



Information Item

Date: February 28, 2011

To: Mayor and City Council
From: Eileen Fogarty, Director of Planning and Community Development
Subject: Ocean Park Boulevard Reconfiguration.

Introduction

Ocean Park Boulevard was reconfigured on a trial basis in 2008 in an effort to improve safety, especially pedestrian safety, between 16th and 18th Streets. The trial reconfiguration significantly reduced accident rates (including the incidence of the most serious types of accidents), reduced the incidence of speeding, and also improved school crossing conditions. While some community concerns still exist, the data demonstrates that the reconfiguration achieved the goal of improving safety, especially pedestrian safety, between 16th and 18th Streets. The reconfiguration was incorporated into the paving improvement completed in 2010 and there are no plans to return to the previous configuration. This item summarizes performance data before and after the reconfiguration as well as public opinion on the trial.

Background

The primary reason for changing the street's configuration was to improve safety and pedestrian crossing conditions along Ocean Park Boulevard from 16th through 18th Streets. Residents, parents, and merchants sought improvements in this area because of its critical location near schools and because it is a neighborhood commercial district. In the past the City had addressed these concerns as follows:

- assigned crossing guards and installed marked crosswalks
- installed, repaired, and replaced several generations of flashing crosswalk technologies
- added school zone signs including real-time speed feedback signs

Although several other measures, including installing additional traffic signals on Ocean Park Boulevard, were considered in 2007, staff recommended a trial of a “road diet”. This configuration had been shown, when implemented on similar arterials, to improve safety and crossing conditions without causing significant reassignment of traffic or delays.

The recommended configuration would eliminate one travel lane in each direction, add left turn pockets, provide a continuous marked bicycle lane on both sides, and add on-street parking in some locations. A community meeting was held at Virginia Avenue Park to discuss the proposal prior to trial implementation. A consulting traffic engineer provided information on the results of similar changes implemented in other locations. Staff sought and received input from businesses and residents at the meeting and in writing. Although some were concerned that the proposed change would lead to slower travel times on Ocean Park Boulevard, and, possibly, more traffic on adjacent neighborhood streets, most agreed that safety, especially pedestrian safety, was the most important consideration. The trial configuration, implemented during winter 2008, extended from a transition west of Lincoln Boulevard to a transition east of Cloverfield Boulevard.

Accident data was compiled for nine months before the change and compared to accident data for the same time period following the change. Staff also collected Big Blue Bus running times on Ocean Park Boulevard from Lincoln Boulevard to Centinela Avenue, to assess the impact on travel time. Residents’ comments and survey responses, as well as comments from City staff including the Police Department’s Traffic Services unit, were also collected. This information was presented to residents in a community meeting in November, 2008. Following the meeting, staff continued to

make modifications to timing and lane assignments. “After” data for local residential streets was also collected to assess possible spillover traffic. It did not present conclusive evidence of rerouting into the neighborhood to avoid Ocean Park Boulevard.

Discussion

This area of the Sunset Park neighborhood is adjacent to an active neighborhood business district, many schools including John Adams Middle School (JAMS), Santa Monica College (SMC), and several public and private elementary schools and preschools. There are marked crosswalks with in-pavement flashers at 16th and 18th Streets, and at 17th Street there is a traffic signal. Crossing guards are deployed during JAMS student arrival and dismissal hours at both 16th and 17th Streets. Ocean Park Boulevard itself is posted as a School Area speed zone, with a 25 mile per hour speed limit when children are present. It carries approximately 23,000 vehicles per day.

Accident History

Accident data reported by the Police Department indicates that there was a 65% reduction in the total number of accidents, from 35 to 12, on Ocean Park Boulevard in the first nine months following the reconfiguration, as compared to the same period in the year prior to the change. The second year accident rate was consistent with the first, based on accident data reported to the State. Injury accidents were reduced by 60% following the reconfiguration, from 15 to 6 in the subsequent 9-month period, and further to one during the same period in the second year. The only pedestrian-related accidents occurred at signalized intersections outside the project area and there were no bicycle collisions.

Speed of Traffic

The speed limit is 35 miles per hour and the school zone is posted at 25 miles per hour. Speed data following the reconfiguration indicates that most motorists now drive at reasonable speeds between 16th and 25th Streets, the area targeted for improvement. Eighty-five percent of motorists in this area travel at or below 27 miles per hour, and

should, at this speed, be able to see and stop for pedestrians prudently crossing the street. Speeds are higher outside the project area, at 39 miles per hour in the segment between Lincoln Boulevard and Ocean Avenue, and at 37 miles per hour in the segment between 25th Street and Centinela Avenue. It appears that the reconfiguration resulted in reasonable and prudent drivers setting the pace for other motorists, as was anticipated.

Roadway users, in particular some residents of Ocean Park, have expressed initial and continuing concern about delays in travel time and queues on Ocean Park Boulevard. A particular concern is the longer queues at the intersection of Ocean Park Boulevard and Lincoln Boulevard. Staff has made striping and signal timing modifications to address these concerns and although queues continue to be long at times, most clear in one or two signal cycles. School drop-off and pick-up periods coincide with the longer queues. As a way to understand travel time impacts, Big Blue Bus runs were compiled for the total time it takes buses to travel from Lincoln Boulevard to Centinela at various times of day and days of the week. The results were mixed, with some runs slightly shorter and some slightly longer than before the new configuration was implemented. The majority of running times do not vary more than a minute, and none take more than two minutes longer for the whole trip.

Shifting Traffic

Traffic counts, as anticipated, are consistent with experiences with similar reconfigurations of other streets. Overall, traffic volumes on local streets in the area have been relatively stable, with changes of less than 200 cars per day. There were decreases on Ocean Park Boulevard and on 23rd Street south of Ashland. The reduction on Ocean Park Boulevard itself is about 3,000-4,500 cars per day. It is not clear to where these trips shifted, but motorists appear to choose between I-10 Freeway and Ocean Park Boulevard for some trips. Local streets and Pico Boulevard did not reflect an increase. Residents at the community feedback meeting reported that, although they were concerned that the reconfiguration might have shifted commuters

from Ocean Park Boulevard to local residential streets, travel times on the local streets did not offer an advantage as compared to Ocean Park Boulevard. Some motorists continue to drive faster than the speed limit on Oak Street and Hill Street, which parallel Ocean Park Boulevard. The Police Department enforces speed limits on these streets as time and resources permit.

Parking and Bicycle Lanes

In addition to traffic safety improvements, the reconfiguration provided new bicycle lanes and additional on-street parking. New parking spaces are available on the south side of Ocean Park Boulevard between 10th and 14th Streets. The bike lanes provide an improved east-west facility for cyclists.

Community Input

In addition to analyzing empirical data, community input was solicited through a survey which was available on line and distributed widely by mail. A meeting was held in November 2008 to give people an opportunity to comment on and ask questions about the project. There was no clear consensus provided by the community input, as there was a wide range of sentiment. Many people appreciate improved conditions for cyclists and pedestrians, but others are dissatisfied by delays and a perception that the reconfiguration has caused motorists to shift off of Ocean Park Boulevard onto parallel streets including Pearl Street, Oak Street, Hill Street, and Ashland Street. Friends of Sunset Park has not taken a position on the reconfiguration.

Conclusion

Because of the clear improvement in safety, the reduction in speeding, and reports from Public Safety staff, the present configuration was retained in a recent resurfacing project and is considered permanent. In summary, the configuration includes:

- One travel lane in each direction between Lincoln and Cloverfield Boulevards
- Parallel parking on the south side of Ocean Park Boulevard between 10th and 14th Streets
- Parallel parking on both sides of the street from 14th Street to Cloverfield Boulevard
- A four-foot wide striped median between Lincoln Boulevard and 14th Street
- A left turn lane/striped median island between 14th Street and Cloverfield Boulevard
- Intersection left turn pockets
- Bicycle lanes between Lincoln and Cloverfield Boulevards

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