



JPB Board of Directors
WPLP Committee Meeting of August 25, 2021

Correspondence as of August 25, 2021

Subject

1 PAC SJ on Diridon Real Estate Update



**PRESERVATION ACTION
COUNCIL OF SAN JOSE**
History Park
1650 Senter Road
San Jose, CA 95112
Phone: 408-998-8105
www.preservation.org

August 25, 2021

Peninsula Corridor Joint Powers Board
Work Program-Legislative-Planning Committee
Charles Stone, Chair
Cindy Chavez
Monique Zmuda

VIA EMAIL (publiccomment@caltrain.com)

RE: AGENDA ITEM #11: DIRIDON REAL ESTATE UPDATE

Dear Directors,

As you are no doubt aware, the Peninsula Corridor Joint Powers Board is the owner and primary steward of San Jose's beloved landmark Diridon Station, constructed in 1935 as the crown jewel of the Southern Pacific Railroad's San Francisco-San Jose line. The station's architectural significance and civic prominence are both unparalleled: it remains the largest, grandest, and most intact historic station in the Caltrain network and within the greater San Francisco Bay area. Befitting its historic and cultural stature, the depot and surrounding support structures were listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 1993, designated a San Jose City Landmark in 1994, and are protected by a legally-binding preservation covenant with the South Bay Historical Railroad Society. Each of these designations is intended to ensure that the historic station's character-defining features are protected from demolition or adverse alteration, and that the landmark structure remains an integral part of San Jose's urban fabric for current and future generations.

Despite these intended protections, it is with extreme concern and growing alarm that the Preservation Action Council of San Jose is compelled to raise the issue of the station's fate in the future redevelopment of the surrounding area. Both the Diridon Station Area Plan (DSAP), approved by the City of San Jose in May 2021, and the in-progress Diridon Integrated Station Concept (DISC) planning process have been frustratingly silent on the issue of the station's preservation. To date, no assurances have been made by the Peninsula Corridor Joint Powers Board, the City of San Jose, or any other relevant stakeholders that preservation of the historic depot will be a guiding priority in redevelopment plans affecting the surrounding station area. This is simply unacceptable.

PAC* SJ BOARD

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Ben Leech

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While we recognize that planned track expansions, realignments, and the addition of future transportation services will require significant station additions and expansions, we believe that this modernization can and must include preservation and adaptive reuse of the existing historic station structure, ideally in its current location, but possibly relocated within the immediate station vicinity if necessary. This effort will obviously require careful planning and close coordination with other elements of the DISC and DSAP plans, and must be planned *in tandem with* these other elements—not *after* these other elements are already set in stone.

It is for this reason that PAC* SJ is strongly opposed to proceeding with any conceptual redevelopment plans for the two JPB-owned parcels immediately east of the station, *before and without* a detailed analysis of how this redevelopment would affect preservation/adaptive reuse alternatives for the station itself. As owner and steward of this irreplaceable historic resource, JPB is obligated to pursue all viable options for its preservation. JPB-owned land immediately adjacent to the station is a significant asset that should be considered integral to these efforts, either as a receiver site for potential relocation or as a functional and visual complement to a repurposed station structure. Without knowing if or how the historic station will ultimately be repurposed, or even where in the project area it could or should ultimately be located, we believe it is premature and irresponsible to proceed with redevelopment plans that could potentially foreclose otherwise viable preservation alternatives.

In 1963, New York City made the shortsighted—and now universally regretted—decision to demolish its historic Penn Station, a tragedy that in no small measure inspired the rise of the current historic preservation movement in the United States. Since then, remarkably few cities have dared repeat New York’s mistake, and the preservation and adaptive reuse of historic train stations have become a bedrock strategy for urban redevelopment and place-making efforts in towns and cities across the country. Even the nation’s most celebrated new multi-modal transit centers, including Denver’s ultra-modern and award-winning Union Station, have included the preservation of historic resources as fundamental elements of their design. JPB and San Jose should demand nothing less for Diridon Station, and must be proactive, comprehensive, and publicly-transparent in its planning efforts to do so.

Sincerely,

Ben Leech
Executive Director
Preservation Action Council of San Jose



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cc: Sam Liccardo, Mayor, City of San Jose
Chris Burton, Director of Planning, Building, and Code Enforcement, City of San Jose
Lori Severino, Diridon Program Manager, City of San Jose
Lorie Garcia, Covenant Representative, South Bay Historical Railroad Society