

Memorandum



To: Angela Calvillo, Clerk of the San Francisco Board of Supervisors

Through: Tom Maguire, Director of Sustainable Streets Division
Jamie Parks, Director of Livable Streets
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From: Jeffrey Tumlin, Director of Transportation *Jeffrey Tumlin* Acting DOT for

Date: September 21, 2020

Subject: Slow Streets Phase 3 – Project Sponsor CEQA Appeal Response

INTRODUCTION

The San Francisco Municipal Transportation Agency (SFMTA) submits this memorandum in support of SFMTA Categorical and Statutory Exemption No. 2020-006251ENV for the Slow Streets Phase 3 project (project). It is a response to a letter of appeal to the Board of Supervisors regarding the Planning Department's issuance of a Categorical and Statutory Exemption under the California Environmental Quality Act for the project. The letter addresses topics other than those related to CEQA, which are separately discussed in the Planning Department's appeal response memorandum.

BACKGROUND

On February 25, 2020, the Mayor issued a proclamation Declaring the Existence of a Local Emergency (COVID-19 Local Emergency). On March 16, 2020, San Francisco's Health Officer issued a Public Health Order in response to the COVID-19 Emergency, requiring that residents shelter in place, with the only exception being for essential needs. This significantly affected San Francisco's transit system and required the San Francisco Municipal Transportation Agency (SFMTA) to reduce transit service.

With Muni service reduced, many San Francisco residents resorted to walking, riding a bike, or taking other travel modes to make essential trips. However, they often could not safely and practically maintain the six feet of social distance required by the city's Public Health Order C19-07b on many of the City's sidewalks, park paths, and bikeways, especially when passing queues outside grocery stores and other essential services. Due to these issues, many pedestrians were choosing to walk in the street, which put them at a higher risk of being in a collision with a vehicle in the roadway.

Since the adoption of the March 2020 health order, the SFMTA has developed the Transportation Recovery Plan (TRP). The Slow Streets Phase 3 project is a component of the TRP. The project is

temporary, set to expire 120 days after the City's proclamation of a local emergency is lifted. It intends to allow some roadways to be safely used for foot and bicycle traffic with adequate space for travelers to maintain six feet of separation. This space makes possible essential walk and bike travel while transit service levels are temporarily reduced. Vehicle traffic is allowed on these streets but the overall purpose of the project is to encourage trips for local travel (e.g. access for residents, businesses, and visitors of residents or businesses), mail, delivery services, and emergency vehicle access.

The Slow Street treatment includes placement of materials such as cones, A-frames, plastic traffic diverters and delineators to slow and discourage vehicular through-traffic in order to enable people to safely walk, run, or bike and maintain six feet social distancing in the streets. The installation of a Slow Street does not include any changes to the existing number of travel lanes, bicycle and pedestrian facilities, loading zones, or parking.

Slow Streets does not legally change the designation of the public right-of-way; people walking or running in the street are authorized to be in the street as the California Vehicle Code currently permits, but do not have the right-of-way over motor vehicles. People walking or running would be required to yield to vehicular traffic.

DISCUSSION

Slow Streets are intended to provide additional space for people traveling on streets while social distancing.

San Francisco's response to the pandemic has stressed the importance of social distancing, or maintaining 6 feet of space between individuals, to control the spread of coronavirus. The city's Public Health Order C19-07b required that all San Franciscans maintain at least six feet of separation with others not from their household. Prior to the implementation of Slow Streets, SFMTA staff observed sidewalk crowding, particularly outside essential businesses. Sidewalk width along Slow Streets Phase 3 corridors varies between eight feet and twelve feet. While this distance theoretically allows for a 6-foot distance for two pedestrians, the space is often inadequate when queues are present on the sidewalk in front of businesses, or when more than two people traverse the sidewalk at once. Pedestrians along these congested corridors would often choose to maintain 6 feet of social distancing by walking in the roadway. The Slow Streets project was created to improve safety for these pedestrians by designating certain corridors where pedestrians and cyclists would be safely present in the street. The project would be implemented with temporary traffic control barricades and signs that required no operational traffic changes and no changes in on-street parking, while improving safety for pedestrians and cyclists.

Initial public outreach was limited due to public health restrictions, but the Slow Streets project provided multiple opportunities for community feedback and made adjustments based on that feedback.

The mandatory public health restrictions imposed during the Shelter in Place order eliminated the opportunity for in-person community meetings, but the Slow Streets project created multiple means to collect feedback from residents.

For Slow Streets Phase 1 and Phase 2, three avenues for public input were created:

- Project-specific website created at www.sfmta.com/slowstreets with contact information for SFMTA staff. (April 21 – present)
- Project-specific email address created at slowstreets@sfmta.com (April 22 – present). Over 1,000 emails have been received at this email address to date, most receiving a response within one business day.
- Slow Streets survey posted on website (April 23 – present). This survey has received over 6,000 responses and was the origin of most Slow Streets Phase 3 corridors.

For Slow Streets Phase 3, means of communication and corridor-specific outreach was improved:

- All methods of Slow Streets Phase 1 and Phase 2 outreach were maintained for Phase 3, including the project-specific website, the project-specific email address, and the project-specific questionnaire.
- Weekly email updates sent to stakeholders via project distribution list (15 weekly email updates sent to date).
- Board of Supervisors coordination improved, with regular email updates and virtual meetings, to address concerns and screen suggestions for future Slow Streets corridors.
- Neighborhood meeting attendance began, as Slow Streets staff attended over twenty community meetings to explain the project and gather resident feedback on Slow Streets since May.
- Mailed notices were sent to every address along Slow Streets corridor segments since May 20. Additionally, electronic notifications to community contacts (both residents and businesses) were sent as corridors were prepared for implementation.

Slow Streets Phase 3 corridors were suggested by San Francisco residents, District Supervisor offices, and other city agencies. These corridors were not suggested by SFMTA as part of a broader plan.

The SFMTA is proposing to implement 14 Slow Street Phase 3 corridors.¹ The 14 corridors were not generated by SFMTA staff; instead, the corridors were suggested by community stakeholders.

The table below shows the origin of each corridor proposal:

Corridor	Suggestion Origin	Suggestions in Survey	Parties Consulted
20th Street	May 22 community meeting with D10 stakeholders, Slow Streets Survey	35	D10 office, Potrero Hill Boosters, Dogpatch Neighborhood Association
Arkansas	May 22 community meeting	<5	D10 office, Potrero Hill Boosters, Dogpatch Neighborhood Association
Arlington	D8 office suggestion on May 20	9	D8 office, Glen Park Neighbors
Cabrillo	Slow Streets Survey	92	D10 office
Cayuga	D11 office suggestion on May 7, discussion July 2	12	D11 office, Ocean Avenue Association
Clay	Pacific Heights Residents Association letter dated May 12, Slow Streets Survey	53	D2 office, Pacific Heights Residents Association
Duncan	Slow Streets Survey	29	D8 office
Holly Park Circle	SF Planning suggestion May 19, Slow Streets Survey	14	D9 office
Mariposa	One-block extension of Phase 2 corridor, Slow Streets Survey	10	D10 office, Potrero Hill Boosters, Dogpatch Neighborhood Association
Minnesota	May 22 community meeting	10	D10 office, Potrero Hill Boosters, Dogpatch Neighborhood Association
Noe	Slow Streets Survey, D8 office	30	D8 office
Pacific	Pacific Heights Residents Association letter dated May 12, Slow Streets Survey	28	D2 office, Pacific Heights Residents Association

¹ The Slow Streets Phase 3 Categorical and Statutory Exemption evaluated 19 corridors, the SFMTA Board approved 16 corridors, and the SFMTA is proposing to implement 14 corridors.

Pierce	Replacement corridor for Scott (Approved Phase 1 corridor, but had conflicts with emergency response)	15	D5 office
Tompkins	Replacement corridor for Jarboe (Approved Phase 2 corridor, too narrow for implementation)	<5	D9 office

Once the corridors were proposed to SFMTA, they were screened for Slow Streets criteria by SFMTA staff. The main criterion for Slow Streets is that they connect residential neighborhoods with essential services, including COVID testing and healthcare, essential businesses, the regional transportation network, and parks/open spaces for exercise. Additional SFMTA Slow Streets screening criteria include:

- At least 6-8 blocks long
- Residential land use
- Preferably two lanes of traffic, one in each direction (one-way operations will disqualify a corridor)
- Generally flat (steep slopes or sight distance issues will disqualify a corridor)
- Connections with the bike network or Green Corridors network
- Stop-controlled intersections rather than signalized intersections (multiple signalized intersections will disqualify a corridor)
- No conflicts with Muni, commercial loading zones, or emergency response routes

Once the SFMTA completed screening of corridors based on the criteria described above, those corridors that meet the screening criteria were submitted through the COVID-19 Transportation Advisory Safety Committee (COVID-19 TASC) process for review by relevant city agencies for consent (with written consent required by the San Francisco Fire Department.) Following consent by COVID-19 TASC, corridors were brought to the MTA Board for approval. The MTA Board approved Slow Streets Phase 3 on July 21, 2020.

Prior to implementation of Slow Streets Phase 3, the SFMTA plans to do additional outreach areas along the affected corridors. Additional outreach would include sending electronic notices to residents and businesses near Slow Streets corridors via mailing lists and supervisor district lists. SFMTA staff would also send mailed notices regarding the Slow Streets program and anticipated implementation schedules to all addresses along the corridors.

The project is not a street closure and does not include any changes to the existing number of travel lanes, bicycle and pedestrian facilities, or loading/ parking.

State law authorizes local governments to regulate traffic, including making modifications such as those found in the Slow Streets Phase 3. The Slow Streets project is not a street closure, but comprises temporary changes to reduce through vehicle traffic on certain street segments by placing temporary and movable traffic barriers in order to respond to the COVID emergency and protect public health and safety. The MTA Board approved the changes recommended in Slow Streets Phase 3 on July 21, 2020 on a temporary basis, set to expire 120 days City's proclamation of a local emergency is lifted.

As described above, the Slow Streets project slows and discourages vehicular through-traffic in order to enable people to safely walk, run, or bike and maintain six feet social distancing in the streets. The installation of a Slow Street does not include any changes to the existing number of travel lanes, bicycle and pedestrian facilities, loading zones, or parking. While vehicle traffic on Slow Streets segments is expected to be reduced as a result of the temporary changes, all blocks within the project area remain accessible to the local traffic such as residents [or merchants], including those in vehicles, and to emergency vehicles.

Even if the project did close a public street to travelers, state law authorizes local governments to close public streets to vehicular traffic under certain conditions that exist here. (California Vehicle Code Section 21101).

Quick, responsive action that can be iterated upon is increasingly in demand from the community during this public health crisis.

During the Covid-19 Public Health Emergency, SFMTA has moved quickly to ensure continued transportation safety. The Slow Streets project is an opportunity to respond to emergency transportation challenges, address community needs, and ensure transportation safety and public health during this unprecedented time. This project uses temporary traffic restrictions on corridors to drastically improve opportunities for essential bike and pedestrian travel while minimizing impacts on the vehicle network and ensuring continued vehicular access. The project has proven to be one of SFMTA's most popular projects, and the demand from residents for continued Slow Streets planning and implementation throughout the public health crisis has continued to grow.

Accordingly, we ask that the San Francisco Board of Supervisors uphold the use of a California Environmental Quality Act Categorical and Statutory Exemption to allow for implementation of Slow Streets Phase 3.