



AGENDA REPORT

TO: Edward D. Reiskin
City Administrator

FROM: Ryan Russo
Director, Oakland
Department of
Transportation

SUBJECT: Informational Report on Oakland's
Slow Streets Program

DATE: February 10, 2022

City Administrator Approval 

Date: Feb 15, 2022

RECOMMENDATION

Staff Recommends That The City Council Receive An Informational Report And Presentation From The Oakland Department Of Transportation Regarding The Status Of And Plans For Oakland's Slow Streets And Essential Places Program.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This informational report responds to a request from Councilmember Kalb at the Rules and Legislation Committee on January 26, 2022. The City Administrator was directed to provide a report to City Council on the status of and plans for the Slow Streets – Essential Places Program. The Oakland Department of Transportation (OakDOT) is transitioning the program to “Phase 3” by removing temporary materials including the temporary street closures and redirecting staff efforts to longer-term improvements for pedestrian safety at essential service locations, the development of a permanent Slow Streets network, and neighbors' use of streets as community space. With “Phase 3,” OakDOT seeks to institutionalize the lessons learned during the pandemic on the importance of essential services, and on the joy and refuge that Slow Streets brought to people and families in the early months of the pandemic. A presentation is provided in **Attachment A**.

BACKGROUND / LEGISLATIVE HISTORY

In March 2020, public health officials announced an emergency Shelter-In-Place order to reduce the spread of COVID-19. From April through July 2020, OakDOT responded to the pandemic by implementing Phase 1 of the Slow Streets – Essential Places Program (<https://www.oaklandca.gov/projects/oakland-slow-streets>), which involved closing 21 miles of neighborhood streets to through traffic and encouraging Oaklanders to bike, walk, skate, and recreate on Slow Street Corridors, in an effort to maintain social distancing, and reduce crowding in parks and on sidewalks.

Beginning in May 2020, OakDOT installed temporary pedestrian safety improvements at 15 Essential Places locations to support access to essential services including grocery stores, food

Public Works Committee
February 22, 2022

distribution sites, health clinics, and COVID-19 test sites on high-crash corridors and in socioeconomically disadvantaged neighborhoods. The Essential Places arm of the Slow Streets – Essential Places Program was initiated in response to resident concerns that Slow Streets Corridors were not responsive to more pressing safety needs of residents accessing essential services in West and East Oakland.

Over that summer and culminating in September 2020, OakDOT studied the program and released an Interim Findings Report (<https://www.oaklandca.gov/projects/oakland-slow-streets>) that marked the beginning of Phase 2: Evaluation & Context Specific Changes. The report took a deep dive into the program's successes and challenges with the two goals of: 1) evaluating and stabilizing the Slow Streets Program for the duration of the pandemic; and 2) gleaning insights to inform post-pandemic planning for safe and more livable streets, healthy and thriving communities, and a more equitable Oakland.

Throughout 2021, OakDOT made adjustments at specific locations and moved toward more durable materials (<https://www.oaklandca.gov/resources/slow-street-corridor-evaluation-and-essential-places-improvements>) in an effort to reduce the amount of maintenance needed to keep the temporary materials in place. In summer 2021, traffic volumes rose with the California reopening on June 15 and with the return of students to in-person school that August. The changes in travel patterns prompted OakDOT to make additional adjustments at key intersections between Slow Streets Corridors and major streets with higher traffic volumes, around re-opened schools, and on AC Transit school routes. Simultaneously, the use of Slow Streets decreased with the end of shelter-in-place and with the reopening of parks, schools, and commercial establishments.

As of January 2022, OakDOT began transitioning to Phase 3 of the Slow Streets – Essential Places Program by emphasizing longer-term improvements. Staff efforts are now directed to sustainable improvements for pedestrian safety at essential services, the development of a permanent Slow Streets network, and supporting neighbors' use of streets as community space. The temporary materials including the temporary street closures were removed in late January and early February.

This transition was precipitated by the following factors:

- Shelter-in-place ended. Use of Slow Streets Corridors for recreation decreased while traffic volumes increased as people returned to school, work, parks, and commercial establishments.
- Outdoor transmission of COVID-19 is now understood as a lower risk compared to the significant unknowns and fear of outdoor transmission in the pandemic's early months.
- Nearly two years into the pandemic, OakDOT is seeking to transition away from temporary materials that require extensive resources and staff time to maintain.
- Neighbors on adjoining streets have grown increasingly concerned regarding traffic diversion and street closures at key intersections that complicate access to their homes.
- OakDOT does not have the resources to resolve these disagreements through neighborhood-specific planning processes across the 21 miles of Slow Streets Corridors.
- OakDOT seeks to prioritize staff time and resources equitably, while the Slow Streets Corridors receiving the greatest use are in lower-priority equity neighborhoods.
- The pandemic response was made possible by staff setting aside other work priorities including traffic safety service requests, advancing the Safe Oakland Streets Initiative, permanent pedestrian safety improvements, Safe Routes to Schools upgrades,

neighborhood speed bump program, and bikeway implementation. It is becoming untenable to defer these priorities indefinitely. Simultaneously, OakDOT is supporting City responses to emergency priorities including wildfires, sideshows, and violence.

ANALYSIS AND POLICY ALTERNATIVES

OakDOT is now advancing Phase 3 of the Slow Streets – Essential Places Program, which advances the Citywide priorities of 1) **holistic community safety**, 2) **housing, economic, and cultural security**, and 3) **vibrant, sustainable infrastructure**. Phase 3 involves three strategies: (1) Expand Essential Places with permanent pedestrian safety improvements at essential services; (2) implement a permanent Slow Streets network; and (3) support neighbors' use of streets for community-building through temporary street closures. OakDOT seeks to institutionalize the lessons learned during the pandemic on the importance of essential services, and on the joy and refuge that Slow Streets brought to people and families particularly in the early months of the pandemic.

First, OakDOT will make permanent the design and construction of Essential Places Locations: pedestrian safety improvements at essential services that our residents, particularly the most vulnerable, rely on, including schools, libraries, grocery stores, senior centers, health facilities, major transit stops, Head Start Centers, and Recreation Centers. OakDOT will continue to use temporary materials for rapid installation and systematically upgrade these locations to permanent treatments. Common treatments include pedestrian safety islands and hardened centerlines. Implementation will be coordinated with and leveraged by upcoming projects, including the forthcoming work of the 5-Year Paving Plan (<https://www.oaklandca.gov/projects/20225yp>). Locations will be prioritized for Essential Places improvements using the High Injury Network (<https://www.oaklandca.gov/topics/traffic-safety-1>) (where the most crashes have occurred) and Geographic Equity Toolbox (<https://www.oaklandca.gov/resources/oakdot-geographic-equity-toolbox>) (which identifies socioeconomically disadvantaged neighborhoods).

Second, OakDOT will develop a permanent Slow Streets network for human-powered travel, low-powered electric vehicles, and community-building. OakDOT will build upon the planning-to-date for Neighborhood Bike Routes (also known as bike boulevards) in Oakland's Bicycle Plan (<https://www.oaklandca.gov/resources/bicycle-plan>). OakDOT will replace Neighborhood Bike Routes with Slow Streets, updating its design guidance and messaging to develop a network of traffic calmed streets for human-powered travel, low-powered electric vehicles, and community-building – expanding the current appeal and utility for bicyclists to pedestrians, micro-mobility users, and residents seeking to use streets as community space. Permanent Slow Streets corridors will be implemented through the City's Capital Improvement Program (<https://www.oaklandca.gov/topics/capital-improvement-program>) and in coordination with the Five-Year Paving Plan. Design elements will include new Slow Streets signage and markings, speed humps, traffic circles, improvements at major street crossings, and context-sensitive diverters at key locations. OakDOT will proactively address nearby residents' concerns for diverted traffic through planning, outreach, and context-sensitive design.

Third, OakDOT will support neighbors' use of streets as community space by advancing opportunities for neighborhood-initiated temporary street closures. OakDOT is participating in developing proposed improvements to the special events permit process. OakDOT envisions

"Pop-Up Slow Streets" as a way for residents to use their streets as community space by experimenting with temporary street closures. Pop-Up Slow Streets could be partial or full street closures that could occur on a regular basis such as every Saturday throughout the summer months. Neighborhood streets which did not receive a Slow Streets Corridor designation in the initial program would be eligible for Pop-Up Slow Streets, providing the option to more neighborhoods. Residents could partner with the City to implement their own regular closures, and OakDOT will strive to support neighbors in high-priority equity neighborhoods in organizing and programming Pop-Up Slow Streets.

FISCAL IMPACT

This item is for informational purposes only and does not have fiscal impacts.

PUBLIC OUTREACH / INTEREST

Despite the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic, OakDOT conducted extensive community outreach and received voluminous input on the program. However, over 22 months and multiple outreach efforts, feedback was generally skewed to whiter and wealthier respondents, with the most feedback generated in North Oakland and secondarily in the Laurel District.

In Phase 1 of the program, OakDOT released a general feedback survey in four languages which received 1,582 responses. Additionally, prior to implementing new sets of Slow Streets Corridors, OakDOT released online surveys on the candidate streets in four languages. These three surveys received a total of 1,148 responses. For both the general feedback survey and the new corridors surveys OakDOT shared the results through public-facing dashboards. OakDOT also released an interactive public comment map which garnered 2,323 responses. Ten press releases were published on the Slow Streets – Essential Places Program. OakDOT met regularly on Slow Streets – Essential Places with a group of active transportation advocates and a group of community leaders from priority equity neighborhoods. In June 2020, intercept surveys were done on six Slow Streets Corridors. After recognizing that multiple Slow Streets Corridors were not being used for recreating in the street, OakDOT began installing Slow Streets Corridors only in partnership with hyperlocal organizations including the Lincoln Recreation Center (Downtown/Chinatown Slow Street Corridor), the Palo Vista Senior Center (62nd Ave, Fenham Ave, and 64th Ave Slow Street Corridor), and the Eastmont Hills Neighborhood Council (Ney Ave Slow Street Corridor).

In Phase 2 of the program, OakDOT sought to reach residents living near individual Slow Streets Corridors in West and East Oakland where OakDOT had received less feedback to date. OakDOT sent surveys by mail to all addresses along the Slow Streets Corridors on Brookdale Ave, Arthur St / Plymouth St, 16th St, 32nd St, and E 16th St. In total OakDOT mailed 1,970 addresses and received 251 responses. OakDOT also sought to be responsive to the 362 Oakland 311 service requests related to Slow Streets – Essential Places received during Phase II of the program, between September 2020 and December 2021. As a result of the feedback received, modifications were made as described above under "Background / Legislative History."

For Phase 3 of the program, OakDOT posted flyers at each of the approximately 300 barricade locations along the 21 miles of Slow Streets corridors. OakDOT notified the 375 OAK 311 requesters who submitted Slow Streets requests (and provided email addresses) of the forthcoming transition to Phase 3. OakDOT presented the transition at the January 20, 2022 meeting of the City's Bicyclist & Pedestrian Advisory Commission (BPAC) with approximately 75 people participating in the meeting. OakDOT continues to welcome input from the public through OAK 311 and the OakDOT@oaklandca.gov email address.

COORDINATION

To launch the program, OakDOT coordinated regularly with the Oakland Fire Department, Oakland Police Department, and Oakland Public Works Departments through the Emergency Operations Center and its COVID-19 response, as well as AC Transit. OakDOT has coordinated with the Economic and Workforce Development Department on Flex Streets, Slow Streets, and Essential Places, and will continue this coordination in support of resident-initiated temporary street closures for community-building.

SUSTAINABLE OPPORTUNITIES

Economic: The Slow Streets – Essential Places Program does not have direct economic benefits as it is focused on traffic safety, active transportation, and neighborhood livability. The program may have indirect economic benefits by making Oakland more livable.

Environmental: The Slow Streets – Essential Places Program has and will continue to encourage safer walking and bicycling. The Slow Streets network will encourage and support the use of sustainable modes as an alternative to driving fossil fuel powered vehicles for transportation as well as recreation.

Race & Equity: The Slow Streets Corridors were most successful in neighborhoods with higher percentages of high income and White residents. However, the Essential Places portion of the program was responsive to Deep East Oaklander's requests to address traffic safety. Essential Places locations have been and will continue to be prioritized for implementation using the Geographic Equity Toolbox (<https://www.oaklandca.gov/resources/oakdot-geographic-equity-toolbox>), starting with neighborhoods with high concentrations of low-income and Black Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC) along the High Injury Network where most crashes have occurred, recognizing traffic crashes also disproportionately affect low-income people, BIPOC, and seniors. The Pop-Up Slow Streets model both allows better organized neighborhoods to initiate and maintain street closures while limiting the staff time spent on Pop-Up Slow Streets, freeing up resources for OakDOT staff to support Pop-Up Slow Streets in priority equity neighborhoods.

ACTION REQUESTED OF THE CITY COUNCIL

Staff Recommends That The City Council Receive An Informational Report And Presentation From The Oakland Department Of Transportation Regarding The Status Of And Plans For Oakland's Slow Streets And Essential Places Program.

For questions regarding this report, please contact Megan Wier, Safe Streets Division Manager, at mwier@oaklandca.gov.

Respectfully submitted,



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Attachments (1):

Attachment A. Presentation – Oakland's Slow Streets and Essential Places Program

