



Council Agenda Correspondence

DATE: July 19, 2022

TO: Mayor and Council

FROM: Matt Horn, Public Works Director
Justin Wong, Transportation Planner/Engineer I

VIA: Derek Johnson, City Manager

SUBJECT: ITEM 6i – AUTHORIZATION TO ADVERTISE 2022 PEDESTRIAN CROSSING IMPROVEMENTS PROJECT, SPECIFICATION NO. 1000069

The purpose of this correspondence is to respond to general questions and comments received to date in preparation of the July 19, 2022, Council Meeting, Agenda Item 6i, Authorization to Advertise 2022 Pedestrian Crossing Improvements Project, Specification No. 1000069. Staff responses are shown below in *italics*.

Question 1: What kind of traffic studies were conducted for this project?

Staff has considered both current and projected long-term traffic projections when evaluating the potential impacts to traffic operations associated with the proposed four-lane to three-lane road diet on Johnson Avenue between Bishop Street and Laurel Lane. The existing traffic volumes used in this study were taken while all local schools were in session (Cal Poly, Cuesta College, and San Luis Coastal Unified School District) and include growth assumptions to account for the portions of the Orcutt Area development that have been constructed and occupied to date. Currently, this segment of Johnson Avenue carries approximately 14,000 to 16,000 vehicles per day (ADT) and is projected to carry approximately 20,000 vehicles in the long-term (20-year horizon) with full buildout of development anticipated in the City's currently adopted General Plan.

The assessment of traffic operations concluded that a three-lane configuration along this segment of Johnson Avenue is anticipated to provide sufficient capacity to accommodate existing and future traffic demand and maintain acceptable operations per the City's adopted transportation performance measures (auto level of service). Further, the existing and future volumes along this segment are within the thresholds recommended per Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) design guidance, which identifies 18,000 vehicles per day as the ideal level for a three-lane road diet, with 25,000 vehicles per day as the maximum range suggested for consideration. As a point of reference, South Street between Higuera and Broad Streets currently carries approximately 18,000 vehicles and provides sufficient traffic throughput following a previous four-to-three-lane road diet installed more than a decade ago. Table 1 below summarizes the existing and proposed traffic volumes on this segment of Johnson Avenue compared to the thresholds recommended by FHWA for three-lane road diets.

Table 1: Johnson Avenue Traffic Volume Thresholds

Roadway Segment	Average Daily Traffic Volume (ADT)		Volume Threshold for 3-Lane Road Diet ³
	Existing ¹	Projected 2040 ²	
Johnson (Bishop to Laurel)	15,200	19,300	<18,000 (Ideal) 25,000 (Max)
1. Existing traffic data collected in 2018, adjusted to 2020 levels based on annual avg. growth rate. 2. 2040 traffic projections from SLO City Travel Demand Forecast Model and reflect buildout of SLO City General Plan. 3. Source: Federal Highway Administration's <i>Road Diet Informational Guide</i> .			

The project designs start the reduction from two-to-one lane in each direction of Johnson Avenue several hundred feet south of Bishop Street, which retains the existing number of lanes and traffic capacity at the Johnson/Bishop signalized intersection, which is intended to avoid any increases in vehicle queues or congestion through Bishop Street intersection.

Lastly, the road diet currently proposed as part of the Pedestrian Crossing Improvements Project is planned as a pilot project. Johnson Avenue is planned for pavement maintenance and full restriping as part of the 2023 Paving Project. By proceeding with a pilot road diet now, this allows staff to monitor traffic volumes, congestion, collision trends, vehicle speeds, and pedestrian crossing conditions before proceeding with permanent street changes in late 2023. Prior to coming to the Council to request authorization to proceed with the 2023 Paving Project, staff will collect this additional data and solicit input from the community to guide final recommendations for Johnson Avenue. It should be noted that in planning the 2023 Paving Project, staff will consider additional safety improvements along Johnson Avenue outside of the current project limits (Bishop Street north to San Luis Drive); however, the current project does not propose any lane reductions or other changes outside of the limits on Johnson between Bishop and Laurel Lane.

Question 2: Why isn't the City considering a traffic signal or pedestrian hybrid beacon (PHB) for the South/King and/or Johnson/Sydney crossings?

In developing the project plans, staff evaluated various types of pedestrian crossing devices, specifically at the South/King and Johnson/Sydney intersections. This analysis concluded that the currently proposed crossing treatments—Rectangular Rapid Flashing Beacons (RRFBs)—were appropriate installations for these locations. None of the proposed crossing location met the required thresholds or “warrants” that need to be met to legally install a full traffic signal. The South/King intersection did meet warrants for a PHB, but the Johnson/Sydney intersection did not have sufficient pedestrian crossing volume to justify a PHB at this time.

A PHB is not proposed at the South/King intersection as part of this project due to funding and timing constraints. A single PHB installation costs approximately \$400,000 and requires 18 to 24 months to design and construct when considering current lead times with PG&E coordination for electrical service and traffic signal equipment shipment. Current project funding is not adequate to fund a PHB and staff believes that the current plans for RRFB beacons provide more immediate benefits, while not precluding further upgrades in the future.

As recommended by the Active Transportation Committee, staff is pursuing grant funding opportunities to upgrade the RRFB crossing to a PHB system at South/King as soon as possible. Two recent grant applications were submitted to help fund this upgrade—one through the Caltrans Active Transportation Program and a separate application through the SLOCOG Local Betterments Grant program. If successful with either of these funding pursuits, staff would immediately begin the design process to upgrade the South/King crossing to a PHB, although construction would likely be at least 18 months out. Similarly, a PHB may be an appropriate upgrade at the Johnson/Sydney intersection in the future if warrants are met and funding allows.

Question 3: How did you conduct public outreach about the different stages of the Johnson/Sydney designs?

Extensive public outreach was conducted at several stages of the design. For the initial design proposal, a [project specific website](#) was created and postcard mailers were sent to 95 addresses within proximity of the Johnson/Sydney intersection. An email list was created with interested parties who reached out about the project. As a result of this outreach, staff received concerns about the proposed elimination of the left-hand turn lane on Johnson Ave and began to explore an alternative design to preserve the left-hand turn movement while also improving the pedestrian crossing of the street.

This alternative design included a road diet only at the intersection and was presented to the Active Transportation Committee (ATC) on March 17, 2022 for input. This meeting was advertised in four social media posts, the email list, poster boards placed at the crosswalk and in the neighborhood, as well as postcard mailer sent to 95 addresses. At the meeting, the ATC expressed concerns about diverting drivers' attention away from the crosswalk if drivers were required to merge into a single lane too close to the Johnson/Sydney intersection. As a result, the ATC made a recommendation to proceed with a wider corridor road diet on Johnson Avenue from Bishop St to Laurel Lane as soon as possible.

Following input from the ATC, staff studied and developed an alternative design to accommodate a road diet on Johnson Ave between Bishop St and Laurel Lane, which is part of the current request to advertise for construction. For the City Council meeting, staff updated the [project website](#), sent out an email project update to interested community members, and sent postcard mailers to 359 addresses along the entire Johnson Ave corridor between Bishop Street and Laurel Lane. The expanded post card outreach is reflective of the extended project limits whereas the initial design proposal primarily impacted addresses within closer proximity to Johnson/Sydney.

Question 4: When and why did the crossing guard service disappear at the Johnson/Sydney Crossing? Did the City contribute?

The crossing guard program is run by the San Luis Coastal Unified School District and this is not a service provided by the City of San Luis Obispo. Prior to COVID, a crossing guard was staffed at the Johnson/Sydney crossing during school start/end times; however, the School District found it difficult to maintain staffing at this location due to concerns from crossing guards about safety at this location. Staff has received requests from previous crossing guards for additional safety improvements at this school crossing as well as concerns about crossing challenges during periods when the crossing guard was not present, which is another reason why this location was prioritized for enhancements as part of the 2022 Pedestrian Crossing Improvements project. At this time, the School District has not been staffing this location with a crossing guard and has been asking families to use alternate routes walking to school until further safety improvements are installed at this location.

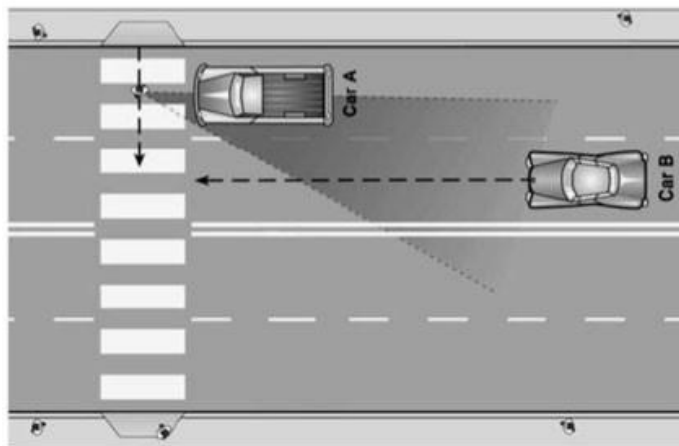
Question 5: How will emergency vehicles pass through the corridor?

While the proposed road diet reduces the number of travel lanes in each direction on Johnson between Bishop Street and Laurel Lane, the project does not reduce the available roadway clear width for emergency response and is not anticipated to increase delays for first responders during emergency events. The proposed project (a) adds a continuous center left-turn lane, which can be utilized by emergency vehicles to bypass other traffic, and (b) allocates additional width for on-street parking and wide buffered bike lanes, which provide space for vehicles to pull over to allow emergency vehicles to pass through unimpeded in the through traffic lanes.

As part of the road diet pilot project, staff will be monitoring changes in traffic patterns, congestion, and emergency response in coordination with the San Luis Obispo Police and Fire Departments to help guide any permanent improvements to be installed as part of the 2023 Paving Project.

Additional considerations from Staff at Johnson Ave / Sydney St:

One of City Staff's primary motivators to pursue a road diet on Johnson Ave between Bishop St and Laurel Ln is the possibility of "multiple threat collisions" at the Johnson/Sydney intersection. A multiple threat collision occurs primarily on multi-lane roadways, when a vehicle stops at a crosswalk, but creates a blind spot for other vehicles traveling in the same direction. As illustrated, if Car B decided not to stop, they would not see the pedestrian in the crosswalk until it is too late.



In addition to all the benefits of implementing a standalone three-lane road diet (reduced speeds, reduced collision severity, lower collision rates, increased bicycle lane separation, improved driveway access), implementing a road diet at this location will nearly eliminate the possibility of a multiple threat collision happening at the Johnson/Sydney crosswalk.