

Memorandum



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

Through: Ricardo Olea, City Traffic Engineer ^{RO}
Carli Paine, Acting Chief of Staff ^{CP}
Jamie Parks, COVID-19 Emergency Temporary Street Changes Program Manager ^{JP}
Ian Trout, COVID-19 Emergency Temporary Street Changes Engineer ^{IT}

From: Jeffrey Tumlin, Director of Transportation ^{JT} Acting DOT for

Date: September 21, 2020

Subject: SFMTA Department Operations Center COVID-19 Emergency Temporary Street Changes Program – Project Sponsor CEQA Appeal Response

INTRODUCTION

The San Francisco Municipal Transportation Agency (SFMTA) submits this memorandum in support of SFMTA Statutory Exemption No. 2020-006458ENV for the SFMTA Department Operations Center (DOC) COVID-19 Emergency Temporary Street Changes Program (project). It is a response to a letter of appeal to the Board of Supervisors regarding the Planning Department's issuance of a Statutory Exemption under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) 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

San Francisco has been working diligently to prevent COVID-19 contagion, and to implement containment efforts for any San Franciscans who test positive for the new virus. San Francisco declared a Local Emergency on February 25, 2020 to accelerate citywide efforts to plan for, prevent, and mitigate community spread of COVID-19. In parallel with the emergency declaration, the City and various city departments activated response centers using the Incident Command Structure (ICS), a nationwide standardized approach to the command, control, and coordination needed to manage an incident, providing a common hierarchy within which personnel from multiple response and implementation agencies can be effective. The Department of Public Health activated its Departmental Operations Center (DOC) on January 21, 2020 marshalling internal resources and leadership to focus on the clinical, epidemiological and community response. On January 27, 2020, the City opened its Emergency Operations Center (EOC), restructured and renamed as the COVID-19 Command Center (CCC) in early July 2020, to centralize the citywide response.¹ On March 13, 2020, the SFMTA activated its DOC.

Throughout San Francisco's response to COVID-19, the citywide and departmental operations centers have continued to revise their goals and objectives to collaboratively and effectively respond to the evolving needs during the public health emergency. In early March, the CCC had five goals for responding to COVID-19. Two of these goals are directly relevant to SFMTA's work and have continued to be the SFMTA's primary goals during the emergency activation:

¹ <https://sfmayor.org/article/city-san-francisco-takes-action-following-emergency-declaration-prepare-novel-coronavirus>

- Prepare for and protect the health and safety of the public and vulnerable populations from COVID-19
- Limit severe illness and death from COVID-19

Since its activation, the SFMTA DOC has received requests from the CCC for various parking and traffic changes necessary to support these goals (e.g., temporary street closures for COVID-19 testing sites, loading zones for food banks, etc.). The SFMTA has generally implemented these changes within a very short turnaround time (typically 2 to 7 days) given their emergency nature. On July 17, 2020 the Director of Transportation signed the order to formalize the COVID-19 Temporary Parking and Traffic Changes Program to continue to nimbly respond to a dynamic situation and help prevent the spread of COVID-19. (See Attachment A).

The program itself is temporary, set to expire 120 days after the City's proclamation of a local emergency is lifted. Many of the street and traffic modifications under this program have already been reverted back to pre-COVID-19 status since they were needed for only several days or a month.

All other routine and permanent parking and traffic changes not part of this program and not related to the COVID-19 response are still required to go through the standard SFMTA review and legislative process, including TASC, a public hearing, and SFMTA Board, as applicable.

DISCUSSION

The Temporary Parking and Traffic Changes Program quickly implements street changes that directly prevent and/or mitigate the COVID-19 emergency

On March 16, 2020, San Francisco's Health Officer issued a Public Health Order in response to the COVID-19 Emergency requiring that resident's shelter in place, with the only exception being for essential needs. San Francisco's response to the pandemic has stressed the importance of physical distancing, or maintaining six feet of space between individuals, to control the spread of coronavirus.

SFMTA created this program to enable the agency to quickly provide temporary parking, loading, and traffic changes that businesses, organizations, other city departments' DOCs, and the CCC require in their efforts to effectively control COVID-19 viral spread and address other direct effects of the pandemic on San Franciscans. Changes implemented under this program (1) further the primary objective of additional physical distancing and (2) are for the essential purposes listed below:

- to congregate or queue for essential services such as free meals, COVID-19 testing, and social services
- for emergency vehicle parking such as for paramedics or members of the Sheriff's office
- to provide security surrounding testing sites and/or critical COVID-19 response buildings
- to designate adequate space for grocery store queuing
- to designate adequate curbside pickup and drop-off spaces for organizations such as the Marin-SF Food Bank, Meals On Wheels, or restaurants

These efforts directly reduce the transmission of the COVID-19 virus or increase the city's capability to properly fight the COVID-19 virus through supporting testing, hotel sites, and emergency field-hospitals. As such, this program is different from the SFMTA's Slow Streets², Temporary Emergency Transit Lane (TETL)³, the Shared Spaces programs⁴, and the Panhandle Social Distancing and Safety Project⁵, all of which received their own environmental determinations.

Recent examples of emergency street changes SFMTA has implemented include:

- Temporary street closure of Jessie Street between 4th and Mission Streets to support a daily COVID-19 testing site from 7AM to 7PM
- Temporary one-day parking removal for food bank distribution at the following locations:
 - o Bay Street, between Stockton Street and Powell Street
 - o Mason Street, between Pacific Avenue and Broadway Avenue
 - o Pacific Avenue between Powell Street and Mason Street
- Temporary removal of a parking lane and a travel lane on Jones Street, from O'Farrell Street to Golden Gate Avenue to create a "physical distance lane" to provide more pedestrian space in the Tenderloin while maintaining physical distance, given frequent queuing and congregation on the sidewalk.

Street closures for COVID-19 testing help expand the city's testing capacity, which in turn helps reduce the rate of transmission of the COVID-19 virus by providing critical information about COVID-19 status to people. Street changes to support essential services like food banks help provide food for those with financial burdens during the COVID-19 pandemic while maintaining physical distance. The physical distance lanes in the Tenderloin respond directly to the Tenderloin Neighborhood Plan for COVID-19,⁶ a neighborhood assessment conducted by the CCC, which sought strategies to mitigate and reduce the risk of COVID-19 transmission from the lens of transportation, housing, and other factors.

The changes implemented under this program are authorized by the San Francisco Transportation Code

The City Traffic Engineer has independent authority to approve certain traffic modifications under Section 201 of the San Francisco Transportation Code. Section 201(a)(5) of the Transportation Code allows the City Traffic Engineer to "Install or remove any temporary Traffic Control Devices on any Street for the purpose of controlling Parking or traffic during emergencies, special conditions or events, construction work, short-term testing, or when necessary for the protection of public health and safety. Such temporary Traffic Control Devices shall be removed when they are no longer required following the emergency, condition, or event."

² <https://www.sfmta.com/projects/slow-streets-program>

³ <https://www.sfmta.com/projects/temporary-emergency-transit-lanes>

⁴ <https://www.sfmta.com/projects/shared-spaces>

⁵ <https://www.sfmta.com/projects/panhandle-social-distancing-and-safety-project>

⁶ https://sf.gov/sites/default/files/2020-05/Tenderloin_Neighborhood_Plan_May_6_2020.pdf

Given the number of emergency requests to SFMTA from the City's Emergency Operations Center, the urgency of the requests requiring short turnaround times, and the limited availability of staff during this crisis, the City Traffic Engineer temporarily delegated authority under this provision to the SFMTA Department Operations Center (DOC) for actions that are responsive to the COVID-19 Local Emergency. (See Attachment A). The Traffic Engineer delegated this authority in order to streamline decision-making under the SFMTA Incident Command.

Given the emergency nature and the immediate response needed by SFMTA, these changes are handled through the SFMTA DOC. Other routine permanent parking and traffic changes not related to the COVID-19 response are handled outside this process through the procedures in the Transportation Code or under separate programs.

Under pre-COVID-19 conditions, most parking and traffic modifications go through staff-level review by the Transportation Advisory Staff Committee (TASC). This is an interagency staff committee that meets twice a month and is composed of SFMTA, Planning, Public Works, SFFD, and SFPD staff. Parking and traffic modifications consented to by TASC would then proceed to a public hearing by the City Traffic Engineer and/or to the SFMTA Board, both of which are public meetings, as required by the Transportation Code. The Transportation Code, however, specifically allows for a quicker process without public hearing in the event of an emergency, among other circumstances. (Transp. Code Section 201(a)(5).) Given the COVID-19 Emergency and the time that it would require to bring the emergency temporary parking and traffic modifications that make up this program to a public hearing and/or SFMTA Board for approval, the SFMTA determined that establishing this expedited process would best allow the SFMTA to respond to the changing response needs of the COVID-19 pandemic in a timely and ethical manner.

Recognizing the importance of an immediate response during COVID-19, the SFMTA DOC created the COVID-TASC process to expedite interagency review of emergency street changes. Rather than a regularly recurring meeting, COVID-TASC works through an email distribution list to notify TASC members (which include the CCC/DOC/Department of Emergency Management [DEM]) about each of these individual street or parking change request. The notice is sent by email by the SFMTA DOC Sustainable Streets Division engineer working on that particular request and provides a 48-hour review and comment period for consent before the SFMTA may proceed with the implementation of the traffic or parking modification. This process allows the SFMTA to immediately respond to requests from the CCC, as most of these emergency changes are expected to be implemented within two to seven days of the initial request to serve its intended purpose. Sometimes these changes are so temporary that they last only one day.

After implementation of a parking and traffic modification, any member of the public may submit comments or questions to 311 and it will get routed to the SFMTA DOC Sustainable Street engineers that worked on that particular case.

Other routine and permanent parking and traffic changes not part of this program and not related to the COVID-19 response are still required to go through the standard SFMTA review and legislative process, including TASC, a public hearing, and SFMTA Board, as applicable.



Emergency vehicle access is maintained or accommodated with all of these parking and traffic modifications

The appellant expressed concern that emergency vehicle access was not being maintained with these parking and traffic modifications. As discussed earlier, all of these parking and traffic modifications are reviewed by COVID-TASC. The process of COVID-TASC ensures that SFFD and SFPD have reviewed the proposed traffic modifications before the changes are made in the field to ensure adequate emergency access. The projects that are part of this program require explicit consent by SFFD before the SFMTA will implement them.

Quick and responsive action is critical during this public health crisis.

During the COVID-19 Public Health Emergency, the SFMTA has moved quickly to ensure continued support of the City's goals of protecting the health and safety of the public and vulnerable populations from COVID-19, and limiting severe illness and death from COVID-19. 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 the continued implementation of the SFMTA Department Operations Center COVID-19 Emergency Temporary Street Changes Program.

Memorandum

COVID Temporary Parking & Traffic Changes Program



SFMTA

TO: Note to File

CC: Susan Cleveland-Knowles, CAO
JT:TM:CP:GL:JK:RO:ARE:IRT:mh

THRU: George Louie^{GL}, Department Operations Center Commander

FROM: Jeff Tumlin^{Jeff Tumlin}, Director of Transportation

DATE: July 17, 2020

SUBJECT: Creation of a Temporary Program under the SFMTA Department Operations Center for the approval of Temporary Parking and Traffic Changes to Address the COVID-19 Local Emergency

This Order creates a temporary program for the implementation of temporary parking and traffic changes under the Proclamation of the Mayor Declaring the Existence of a Local Emergency dated February 25, 2020 (COVID-19 Local Emergency Declaration). This program is independent of and separate from the Temporary Emergency Transit Lanes program, Slow Streets program, the Shared Spaces program, and emergency bike lanes.

As a result of the coronavirus (COVID-19) public health emergency, the San Francisco Municipal Transportation Agency (SFMTA) creates a program within the Department Operations Center (DOC) to make temporary parking and traffic changes as requested by businesses, organizations, other city departments' DOC's, and the city's COVID Command Center (CCC), including recommendations from CCC Neighborhood Assessments. Such temporary parking and traffic changes include turn restrictions, parking/loading changes, lane closures, and part-time or full-time street closures for up to 90 days, for the reasons listed in this memorandum. Lane closures and part-time or full-time street closures will be subject to review by the COVID Transportation Advisory Staff Committee (COVID-TASC) or TASC, both of which include representatives from the San Francisco Fire Department.

These changes are needed in order to designate adequate physical space for the following purposes:

- to congregate or queue for essential services such as free meals, COVID testing, and social services
- for emergency vehicle parking such as for paramedics or members of the Sheriff's office
- to provide security surrounding testing sites and/or critical COVID-19 response buildings

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COVID Temporary Parking & Traffic Changes Program



- to designate adequate space for grocery store queuing
- to designate curbside pickup/drop-off spaces for organizations such as the Marin-SF Food Bank, Meals on Wheels

To implement these temporary parking and traffic changes, temporary materials such as temporary striping, signage, and barricades will often need to be placed to indicate that the area has been modified. All these materials will be consistent with SFMTA's existing traffic engineering standards and practices and installed following proper procedures.


The proposed changes are temporary in nature and will expire, at the latest, 120 days after the retraction of the city's proclamation of the COVID-19 local emergency (dated 2.25.2020).

Attachment: Delegation of temporary authority to the SFMTA DOC under COVID-19 Local Emergency Declaration



MEMORANDUM

TO: Tom Maguire
Director of Sustainable Streets

FROM: Ricardo Olea 
City Traffic Engineer

DATE: July 10, 2020

SUBJECT: Delegation of temporary authority to the SFMTA Department Operations Center (DOC) under COVID-19 Local Emergency Declaration to Approve Traffic Control Devices to Address the COVID-19 Local Emergency.

This memo is to memorialize delegation of authority over the implementation of temporary parking and traffic changes under the Proclamation of the Mayor Declaring the Existence of a Local Emergency dated February 25, 2020 (COVID-19 Local Emergency Declaration). The COVID-19 Local Emergency necessitated parking and traffic changes beginning March 23 and I orally authorized this delegation beginning on that date. This delegation is authorized until such time as I rescind it or the COVID-19 Local Emergency Declaration expires or is terminated.

Transportation Code Section 201(a)(5) allows the City Traffic Engineer to install or remove traffic control devices “for the purpose of controlling Parking or traffic during emergencies, special conditions or events, construction work, short-term testing, or when necessary for the protection for public health and safety.” The COVID-19 Local Emergency qualifies as such an emergency that necessitates parking or traffic changes to accommodate various types of needs related to the emergency. Specifically, turn restrictions, parking/loading removal, curbside pickup, and part time or full-time street closures are part of these aforementioned traffic control devices.

In order to streamline decision making under the SFMTA Incident Command System active since March 13 I have delegated the authority to implement such traffic control devices and issue work orders that are responsive to the COVID-19 Local Emergency to the SFMTA Department Operations Center DOC. Sustainable Streets engineers like Ian Trout, Alan Uy , and others have been and will continue coordinating internally and externally for all COVID-19 emergency temporary work orders. The DOC has been and will continue tracking the temporary work that has been done under disaster response and will over the course of the disaster determine which need to be modified, continued, or terminated. Any DOC parking and traffic changes implemented that need to remain following the COVID-19 Local Emergency Declaration will require permanent legislation or authorization by the City Traffic Engineer as required under Transportation Code Section 200.

Section 201(a)(5) changes that are not related to COVID-19 will be reviewed and approved by me as usual.