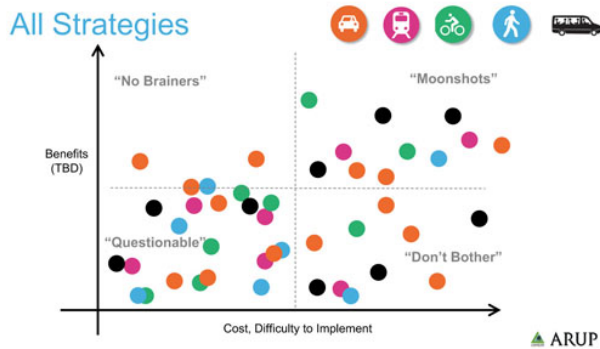


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Downtown Congestion Reduction Study Kicks Off

By Cathy Tyson



It is no secret to city leaders that traffic and congestion are unfortunately a growing problem in Lafayette, and appear to be getting worse. Looking to address these complex issues, city leaders obtained grant funding to pay for a comprehensive study to take a hard look using game-changing data along with public feedback to identify when, where and why congestion happens and to make recommendations that weigh costs and benefits of potential fixes.

Introducing Phase I of the roughly year-long Downtown Congestion Reduction Study at a recent city council meeting, Arup Principal Will Baumgardner described the overall purpose of the study: "The intent is to reduce downtown congestion, but also improve the overall quality of life in its broadest sense - safety, economic vitality, local character and environment." Arup is a global

Image provided

consultant group that specializes in infrastructure design, economics and planning.

Acknowledging there have been many studies in the past addressing traffic-related issues in Lafayette, Arup Senior Transportation Engineer Mike Iswalt said the key difference this time is new sources of big data that can specifically identify travel patterns - a critical factor to find tailored solutions. The study is funded by a grant from the Contra Costa Transportation Authority.

Recognizing there are no quick fixes, the Arup consultants will customize the wide-ranging study with input from the Downtown Congestion Reduction Steering Committee, feedback from an online survey, as well as GPS and cell phone information. Ultimately the consultant will identify feasible strategies and focus on implementation, which means finding funding.

The data allows the consultants to zero in on segments that are most congested, and analyze how the street network performs. Iswalt explained that Lafayette is a bit unusual in that there are three to four hours in the afternoon where the congestion is fairly constant - starting around 3 p. m., running until 6 p.m. "Congestion is something that we all dislike as it takes longer to travel places, which keeps us away from home, work, and the enjoyable things in life," wrote Iswalt in a memo for the Nov. 9 presentation.

One of the most surprising findings from the initial work done by the consultant is that 63 percent of the traffic is heading down Moraga Road toward Mt. Diablo Boulevard to Highway 24. "There is pressure at the Y," said Iswalt, referring to the path toward freeway onramps from Moraga Road. Causes include the number of driveways to businesses and signalized intersections that add to backups.

Consultants are asking residents from throughout Lamorinda and beyond who happen to drive, bike or walk through Lafayette to be a part of the solution by going online to complete a short transportation priorities survey, and to take a moment to map issues and opportunities by dropping pins on a map and explaining briefly what the problem is at that particular location. These two information-gathering tools will be live for approximately the next five weeks at www.lafayettecongestion.com.

Baumgardner made it clear that the consultants understand that any recommendations will have to consider "the bang for the buck - benefits versus the cost and difficulty to implement."

There will be a second round of outreach in the spring that will focus on a short list of specific

ideas gleaned from the first portion of the study that are the most promising.

Two public speakers added a somber note to the discussion. Stanley Middle School Principal David Schrag spoke for Lafayette School District Superintendent Rachel Zinn who was unavailable that night; he pointed out there have been three students hit by cars near the school in the last year and emphasized that safety be the top priority.

The mother of an 11-year-old boy who was hit by a car near Stanley on Oct. 29 asked, "What are we waiting for? The next child may not be so lucky." Council Member Traci Reilly pointed out there will be a meeting of the Joint City / School District Traffic and Safety Task Force on Nov. 16 that will discuss this item.

To view the entire Arup presentation, go to www.lovelafayette.com, click on public meetings and go to the Nov. 9 city council meeting, and scroll down to read the attachment.

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[back](#)

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