

CHAPTER 5 TRANSPORTATION AND CIRCULATION

Transportation and circulation – the movement of people by all modes, and provision of support facilities, most notably parking – are crucial to quality of life and economic vitality. They are also key components of providing emergency services and facilitating the movement of goods. Circulation is also a mandatory general plan element.

The circulation element describes those services, facilities and capital improvements needed to facilitate vehicle, pedestrian, transit, bicycle, and emergency transportation. It also describes means for promoting and encouraging the use of alternative transportation modes, accommodating growth in travel demand, and preserving safety.

A. Setting

Street and Highway System

Street Hierarchy

Although El Cerrito has a hierarchy of highways and streets, it lacks a central business district with a traditional grid pattern of streets. Instead, the City is developed along San Pablo Avenue, which serves as its spine. El Cerrito's existing streets and their functional classifications are shown in Figure 6.

Freeways and Interchanges

Interstate 80 is the major freeway serving El Cerrito, although Interstate 580 is also located in the area. Historically, Interstate 80 has been heavily congested in the southbound (westbound) direction in the a.m. peak period and the northbound (eastbound) direction in the p.m. peak period. Recent reports indicate that Interstate 80 ranks among the top five most congested freeways in the San Francisco Bay Area. Caltrans has recently completed construction of high occupancy vehicle lanes and will soon be completing the remainder of the ramp improvements on I-80.

Three interchanges provide access from Interstate 80 to El Cerrito:

1. The Central Avenue Interchange is the first El Cerrito Interchange from the south. Although the interchange is located in the City of Richmond, as is the Interstate 580 Interchange with Central Avenue, Central Avenue is the primary travel route to southern El Cerrito, the El Cerrito Plaza and the El Cerrito Plaza BART Station.
2. The Carlson Boulevard Interchanges with Interstate 80 and 580 are also located in the City of Richmond. Although these interchanges provide access to areas of the Richmond Annex, they provide only limited benefit to the City of El Cerrito

because there is no direct connection between Carlson Boulevard and San Pablo Avenue in the vicinity of the interchanges.

3. The Cutting Boulevard/Potrero Avenue Interchange with Interstate 80 is a split interchange with Cutting Boulevard providing the northbound I-80 on- and off-ramps and Potrero Avenue providing the southbound Interstate 80 on- and off-ramps. This split freeway ramp configuration, in combination with the heavy traffic flows to and from local businesses, adjacent residential areas, and the BART Station creates congestion in the Del Norte area.

Traffic conditions on Interstate 80 and at its interchanges have a major influence on El Cerrito surface streets. When an accident or unusual condition causes a breakdown in freeway traffic flow, regional traffic diverts to local arterials: San Pablo Avenue (State Route 123) and the portions of Cutting Boulevard, Potrero Avenue, and Central Avenue west of San Pablo Avenue. San Pablo Avenue is very heavily affected by regional transportation conditions because it parallels Interstate 80 from the City of Emeryville to the City of San Pablo and beyond as far as the Carquinez Bridge, serving as an alternative travel route for regional and semi-regional traffic.



THE
CITY OF
EL CERRITO

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Figure 6 ROADWAY AND TRANSPORTATION CLASSIFICATION



Traffic Operations

Figure 7 identifies existing and projected (under General Plan build-out conditions) daily traffic volumes on area streets and highways. The operation of transportation facilities (freeways, roadways, intersections) is classified in six “level-of-service” categories. Level of service (LOS) is defined in terms of a letter grade ranging from A to F. LOS A is the best level of operation, representing free flow conditions, and LOS F is the worst level of operation, representing excessive delays, long vehicle queues, and generally intolerable conditions. The City of El Cerrito policy calls for achievement of LOS D or better conditions.

Most intersections in El Cerrito currently operate at LOS C or better. All City operated intersections (not along San Pablo Avenue) operate at LOS A. Traffic operation in the Del Norte area, other portions of San Pablo Avenue, and the Central Avenue Interchange can be as bad as LOS E or F conditions when an incident on Interstate 80 results in a higher-than-normal diversion of regional traffic. As of 1999, traffic on Central Avenue can be quite backed up. It is not known, without further study, whether this is a temporary or ongoing problem.



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**Figure 7 TRAFFIC VOLUMES
1998 AND GENERAL PLAN BUILDOUT**

