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November 17, 2014

Mayor Robert Ross and Council  
City of San Mateo, City Hall  
330 West 20<sup>th</sup> Avenue  
San Mateo, CA 94403

Honorable Mayor Robert Ross and Members of the San Mateo City Council,

Greenbelt Alliance appreciates the opportunity to share our enthusiastic support for San Mateo's Draft Sustainable Streets Plan. Greenbelt Alliance is the champion of the places that make the Bay Area special. We defend natural and agricultural landscapes from development while helping create great cities and neighborhoods to make the Bay Area an even better place to live. This visionary document is designed around the concept that streets should be safe, accessible and comfortable for all users, while also contributing to a sense of community and addressing environmental issues.

Streets are an integral part of every city and can be designed to address multiple goals. As a region, we are moving towards more compact, walkable neighborhoods that are close to transit, shops, jobs and parks. Designing cities around people has enormous benefits for our community, our health, our economy, and our planet. Each city is rich in roads, the largest part of the public realm, and this resource is often untapped. The City of San Mateo is demonstrating leadership in re-imagining its roadways to be vital places that enhance our collective quality of life.

The conceptual designs for the recommended projects on North San Mateo Drive, South Grant Street and portions of El Camino Real are exciting, visionary and necessary to ensure that San Mateo responds well to opportunities and challenges on the horizon.

### The Community

A community thrives when it plans for the future. While our car culture grew post World War 2, recent demographic shifts point to the need to create streets that are safe for people who choose to walk, ride their bike and take transit. This is a result of an aging population where driving is either no longer an option or desirable, and the preferences of the largest generation in history, the Millennials, who seem to

be [shunning cars](#)<sup>1</sup>. The Draft Sustainable Streets Plan, when implemented, will meet the needs of an evolving city. Streets are for all users, ages 8 to 80 (and beyond), and many of these people do not use a car, so the Plan is inclusive by focusing on people trips in addition to car trips.

Over the course of a year, the City of San Mateo held community workshops and the educational series, Taste and Talk. Well-attended and robust, these gave people an opportunity to understand the numerous benefits of complete, green streets. The Plan's website is [informative](#) and easy to navigate, and the resources can be shared with other cities. San Mateo has done an excellent job of informing the community of the process and Plan and staff should be commended for this.

### Healthy Places

Cities that are designed around people tend to be healthier places. According to [Smart Growth America](#), the U.S. spent [\\$83 billion](#)<sup>2</sup> caring for diabetes patients in 2008 alone. Crosswalks, bike paths and other measures to increase more walking and cycling trips can lower obesity rates and diabetes risk.

The [San Mateo County Health System](#) has made increasing physical activity a cornerstone in their efforts to improve public health. Some of the worst traffic congestion comes in the morning when parents drive their kids to school. Ensuring safer routes to schools and parks can allow more kids to walk or ride their bike, which addresses childhood obesity. In San Mateo County, 25% of all children are overweight or obese. The City of San Mateo has an opportunity to say yes to streets that make the healthy choice- walking and riding a bike- the easy choice.

### Strong Economy

Not only do more walkable streets create healthier communities, they are good for business too. [Realtors use Walk Score](#) to demonstrate the increased value of their properties. Wider sidewalks, street trees and pedestrian-scaled lighting in business districts attract new businesses and increase sales tax revenue, as [various studies](#)<sup>3</sup> continue to report.

And [bicycling means business](#)<sup>4</sup>: bike lanes have been connected to an increase in sales receipts all over the country, including in a Memphis neighborhood where residents took matters into their own hands by painting bike lanes. Six months later, all of the storefronts- half of which had been vacant- were full. And when it comes to a smart, economical investment, bike infrastructure is a far better value than car parking. Implementing the Draft Plan is something the City can afford to do and will reap the rewards in return!

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<sup>1</sup> Emily Badger, *The Chicago Tribune: Why millennials are shunning cars*, Oct. 15, 2014

<sup>2</sup> Blaire Briody, *Kaiser Health News, Diabetes: Hospital Bills Cost U.S. \$83 Billion a Year*, August 19, 2010

<sup>3</sup> Sara Hammerschmidt, Urban Land Institute, *The Economic Value of Pedestrian Infrastructure and Amenities*, June 12, 2014

<sup>4</sup> Tanya Snyder, *Streetsblog USA, Bicycling Means Business: How Cycling Enriches People and Cities*, March 8, 2013

### Caring for our Environment

Living in more compact, walkable neighborhoods is good for the planet; something that Greenbelt Alliance began promoting decades ago. According to city planner [Jeff Speck](#)<sup>5</sup>, “changing all your light bulbs to energy savers saves as much energy in a year as moving to a walkable city does in a week.” He also addresses the environmental health connection in that, “Fourteen Americans die each day from asthma, three times what it was in the 1990s, and it’s almost all coming from car exhaust. American pollution does not come from factories anymore, it comes from tailpipes.” Reducing the need to drive and making walking and cycling more pleasant has a ripple effect across the environment.

At the same time, green streets help filter storm water runoff, thereby protecting creek and bay health. They also add urban green space, provide wildlife habitat and improve air quality. The Draft Plan addresses all of this and more. One would be hard pressed to find a reason as to why this would be bad for San Mateo.

### Conclusion

Green, complete streets serve multiple functions, from managing storm water to providing healthy transportation options to increasing foot traffic and sales tax revenues. The Draft Plan lays out the benefits well. Greenbelt Alliance applauds the City of San Mateo for being a regional leader on this issue. We encourage the City Council’s support of the Draft Plan as it carefully and artfully lays out the vision for safe, green, attractive streets for all.

Sincerely,



Michele Beasley  
Regional Director

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<sup>5</sup> Jeff Speck, TED talk, *The Walkable City*, Sept. 2013, (14:15 and 9:27 respectively)