



Memorandum

TO: TRANSPORTATION AND
ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE

FROM: Councilmember Oliverio
James R. Helmer
Robert L. Davis

**SUBJECT: STATUS REPORT ON
RESIDENTIAL TRAFFIC CALMING
COMMUNITY MEETINGS**

DATE: 11-21-07

Approved

Date

11/21/07

RECOMMENDATION

The Transportation and Environment Committee (T&E) accept this status report on the Traffic Calming community meetings and direct the Traffic Calming policy team to return to the T&E Committee in March 2008 with a comprehensive report regarding input received at the meetings and recommended changes to the policy.

OUTCOME

Acceptance of this report will provide direction to the Traffic Calming policy team to proceed with a review of input received through the recent community meetings, thoroughly analyze potential modifications to the policy, benchmark traffic calming programs in other municipalities, and collect any necessary data in order to develop recommendations regarding San Jose's Traffic Calming policy.

BACKGROUND

The existing traffic calming policy was adopted by the City Council on June 26, 2001. For the past six years, the guidelines contained within the policy have been used primarily by the Department of Transportation (DOT) to respond to neighborhood traffic concerns. However, some of the tools provided for in the existing policy, such as NASCOP (speed photo radar enforcement) are no longer available; several neighborhoods have expressed a desire for exceptions to the traffic calming policy, and there are technologies available today, such as solar-powered speed display signs, that were not readily available when the policy was initially established. In FY01-02, \$5 million in capital funds were allocated to institute a Traffic Calming program. These funds lasted nearly five years, however funding in recent years has been limited, with no additional capital funds allocated to the program in the current and prior fiscal years. Additionally, although San Jose's population

continues to increase annually, the existing staffing level of the Police Department's Traffic Enforcement Unit is one position lower than it's 1986 staffing level.

This past year, the City Council approved exemptions to the Traffic Calming Policy to provide for pilot projects on two neighborhoods streets. Exemptions to the policy were required in order for these projects to occur as traffic conditions in these neighborhoods were not considered "adverse" as defined in the Traffic Calming Policy. Per the policy, an "adverse" traffic condition is one where the speeds, volumes, or number of crashes is 10% or more above the citywide average for comparable streets.

On September 18, 2007, the City Council approved a recommendation by the Rules and Open Government Committee and Mayor Reed to initiate a series of Residential Traffic Calming Community Meetings chaired by Councilmember Oliverio, to begin immediately and end in December 2007. Together, with DOT, the Police and Fire Departments, Councilmember Oliverio was to provide a report to the T&E Committee in December 2007.

The May 2007 City Auditor's report on the Traffic Calming Program included a recommendation that the City Council review the Traffic Calming policy and consider funding larger projects on a priority ranking system basis vs. the current Council policy of funding projects on a first-come, first-served basis. Establishing a priority ranking system would provide for funding of larger projects on a need basis. A similar system is used for prioritizing use of the limited funding available for the installation of traffic signals.

Additionally, the Governor of California recently signed into law Assembly Bill 321 that allows a city or county to establish a prima facie speed limit of 15mph in school zones, on two-lane roads that are currently posted with speed limits of 30mph or less. Current law establishes 25mph as the prima facie speed limit. When determining the need to lower the prima facie speed limit, the bill specifies that a city or county shall take into consideration the provisions of California Vehicle Code Section 627, which covers requirements for conducting Engineering and Traffic Surveys to establish posted speed limits.

ANALYSIS

City-wide Traffic Conditions

San Jose is one of the safest big cities in the nation when considering traffic safety. Over the past 15 years, the injury crash rate has continually declined, and in calendar year 2006 was at 3.3 crashes per 1,000 population. The national average injury crash rate was much higher at 6.3 crashes per 1,000 population. In San Jose, the crash rate is projected to decrease again in calendar 2007 to approximately 3.1 crashes per 1,000 population. The ongoing reduction in the crash rate is substantially due to the combined efforts of both DOT and the Police Department in proactively reviewing and analyzing high crash locations, implementing appropriate engineering measures at these locations to reduce or mitigate crashes, providing focused enforcement and providing a multitude of education programs for children and adults.

The City of San Jose 2005 Community Survey of 1,000 residents indicated that a significant majority (73%) of the community felt that traffic conditions in their neighborhood was acceptable and they felt safe while driving (83%), bicycling (48%) and walking (79%) in San Jose.

Neighborhood Perception

Notwithstanding the above accomplishments, many of the approximate 200 residents that have attended the nine meetings to date indicate that traffic conditions in their neighborhoods are unacceptable and improvement is needed. Preliminarily, the results of surveys submitted by 175 of the meeting attendees show a substantial difference from the above city-wide 2005 community survey. Only 31% of residents felt that traffic conditions in their neighborhood were acceptable, 54% felt safe while driving, 13% felt safe while bicycling and 39% felt safe while walking.

Although the city-wide average speed on 25mph posted residential streets is 26mph, a substantial number of residents at the community meetings indicate that many vehicles are traveling at speeds of 40-50mph and higher. Additionally, while a significant number of meeting attendees requested additional enforcement, more expressed a desire for construction of physical traffic calming devices to control vehicle speeds as the belief was that there would never be enough officers, whereas the devices would be there permanently and functioning on a 24/7 basis.

Community Meetings

The purpose of the traffic calming meetings was to gather input from San Jose residents on the existing policy, to solicit feedback on potential changes to the policy and recommended priorities for the City to consider in continuing to address neighborhood traffic concerns.

In coordination with all Councilmembers, a community meeting was scheduled in each Council District. As of the submittal of this memorandum, nine of the ten meetings have been held. The remaining meeting will have occurred by the December 3rd T&E Committee meeting. Staff support for these meetings has been provided by DOT, the Police Department, and Councilmember Oliverio's office.

These meetings have been beneficial in providing information to the community about the effectiveness of the existing policy and the challenges faced by both DOT and the Police Department in light of multiple budget reductions over the past several years. More importantly, these meetings have provided the Traffic Calming policy team with substantial input and recommendations from the community that need to be thoroughly considered and analyzed. In addition to receiving verbal input, attendees were provided a survey to rate their perception of traffic conditions, their views on potential changes to the Traffic Calming policy, and to prioritize potential methods to improve neighborhood traffic conditions.

The common theme expressed by residents in each council district that attended the meetings is that traffic impacts in neighborhoods and near schools remains a significant concern. The majority of meeting attendees have expressed a desire for more traffic calming devices, more enforcement of traffic and parking regulations (particularly speeding), and an expanded use of technology warning

systems in addressing traffic issues. While most residents focused on the need to improve traffic conditions in their own neighborhood, common suggestions from some meeting attendees included placing a priority on improving drop-off and pick-up conditions at schools, enabling neighborhoods to fund installation of their own traffic calming devices, and improving bicycle and pedestrian facilities.

Potential Policy Modifications

Based upon the input received at the meetings and the completed surveys, following are the primary areas of the existing policy that should be evaluated for potential modification or consideration:

- Whether the existing 10% threshold that defines if a neighborhood is experiencing an “adverse” traffic condition should be changed.
- Whether the policy should consider the cumulative impacts (speed, volume, crashes, proximity to schools, pedestrian activity, etc.) of traffic when determining if an “adverse” traffic condition exists.
- Whether neighborhoods should be allowed to self-fund traffic calming devices.
- Whether an appeals process should be established for neighborhoods to obtain physical traffic calming devices if they do not qualify under the policy.
- Whether the City should implement a photo radar camera program at signalized intersections to reduce the incidence of red light running violations.
- Whether the existing Traffic Calming Policy criteria related to private and public development projects is effective.

Impacts of Modifying the Policy

Each of the above items has significant implications in how the City responds to neighborhood traffic concerns. Substantial review and analysis is needed to determine how the existing policy should be modified. San Jose covers over 178 square miles, has over 16,000 intersections, 2,300 miles of roadway, over 400 neighborhoods and is approaching 1 million residents, thus any changes could result in lengthy implementation cycles and funding challenges.

Addressing neighborhood concerns is not as simple as providing additional funds for traffic calming devices or enforcement officers, lessening the policy to make it easier for neighborhoods to obtain traffic calming devices, or allowing neighborhoods to fund their own devices. The challenge is in striking the right balance of addressing traffic issues, providing safe traffic conditions in neighborhoods and near schools, utilizing the City’s limited resources in the most effective manner, and minimizing unintended consequences to all roadway users (motorists, motorcyclists, bicyclists and pedestrians) and surrounding residential and business communities.

Following are some of the issues that need to be thoroughly considered and analyzed in order to develop sound recommendations regarding any changes to the Traffic Calming Policy:

- If changes occur in determining whether an “adverse” traffic condition exists, what is the anticipated impact in terms of the number (or percentage) of neighborhoods throughout the city that might qualify for physical traffic calming devices?
- Should a neighborhood be required to have a minimum volume, and/or minimum number of speeding vehicles to warrant installation of physical traffic calming devices?
- Should a neighborhood that is subjected to frequent negative traffic impacts due to its proximity to a freeway, business district or other generator of traffic utilize different criteria to qualify for physical traffic calming devices?
- Impacts to emergency service, transit and other service providers, such as garbage collections if there is a substantial increase in traffic calming devices installed throughout the city.
- Financial impacts of policy changes, both in terms of one-time capital costs, staffing costs to implement the revised policy, and ongoing operating and maintenance costs.
- Should a warrant system be established to determine if a neighborhood qualifies for physical devices, and if it qualifies, should the warrant system be used to prioritize traffic calming projects based upon need, given the funding limitations of the City’s existing budget?
- If neighborhoods self-fund traffic calming devices, should there be an associated requirement for a neighborhood to provide for ongoing operating and maintenance costs, or alternately require a sinking fund to provide maintenance as needed?
- If an appeals process is established, should a funding limitation be provided to the appeals body for each appeal, both in terms of staff resources and capital funds required to design and implement a project approved by the appeals body? Additionally what type of guidelines should be provided to the appeals body to ensure that decisions are thoughtful and take into consideration impacts to the surrounding neighborhoods and businesses, emergency service providers, and transit, ongoing operational and maintenance costs of installed devices, and adherence to state and national guidelines?
- Should any changes be made to expand the installation of physical traffic calming devices with development projects.
- Review of traffic calming programs in other municipalities.
- Review of Assembly Bill 321 (school area speed limits) to determine how it should be implemented in San Jose.

PUBLIC OUTREACH/INTEREST

- Criterion 1:** Requires Council action on the use of public funds equal to \$1 million or greater. **(Required: Website Posting)**
- Criterion 2:** Adoption of a new or revised policy that may have implications for public health, safety, quality of life, or financial/economic vitality of the City. **(Required: E-mail and Website Posting)**
- Criterion 3:** Consideration of proposed changes to service delivery, programs, staffing that may have impacts to community services and have been identified by staff, Council or a Community group that requires special outreach. **(Required: E-mail, Website Posting, Community Meetings, Notice in appropriate newspapers)**

While this report does not meet the \$1 million threshold in Criteria 1, this memorandum will be posted on the City's website for the December 3, 2007 T&E Committee agenda. In addition, the series of 10 community meetings were posted on the City's website and publicized in the Mercury News.

COORDINATION

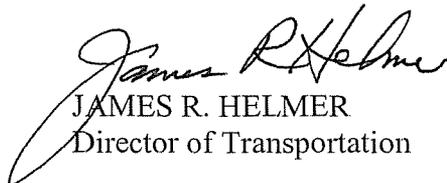
This memorandum has been coordinated with the Fire Department.

COST IMPLICATIONS

The cost implications of various changes to the traffic calming policy will be evaluated as part of the comprehensive review of the policy and included in the status update report that is provided to the T&E Committee in March 2008.



COUNCILMEMBER OLIVERIO



JAMES R. HELMER
Director of Transportation



ROBERT L. DAVIS
Police Chief

For questions please contact Denelle Fedor at 535-4952, Laura Wells at 975-3725, or Lt. Jeff Smith at 277-4525.