



A K-12 independent school

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May 22, 2020

Pasadena Planning Commission
175 N. Garfield Ave.
Pasadena, CA 91101
c/o Jennifer Paige
jpaige@cityofpasadena.net

RE: May 27, 2020 Agenda Item 5.A.2: Proposed St. John Vehicle Capacity Enhancement Project - CIP Inclusion and Consistency with the General Plan

Dear Members of the Pasadena Planning Commission,

As local stakeholders concerned about the health, well-being, and future of Pasadena, we are writing to submit our opposition to the proposed St. John Capacity Enhancement Project that you will formally consider adding to the City's Capital Improvement Project (CIP) list at the May 27, 2020 meeting. This project is immediately proximate to Sequoyah School. The location receives a high amount of foot traffic from our school, as well as the nearby pedestrian draws of Singer Park, the Vons shopping plaza, and The Waverly School. The proposed changes would make the intersections more dangerous for pedestrians.

Increasing the car throughput at the intersections of California Boulevard and St. John Avenue, and California Boulevard and Pasadena Avenue, immediately adjacent to our school and Singer Park is unsafe for pedestrians. In the current arrangement at the corner of California Boulevard and Pasadena Avenue we have had both pedestrians and cars accessing our campus hit by speeding traffic. **This project is in direct conflict with General Plan Policy 18.5 (Land Use-Mobility Compatibility)** by increasing vehicle traffic volume and speeds to levels incompatible with the character of adjacent land uses, the functions of the street(s), and bicycle and pedestrian traffic.

We are concerned that this temporary solution may become permanent. When the sale of the “ditch” immediately north of Sequoyah School’s campus goes through and the future version of the Connecting Pasadena Project is implemented, traffic patterns will change and this area will again be redesigned. We see other, more permanent projects to improve mobility submitted by the City of Pasadena for Measure R funding.

The only circumstances in which we would support the installation of the two turn lanes would require installation of all of the following conditions:

- Installation of two red turn arrows in the traffic light to stop cars from turning when pedestrians are in the crosswalks; especially at dual turn lanes
- Installation of signs which alert drivers to a SCHOOL ZONE - 25 MPH
- Installation of a flashing, lighted crosswalks to alert drivers to the presence of pedestrians in the crosswalks across Pasadena Avenue and St. John Avenue
- And a change of timing to allow for leading pedestrian interval at all crosswalks

These conditions were discussed as pending when the left turn arrow from eastbound California Boulevard onto northbound Pasadena Avenue was installed. Additional pedestrian safety improvements we would like to see include:

- A curb extension on the northwest corner of California Boulevard and Pasadena Avenue (where there is currently roadway striping and not a drive lane) to shorten the crosswalk crossing time. This would also allow for consolidation of the light and electric poles that block the pedestrian right of way
- Improvement of the substandard sidewalk along California Boulevard between St. John and Pasadena Avenues

The proposed project is not consistent with the Guiding Principles of the City’s 2014 adopted General Plan. Specifically, the project fails to meet the standards outlined in following principles (via www.ourpasadena.org):

Pasadena Guiding Principle: Welcome community participation. - *Community participation will be a permanent part of achieving a greater city.*

- Despite clear and significant public safety and health impacts, the proposed project did not include meaningful community engagement or participation before it was submitted for funding with Metro, in contrast to other submitted projects that were already listed on the CIP. Key local stakeholders, including Sequoyah School, were not fully involved in the planning process, only notified after the fact. The project was only publicly discussed as one of dozens of potential projects shared at Pasadena Transportation Commission and later City Council meetings, where the only project details shared consisted of a brief summary of the project. Given the long-term health, safety, and environmental impacts of the proposed project, this level of outreach cannot be deemed sufficient to the City’s community participation standards, let alone the cherished “Pasadena Way”. Engaging the community after a project has been almost fully vetted and planned is not acceptable.

Pasadena Guiding Principle: Make car-free circulation possible. - Pasadena will be a city where people can circulate without cars.

- The intersection of California Blvd and Pasadena Ave already has documented safety issues involving people walking and driving. The proposed addition of dual/double right turn lanes would further degrade the safety of the marked crosswalk to local children, families, and residents who rely on it to access nearby schools and businesses.

Intersections with dual/double lanes have more potential conflict points between people driving vehicles and walking. As a result intersections with these capacity “improvements” have more crashes involving pedestrians. This is of particular concern given the frequency of use of the existing crosswalks by students and families of Sequoyah School. According to the Los Angeles County Department of Public Health, traffic crashes remain the number one cause of premature death for children aged 5-14, and number two cause for children 1-4, young adults 15-24, and adults 25-44.¹ Rather than helping make “car-free circulation” possible, the proposed project will make it even harder and more dangerous for anyone not in a car to navigate this dangerous crossing.

Pasadena Guiding Principle: Balance all areas of sustainability. - Pasadena will be socially, economically, and environmentally sustainable.

On March 5, 2018 the Pasadena City Council unanimously adopted the [Pasadena Climate Action Plan \(CAP\)](#). According to the plan the number one source of greenhouse gas emissions in the City is the transportation sector, primarily vehicle trips. The proposed project is designed to move more vehicles through the intersections of California Boulevard and St. John and Pasadena Avenues. Yet this contradicts the key strategy in the City’s adopted climate plan: create an interconnected transportation system and land use pattern that shifts travel from personal automobile to walking, biking, and public transit by improving pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure (page 34). The plan also specifically calls out the need to continue to “Improve pedestrian and bicycle safety” and “Decrease annual commuter miles traveled by single-occupancy vehicles” (page 37).

Focusing so much one-time funding to encourage more vehicle throughput via a project that was proposed without meaningful public participation is particularly inappropriate in today’s context when traffic is at historic lows. More working professionals and institutions of all types are gaining valuable experience and expertise telecommuting, trends that could be supported and encouraged by the City as we navigate one crisis and need to prepare for the Climate Crisis. In 2020 the City needs to put its decades-long focus on moving more vehicles through intersections faster to moving people and reducing vehicle trips. Investing millions in funding eligible for more sustainable alternatives will only induce additional car trips, resulting in no net benefit to travel times and automobile congestion, the purported justification for this project. This outcome is

¹ *Mortality in Los Angeles County* (accessed 5/2/20 - <http://publichealth.lacounty.gov/dca/data/documents/mortalityrpt12.pdf>)

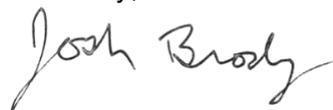
increasingly well-documented and acknowledged in the academic world, including by the California Office of Planning and Research, which advised agencies in 2017 that “each percent increase in lane miles results in a 1.03 percent increase in vehicle travel”².

Guiding Principle: Be a leader in the region. - *Pasadena will be a cultural, scientific, corporate, entertainment, and educational center for the region.*

In contrast to other 710-corridor communities including the City and County of Los Angeles, Pasadena is currently moving forward with over \$250 million in projects that are singularly focused on enhancing vehicle capacity, to the detriment of public health, public safety, greenhouse gas emissions, and the region’s worst-in-nation air quality. This is inherently in conflict with the City’s purported commitment to being a scientific and educational leader in the region. The City’s clean air, public safety, public health, and climate action goals necessitate a swift transition to a more sustainable, multi-modal future with fewer vehicle trips.

Pasadena needs to set a higher standard for public works and mobility projects planned for the next decade. While we face the current crisis head on, we cannot lose sight of the very real, very serious crises looming in the not-so-distant future. **We urge the Planning Commission to direct City staff to renegotiate this project with Metro as neighboring communities like San Marino, Los Angeles, and Los Angeles County have successfully done.** These are Measure R taxpayer dollars that are eligible for projects to “*reduce automobile dependency, encourage multi-modal trips, improve traffic operations, and maximize the use of the latest available technologies to enhance performance of the existing transportation system to minimize impacts of the regional traffic on the communities along the SR-710 corridor*” (2017 Metro Board of Directors Motion redirecting use of 710-N funds).

Sincerely,



Josh Brody
Head of School
Sequoyah School

² (Source: pg. 29 - http://opr.ca.gov/docs/20180416-743_Technical_Advisory_4.16.18.pdf). (Source: pg. 29 - http://opr.ca.gov/docs/20180416-743_Technical_Advisory_4.16.18.pdf).