



STAFF REPORT

Update on Safe Routes to School Improvements along Hiller Street

January 13, 2004

Honorable Mayor and City Council:

Summary

This report outlines the public process that was undertaken for the development of the traffic calming plans along Hiller Street and Masonic Way. The Safe Routes to School traffic calming plans were developed at the same time as the plans for the Pedestrian and Bicycle Bridge. In addition, the report outlines specific measures that have been taken to improve the visibility of the traffic calming devices.

The report recommends City Council instruct staff to continue to work with representatives of the Sterling Downs Neighborhood Association to improve the visibility of the bulb-outs through existing financial resources in the Streets Maintenance Fund.

Background and Discussion

City staff had received a number of concerns over the years regarding the speed of traffic traveling along Hiller Street, the amount of traffic shortcutting through the neighborhood, and concerns about pedestrian safety in the immediate area of Nesbit School.

City Council at their February 9, 1999 meeting authorized City staff to apply for a Safe Routes to School Grant to develop specific plans to improve the safety of school children walking to and from Nesbit Elementary School by reducing vehicle speeds and the number of vehicles using Hiller Street as a shortcut to by-pass the intersection of Ralston and Old County Road.

There were 9 public meetings (Exhibit 1) that were held between January, 2001 and March 28, 2002 to develop specific plans for traffic calming along Masonic Way and Hiller Street to improve pedestrian safety and for the design of a pedestrian and bicycle bridge across US 101.

In addition to the 9 public meetings, the Recreation and Parks Commission, Planning Commission (2 meetings), and the City Council (2 meetings) reviewed the traffic calming plans as well as the plans for the pedestrian and bicycle bridge. The City Council authorized City staff to advertise and award the contract to implement the improvements along Masonic Way and the traffic calming devices along Hiller Street.

There was a significant outreach effort to advise not only the residents in the Sterling Downs area that would be affected by the proposed traffic calming, but also to representatives of all the Homeowner Associations, the Belmont-Redwood Shores School District, and area businesses. All the Neighborhood Design Workshops were advertised in the local newspaper (Exhibit 2). Exhibit 3 provides a sample mailing list for the notices for all of the public meetings and the meetings for City Council and Commissions. The attendance at the meetings was small in spite of sending out approximately 300 notices for each of the meetings. It should be noted that a representative from the Sterling Downs Neighborhood Association was in attendance at most of the public meetings.

It was planned originally for the Masonic and Hiller Street improvements to be implemented at the same time the pedestrian and bicycle bridge as one project. However, the Safe Routes to School project along Masonic Way and Hiller Street were separated out as a result of design and environmental clearances delays for the pedestrian and bicycle bridge and the funding deadline for Safe Routes to School funds.

It is estimated that the total staff time spent on the Safe Routes to School project and the pedestrian and bicycle bridge exceeds 1,000 hours.

Safe Routes to School Project Status

It should be noted that the Safe Routes to School project has not been completed as of the writing of this report. The Masonic street widening to facilitate parking was completed before the first of the year. It is anticipated that the relocation of the STOP signs to Biddulph Way and Hiller Street, and the re-striping of the Hiller should be completed by the January 13th City Council meeting, weather permitting.

City staff has been working to improve the visibility of the bulb outs. City staff has installed raised solar powered lights on the approaches to each of the bulb outs located at the intersections. In addition, staff will be painting each bulb out with reflective painting to better delineate the bulb outs at night.

Neighborhood Traffic Calming Program

The comment was made that the City did not follow the procedures outlined in the Neighborhood Traffic Calming Program. This Safe Routes to School project actually started before the adoption of the Neighborhood Traffic Calming Program. Therefore, the application process outlined in the Neighborhood Traffic Calming Program would not have been applicable. For this project, the City Council elected to proceed with a series of

Neighborhood Design Workshops and several public hearings for additional public comments at the Parks and Recreation, Planning Commission and the City Council.

One of the underlying principles throughout the Neighborhood Traffic Calming Program is to insure that there is public notification, awareness and involvement with the development of any proposed traffic calming program. The process that was undertaken to develop the Safe Routes to School project clearly embraced these principles.

Discussion of Hiller Street Traffic Calming Devices

The standard lane width varies between 10 and 12 feet in width. The traffic lanes in one lane portion of Ralston Avenue between South Road and Alameda are 12 feet in width. The traffic lanes on Notre Dame and several other collector streets within the City have 10-foot lane widths.

The bulb-outs along Hiller Street are designed to provide a twelve (12) foot lane in each direction. The bulb-outs on the side streets provide for 10-foot lanes in each direction. A large SUV or pick-up truck is less than 7 feet in width. There is sufficient room for vehicles to pass safely on all approaches. The South County Fire Authority approved the design of the bulb-outs.

The primary complaints have been that vehicle drivers have to slow down to much to make the turn onto side streets, the congestion the bulb-outs caused by slow turning vehicles, and the visibility of the bulb-outs.

The concerns about vehicle drivers having to slow to make turns onto the side streets and the congestion caused as the result of slow turning vehicles indicate that the bulb-outs have been successful in slowing traffic in the area. This is especially true during the peak am period when children are walking to school. As vehicle drivers become more familiar with the area the frequency of vehicle drivers hitting the curbs when turning corners is reduced.

The observations of City staff indicate that the calming devices have been successful in reducing vehicle speeds. The most dramatic reductions have been during the times that school children are walking to and from school. It is difficult to access the overall success of the program until such time the project is complete and the STOP signs have been relocated.

Fiscal Impact

The Safe Routes to School project has used all of the grant funds available for the project. Any major modifications or removal of bulb-outs would require City Council to appropriate either Measure A or General Funds. Minor improvements to increase visibility can be funded out of the Streets Maintenance funds.

Any significant involvement of City staff time to reopen the traffic calming discussion will require staff to re-schedule existing City Council Priority Calendar items. In addition, the time spent on revising the plan will not have any grant or other fund to charge against and will require additional expenditure of General Funds.

Alternatives:

There are several alternatives that City Council may take in addressing this project. Each approach is described as follows:

1. Leave As-Is When Completed: This alternative will not make any changes to the completed program. There would not be any additional fiscal impacts associated with this alternative.
2. Additional Minor Modifications: This alternative would make minor modifications to improve the visibility of the bulb-outs. Minor modifications can be facilitated using existing maintenance funds, therefore, there will be no additional fiscal impacts associated with this alternative.
3. Major Modifications: This Alternative will have staff work with the area residents to improve the aesthetics and visibility of the bulb-outs by installing irrigation and landscaping. Selective bulb-outs on the side streets may be removed. Any major modifications will require City Council to allocate funds for the improvements.
4. Remove All the Devices: This Alternative will remove all the bulb-outs and restore the street to condition it was prior to the installation of the traffic calming devices. There are no funds available to undertake this alternative and it will require City Council to allocate funds to remove the devices.

Recommendation

It is recommended that City Council instruct staff to continue to work with representatives of the Sterling Downs Neighborhood Association to improve the visibility of the bulb-outs through existing financial resources in the Streets Maintenance Fund and for City staff to report back in June on the effectiveness of the devices on vehicular speeds and collisions on Hiller Street.

Attachments

1. Outline of Public Process
2. Sample Meeting Notification List
3. Sample Notification to Newspapers and Residents

Respectfully submitted,

Raymond E. Davis III, PE, PTOE
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