily housing areas and high school students. There are five bus stops along the corridor. The Regional Transit Authority (RTA) March 2017

Bus Stop Evaluation Report identifies deficiencies in the Paso Robles RTA routes. The Niblick and Nicklaus bus stop lacks an ADA landing pad. Other stops do not have shelters or sufficient lighting.

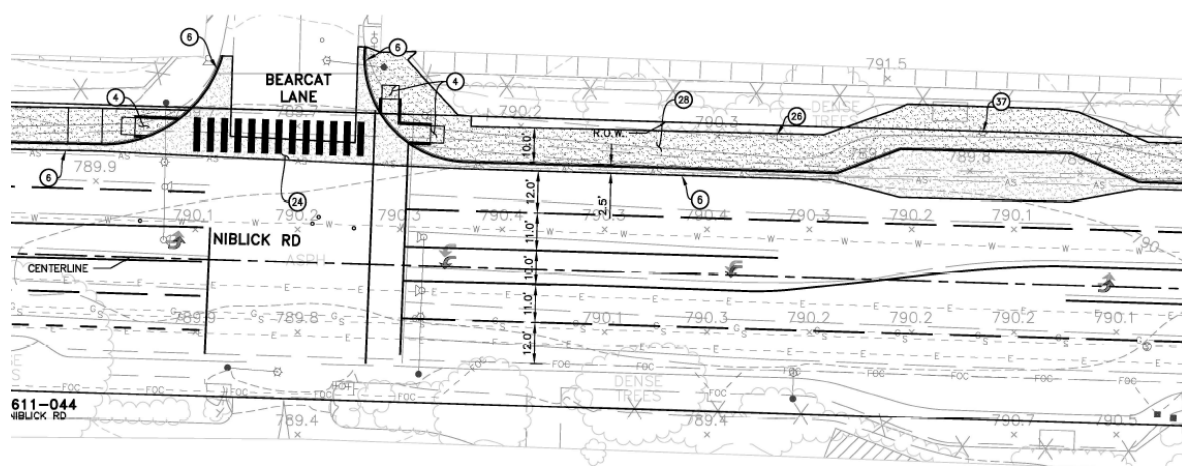
Project Design Objectives

Planning for the project began in 2018. After extensive outreach with the community, three plan options were presented to Council. On July 9, 2020, the Council adopted their favored alternative (maintaining the existing number and width of vehicle travel lanes, while repurposing the westbound bicycle lane and sidewalk on the north side of the road into a 10-foot wide elevated bicycle and pedestrian path). In 2022, the City received a \$13.9 million Cycle 6 Active Transportation Program (ATP) Grant for the project. Use of the grant funds is limited to the project described in the grant application (Council's preferred option) and to the objectives of the ATP program, which include:

- Increasing the proportion of trips accomplished by biking and walking;
- Increasing safety and mobility for non-motorized users; and
- Enhancing public health.

The project would maintain the current number of driving lanes and driving-lane widths and would replace the existing westbound Class II bike lane and north side sidewalk with a raised 10-foot-wide multi-use path between Spring Street and Creston Road, providing a safer route for pedestrians and cyclists without reducing the level of service for vehicles using Niblick Road. As part of improving the corridor for bicyclists and pedestrians, the project includes landscaping, urban design, wayfinding and aesthetic improvements. These improvements are recommended to make the corridor both functional and appealing to encourage more pedestrian and bicyclist use. The project also includes paving the entire width of the road from Spring Street to Creston Road.

Typical Plan for the 10-foot-wide Bike and Pedestrian Pathway



Planning Commission Review

In 2023, the City Council selected Stantec Consultant Services to prepare Project Approval and Environmental Documents (PAED) for the project. Stantec prepared a mitigated negative declaration for

the project, which was circulated between December 12, 2024 and January 10, 2025. The Planning Commission discussed the project at their meeting on February 11, 2025 and adopted Resolution PC 25-01 recommending the Council adopt the mitigated negative declaration for the project.

At the same meeting, the Planning Commission reviewed design concepts prepared by Stantec for the project. The Planning Commission recommended additional review of proposed design elements including city gateway enhancements at Spring Street, fence/separation barrier materials, and decorative wall elements.

The Planning Commission also strongly recommended the City Council explore all options to enhance vehicle traffic capacity on Niblick Road. At its last meeting, the Council took the first step toward a significant effort to increase traffic capacity throughout the City by awarding a contract for preparation of a Traffic Signal Master Plan, which will improve coordination between traffic signals, so they work seamlessly together to reduce vehicle idling/wait times at intersections, one of the largest obstacles to maximizing the efficiency of local roads. In addition, the developers of the Olsen-South Chandler Ranch and Beechwood Specific Plans are conditioned to make the following improvements to Niblick Road:

- Niblick and Creston Road intersection – additional right turn lanes and intersection widening
- Niblick and South River Road intersection - additional right turn lanes and left turn lanes extensions

Urban Design and Aesthetic Improvement Concepts

The project design team are recommending a comprehensive approach to improving landscaping, urban design, wayfinding and aesthetic improvements along the Niblick Corridor. The project includes a series of conceptual design elements that will be refined into the final project design. These improvements are recommended to make the corridor both functional and appealing to encourage more pedestrian and bicyclist use. Increasing pedestrian and bicycle use, especially to the schools would remove vehicular trips from the corridor. The project team is looking for feedback on the following design concepts, so they can be refined. The proposed urban design elements are fundable by the project grant. The following pages display several different design concepts:

Options for Spring Street Gateway (full menu included as Attachment 1)



Option 1



Option 1B



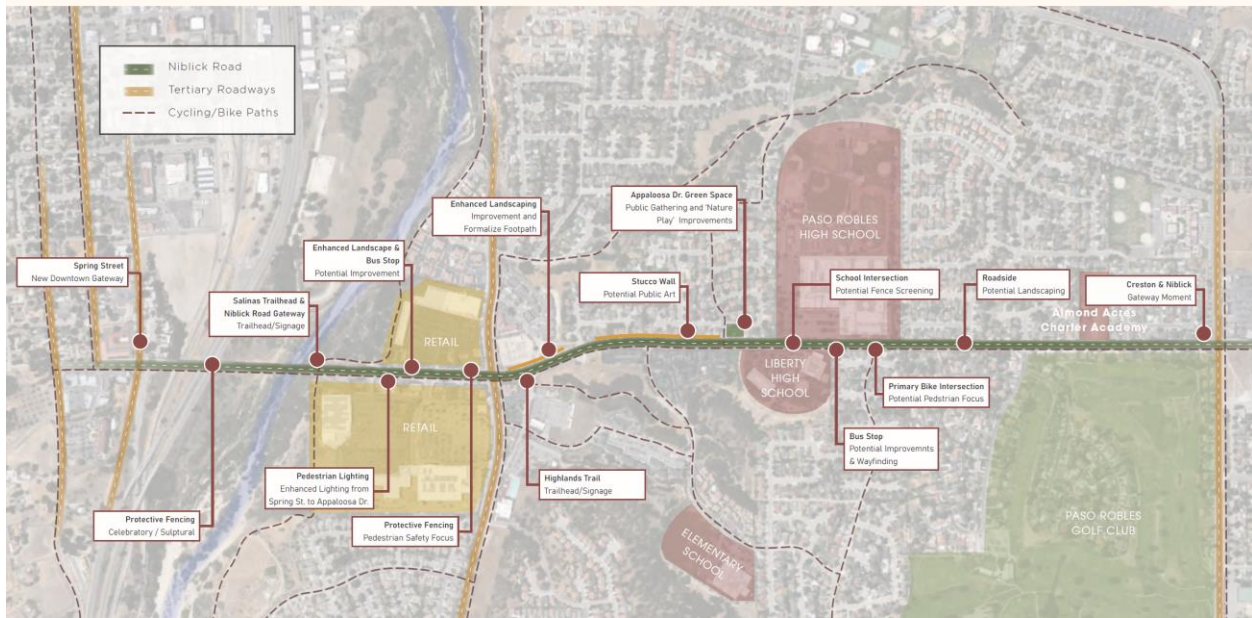
Option 3A

Options for Pedestrian Barrier Design



Additional Design Concepts

Overview Map



Salinas River Walk Trailhead



Quarterhorse Lane Landscaping Trail Improvements



Appaloosa Drive Green Space



Paso Robles High School Corridor



Wall Treatment Options



Project Timeline

The project is expected to follow this timeline:

- City Council approval of the project - April 2025
- Approval for grant to be used for design - June 2025
- Engineered Plans complete - March/April 2027
- Approval for grant to be used for construction - June 2027
- Construction complete - December 2029

Fiscal Impact

The California Transportation Commission (CTC) awarded the City a \$13.9 million Active Transportation Program grant, that requires the City to match \$3.4 million, for a project construction total of \$17.3 million. If the City does not proceed with the project, it will forfeit the grant money awarded. This is a planned project and no further City Council action is necessary.

Budgeting for maintenance of the Niblick Corridor improvements is a key step in the viability of the project. Maintenance costs will be estimated when plans and specifications reach 90% completion, and specific improvements such as plant type and number are finalized. Those costs will be factored into the total project cost when presented to Council for construction contract approval.

CEQA

In compliance with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), an initial study and mitigated negative declaration (SCH 2024120426) were prepared for the project and were circulated between December 12, 2024 and January 10, 2025. The mitigated negative declaration (Exhibit A) identified the project could, without mitigation, have a potential significant impact relating to Air Quality, Biological Resources, Cultural Resources, Geology and Soils, Hazards and Hazardous Materials, Hydrology and Water Quality, Noise, Transportation, Tribal Cultural Resources, and Mandatory Findings of Significance. Through the application of the mitigation measures listed in the Mitigation Monitoring and Reporting Plan (MMRP) (Exhibit B) the environmental impacts would be reduced to a less than significant impact.

There is no substantial evidence that the project will have a significant effect on the environment with the incorporation of mitigation measures.

Recommendation (Option 2)

Approve Resolution 25-XXX, adopting the Mitigated Negative Declaration and Mitigation Monitoring and Reporting Program (SCH 2024120426) for the Niblick Road Complete and Sustainable Bike and Pedestrian Enhancements Project.

Attachments

1. Design Concepts
2. Resolution 25-XXX – MND Niblick Road Complete and Sustainable Bike and Pedestrian Enhancements
 - a. Exhibit A. Initial Study and Mitigated Negative Declaration SCH 2024120426
 - b. Exhibit B. Mitigation Measure Monitoring and Reporting Plan
 - c. Exhibit C. Response to Public Comments