


# Memorandum



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

**Through:** Tom Maguire, Director of Sustainable Streets Division  
Mark Dreger, Senior Transportation Planner

**From:** Jeffrey Tumlin, Director of Transportation 

**Date:** January 21, 2020

**Re:** Page Street Bikeway Improvements Pilot – Project Sponsor CEQA Appeal Response

## INTRODUCTION

The San Francisco Municipal Transportation Agency (SFMTA) submits this memorandum in support of SFMTA Resolution No. 191119-142 for the *Page Street Bikeway Improvements Pilot* (the “pilot project”). It is a response to a letter of appeal to the Board of Supervisors regarding the Planning Department’s issuance of a Categorical Exemption under the California Environmental Quality Act for the pilot project. The letter addresses topics other than those related to CEQA, which are separately discussed in the Planning Department’s appeal response memorandum.

## BACKGROUND

The Hayes Valley and Lower Haight neighborhoods are situated near the geographic center of San Francisco where several crosstown high-volume arterial corridors intersect, including the east-west Oak/Fell and north-south Franklin/Gough one-way couplets. Octavia Boulevard replaced the Central Freeway north of Market Street in 2005 and serves to move traffic on and off the remaining portion of the Central Freeway and these one-way crosstown arterial couplets.

People driving towards Octavia Boulevard to access the Central Freeway are increasingly queuing on residential streets and transit-priority corridors, including Page and Haight streets, as opposed to remaining on arterial streets such as Oak, Fell, and Gough streets. The ensuing congestion results in traffic safety, mobility, and quality-of-life issues on these streets – which most impact vulnerable users, including people walking and biking, as well as younger and older populations.

Both the Page Street/Octavia Boulevard and Page Street/Gough Street intersections are located on the City’s Vision Zero *High-Injury Network* – the 13 percent of streets where 75 percent of severe and fatal traffic injuries occur. On Page Street between Octavia Boulevard and Webster Street, there were 16 reported collisions in the five-year period between 2014 and 2019; of these collisions, 11 involved a person bicycling and three involved one or more people on foot (including one child struck while walking to school). Such a large concentration and percentage of overall collisions involving vulnerable users is not typical in San Francisco.

For several years, community members living, working, and traveling on Page and surrounding streets have expressed concerns regarding the growing amount of freeway-bound traffic and the safety and environmental issues that ensue. From 2015 through 2019, the SFMTA engaged the Hayes Valley and Lower Haight communities on these issues, implementing a series of near-term safety improvements while concurrently developing a strategy to evaluate larger circulation changes and bicycle safety improvements for the neighborhood. While community members differ in their opinions of how to address these issues, the consensus is that the status quo on these streets is not working and that something must be tried.

In 2019, staff developed a pilot project consisting of a package of traffic circulation changes and bikeway improvements on and around Page Street to reduce the use of Page Street between Webster and Gough streets as a conduit for commuter traffic accessing the Central Freeway, to improve bicycle safety on a key corridor of the Bicycle Network, and to calm traffic within the John Muir Elementary school zone. The effort was scoped as a pilot so the changes could be implemented using temporary materials and studied to inform possible permanent solutions.

On November 19, 2019, the SFMTA Board of Directors approved the 12-month *Page Street Bikeway Improvements Pilot* to temporarily implement and study the following intersection movement restrictions and other traffic control changes:

- Prohibit eastbound vehicle traffic from entering Page Street at Webster Street
- Prohibit westbound thru vehicle traffic and left-turns on Page Street at Octavia Boulevard
- Convert Page Street between Octavia Boulevard and Laguna Street into a one-way westbound street (away from the Boulevard) with a contra-flow protected bikeway
- Add a westbound bike lane on Page Street from Octavia Boulevard and Webster Street
- Prohibit left-turns from southbound Webster Street onto eastbound Haight Street
- Create a weekday peak hour 'right lane must turn right, except Muni' and prohibit parking on the south side of Haight Street between Buchanan and Webster streets to benefit Muni

Together, these changes eliminate access to Octavia Boulevard and the Central Freeway on Page Street, while still preserving vehicle access for block residents and the public. The expected lower traffic volumes on Page Street and additional bikeway improvements will enhance the safety and comfort for people walking and bicycling, importantly including students of John Muir Elementary School.

## **DISCUSSION**

**The primary purpose of the pilot project is to collect data to evaluate changes in safety, mobility, and design effectiveness.**

Pilot projects provide a better understanding than modeling of neighborhood-scale traffic circulation changes such as those that have been developed for Page Street. Pilots can provide a real-world realization of the complex changes in the routes, times of day, and modes of travel that people would make in response to proposed changes, where models would rely on evidence-based assumptions. Further, pilots allow for the public to experience changes, aiding in public outreach, where models can only describe potential results of changes. The primary purpose of this 12-month pilot project is to collect data to evaluate the effects of the proposed changes to inform the best course of action going forward.

The project team accordingly secured a California Environmental Quality Act Class 6 Categorical Exemption intended for data collection, research, and evaluation activities with the pilot project. All changes will be implemented temporarily using roadway paint, signs, and flexible plastic posts – able to be easily modified or removed during and after the pilot period.

A comprehensive evaluation plan is planned, as informed by outreach preceding legislation. Over a dozen individual metrics are included in the evaluation. Further, the pilot project is intended to serve as an extended phase of public outreach, with a public perception survey, continued engagement with neighborhood groups, and a dedicated project email address to facilitate on-going feedback. The evaluation plan is summarized as follows:

**1. Vehicle and bicycle volumes on Page Street**

- To measure the project’s primary goal of reducing vehicle volumes on Page Street east of Webster Street, and the extent to which the street becomes more attractive for bicycling

**2. Vehicle queuing on Oak and Haight streets**

- To measure possible changes to vehicle queuing lengths and incidents of ‘blocking the box’ on Oak and Haight streets approaching Octavia Boulevard

**3. Neighborhood traffic circulation**

- To study changes in traffic patterns throughout the larger neighborhood street grid (i.e., how traffic is dispersed onto other streets)

**4. Transit travel times on Haight Street**

- To measure possible changes in transit travel times

**5. Violations of Muni-only lane on Haight Street**

- To measure possible changes in private vehicle violations of the eastbound Muni-only lane on Haight Street

**6. Compliance with traffic modifications and turn restrictions**

- To measure the effectiveness of the proposed pilot traffic restrictions

**7. Safety on Page and Haight streets**

- To study various metrics of safety, which may include ‘close calls’ between people driving and bicycling, passing events, and collisions

## 8. Public perceptions

- To study the public's perceptions of the modified traffic patterns

'Baseline' data has already been collected and two evaluation periods are proposed. Once data is available and assessed from the first evaluation period, SFMTA staff will return to the SFMTA Board of Directors halfway through the pilot project (expected in summer 2020) to review performance of the pilot project and consider potential 'course corrections' as needed.

- **1st evaluation – spring 2020**
  - *Staff to brief SFMTA Board 4-6 months into pilot*
- **2nd evaluation – fall 2020**

The project team will return to the SFMTA Board of Directors with a final report of findings by in early 2021 along with a recommendation of whether to continue, modify, or remove the pilot project's traffic restrictions, bikeway improvements, and parking changes.

### **The pilot project is not preempted by Federal or State law.**

In her appeal the appellant states, without citation or support, that "the Project is preempted under the California and United States Constitutions, which prohibit closing public streets to travelers, including those in motor vehicles." In her January 17 letter, that statement is narrowed to the argument that, because the pilot closes vehicle access to a public street, it is preempted by State law. This is incorrect for two reasons.

First, state law authorizes local governments to implement the types of traffic modifications found in the pilot program and adopted by the SFMTA Board of Directors – namely, turn restrictions, one-way street designations, parking restrictions, and other traffic controls. Even if the pilot program did close a public street to travelers, state law authorizes local governments to close public streets to vehicular traffic under certain conditions (California Vehicle Code section 21101).

Second, the pilot program is not a street closure. The temporary changes are intended to *reduce* the amount of vehicle traffic on Page Street by implementing turn restrictions from certain streets. State law provides that the City may adopt regulations to prohibit entry to, or exit from, or both, any street by means of islands, curbs, traffic barriers, or other roadway design features to implement the circulation element of a city's general plan (California Vehicle Codes section 21101(f)). Consistent with this, the Planning Department determined that prohibiting entry onto Page Street at certain locations by vehicles and other changes are designed to implement Objectives 15 and 18 of the General Plan's Transportation Element.



While vehicle traffic on Page Street between Webster Street and Octavia Boulevard is expected to be significantly reduced as a result of the temporary changes, all blocks within the project area will remain accessible to the public, including those in vehicles.

**Quick, responsive action that can be iterated upon is increasingly in demand from the community and elected officials.**

In the shadow of continued traffic injuries and deaths alongside the City's commitment to Vision Zero, worsening congestion, and a climate emergency that owes much to how we move about, San Franciscans are increasingly demanding that we move faster to solve challenging problems with creative and iterative ideas. This pilot project is an example of good planning – an opportunity to test an approach to tackle traffic safety challenges affecting a community that has been disproportionately affected by these issues.

This pilot project will allow SFMTA to test changes to traffic circulation and bikeway improvements that have been developed with the community for several years. The package of improvements approved by the SFMTA Board of Directors last November represents staff's best recommendation for addressing what community members have expressed to be an intolerable status quo. After years of planning, much is expected to be learned from the pilot project's evaluation and expanded outreach phase.

Accordingly, we ask that the San Francisco Board of Supervisors uphold the use of a California Environmental Quality Act Categorical Exemption to allow for data collection and evaluation of the changes approved by the SFMTA Board of Directors as part of the *Page Street Bikeway Improvements Pilot*.