

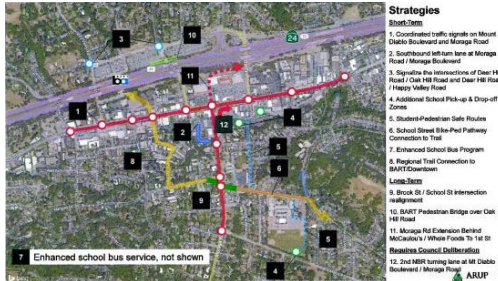
Published February 7th, 2018

Traffic solutions, all options still being explored

By Pippa Fisher

When it comes to addressing downtown congestion, the Lafayette City Council agrees - every single option comes with a cost, and it's not just financial.

The council reviewed proposed solutions to the traffic problems of downtown Lafayette from city staff and engineering consultants Arup at the Jan. 22 meeting but ultimately requested the item be continued to the Feb. 12 city council meeting and directed city staff to come back with further information on key issues and specifics on the benefits and tradeoffs of traffic signal coordination and further study of a possible pedestrian bridge over Moraga Road. Council members also requested more information on a funding plan and suggested dropping the Oakhill pedestrian overpass idea.



Many ideas for solving traffic woes, but no silver bullet. Image provided

together with Arup, the city has come up with a list of 12 possible options, both short- and long-term, which have been discussed at multiple community and steering committee meetings, with sometimes heated input from residents.

This city council meeting was no exception.

However, at this meeting several members of the public spoke in favor of an option that has not made it to the city's list of strategies - that of a footbridge over Moraga Way in place of the pedestrian crossings that currently necessitate frequent traffic stops, especially at school drop-off and pickup times.

City Transportation Planner James Hinkamp said that contrary to popular opinion, delays on Moraga Road are not just due to pedestrians crossing but rather to the sheer travel demand. He said that staff are concerned with the geometry of a footbridge, pointing out that to get the 16-foot elevation required, it would be difficult to build the length of ramps needed at a less than 5 percent slope to be ADA compatible. He also made the point that over time, given the projections for traffic growth, any benefit in reduction of pedestrian-caused traffic stops would be offset.

An alternative long-term proposal for the Brook Street intersection (No. 9 on the map) is to realign Brook Street and School Street, with the demolition of the Masonic Lodge, creating one curved intersection. Most of the public comments were strongly against such a proposal, citing concerns that more traffic would cut through the residential Brook Street as a result, with at least one speaker referring to it as the "Brook Street bypass."

Council Member Mike Andersen requested more information on the benefits of the footbridge and was keen to explore it further as an option.

In fact Andersen made the point that he doesn't want to see a traffic system based solely on moving cars through and wants a commitment that any ideas can accommodate pedestrians in a reasonable manner when the city is encouraging walkability from downtown communities.

For example, having a two-lane right turn from northbound Moraga Road onto Mt. Diablo Boulevard would mean losing the pedestrian crossing at that point, due to compromised visibility for drivers in the second lane, which would mean pedestrians would potentially have to cross in three spots to get across.

The 12 proposals, some short-term and some long-term, including adding a second right hand turn lane at Mt. Diablo Boulevard from Moraga Road northbound (No. 12 on the map) and adding a southbound left turn lane at Moraga Road and Moraga Boulevard (No. 2 on the map), come with various price tags. At an estimated cost of \$4 million to \$6 million a pedestrian bridge is one of the more pricey options, but similar to the cost of the Brook Street/School Street realignment.

Mayor Don Tatzin said that it was clear something has to be done at the Brook Street intersection. "When Brook Street realignment was proposed 20 years ago it got the same reaction as tonight," he said, noting that they don't need to do it for 10 years and "maybe never."

One thing is clear; whichever steps are taken will involve tradeoffs.

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[back](#)

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