Claremont Traffic and Transportation Commission

Agenda Report

File #: 4379 **Item No:** 4.

TO: TRAFFIC AND TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION

FROM: MARIA B. TIPPING, CITY ENGINEER

DATE: SEPTEMBER 22, 2022

Reviewed by:
Finance Director: N/A

SUBJECT:

MOUNTAIN AVENUE CORRIDOR (BASE LINE ROAD TO BONITA AVENUE) COMPLETE STREETS ASSESSMENT AND PROPOSED IMPROVEMENTS UPDATE

SUMMARY

At their October 28, 2021 meeting, the Commission reviewed the City's Pavement Management System schedule, which included proposed maintenance for the Mountain Avenue segment between Foothill Boulevard and Bonita Avenue. At this meeting, the Commission recommended that staff separate this Mountain Avenue segment from the regular maintenance schedule to look at this section as a stand-alone project for potential additional complete street features.

On January 27, 2022, staff presented a report on the Mountain Avenue Corridor Study and Recommended Phased Improvements to the Commission, outlining the proposed improvements for the Mountain Avenue segment between Base Line Road and Foothill Boulevard. Funding for the implementation of these phased improvements had not been identified, and was not available at that time.

With school route safety in mind, early this year, staff saw the opportunity to take a new approach to evaluate complete streets options for our local roads. Staff applied for a spot in the Complete Streets Safety Assessment (CSSA) program, as a valuable opportunity to learn from the UC Berkeley experts through CSSA process. Claremont was one of the few selected communities to participate in this program. In March 2022, UC Berkeley conducted an assessment on Mountain Avenue from Base Line Road to Bonita Avenue to evaluate potential complete street features for Mountain Avenue, as a corridor project.

At tonight's meeting, staff is bringing forth two presentations to update the Commission on the progress made with the Mountain Avenue Corridor study and to outline the future steps to complete this project. One presentation will be on the UC Berkeley CSSA and second presentation will be a staff update on the project's future steps and schedule.

RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends that the Traffic and Transportation Commission provide feedback and receive and file the Mountain Avenue Corridor Complete Streets Assessment and Proposed Improvements update report.

FINANCIAL REVIEW

The cost to implement a Complete Streets project on Mountain Avenue from Base Line Road to Bonita Avenue is estimated at $3 million, which is appropriated in the 2022/24 Capital Improvement Program (CIP) budget.

The cost to prepare this staff report is estimated at $1,106 and is included in the operating budget of the Community Development Department.

ANALYSIS

Over the past few months, staff has been focusing on the Mountain Avenue (Base Line Road to Bonita Avenue) corridor study and the future steps involved in the project development to design and construct improvements that will include both Mountain Avenue segments, north and south of Foothill Boulevard. Originally, the work on Mountain Avenue was envisioned to be completed as two completely separate projects: a standard maintenance project for the Mountain Avenue between Foothill Boulevard and Bonita Avenue and a complete streets project for the section of Mountain Avenue between Base Line Road and Foothill Boulevard. This approach was envisioned this way, because funding was only available for the Mountain Avenue segment between Foothill Boulevard and Bonita Avenue.

Under that approach, staff presented the City's Pavement Management System (PMS) schedule at the October 28, 2021 Traffic and Transportation Commission (TTC) meeting. The PMS schedule included proposed maintenance work for the Mountain Avenue segment between Foothill Boulevard and Bonita Avenue. At this meeting, the Commission recommended that staff separate this Mountain Avenue segment from the regular maintenance schedule to look at this Mountain Avenue section in more detail, and as a stand-alone project, to provide the opportunity to better plan for additional complete street features for this street segment. While this segment of Mountain Avenue was modified in 2007, to incorporate a road diet and accessibility features, the Commission felt that additional, more up to date, complete street features should be considered at this time.

On January 27, 2022, staff presented a study on Mountain Avenue, from Base Line Road to Foothill Boulevard to the Commission. This study evaluated the existing conditions on Mountain Avenue between Foothill Boulevard and Base Line Road and conducted a data collection process to determine potential improvements that could be implemented along this corridor to improve existing conditions. The study proposed a phased approach to implement changes, such as traffic signal and signage upgrades and more wide ranging improvements such as a road diet implementation for traffic calming purposes. The first phase of proposed improvements for this segment included enhancements to the signalized intersection of Mountain Avenue at Scripps Drive. These "Phase 1" improvements were completed in August as follows:

- Install "No Right Turn on Red" signs for the four legs of the intersection from:
    - 7:00 am - 9:00 am
    - 1:30 pm - 3:30 pm

- Signal Timing modification
    - Incorporation of a lead pedestrian phase - all directions
        - Assists with allowing pedestrians to access the crosswalk ahead of the green phase allowing vehicles right turns

In addition to completing the installation of the proposed improvements in Phase 1, staff was able to secure traffic signal equipment to upgrade the signal with pedestrian count down heads and audible traffic signal features.

Staff used available cost savings funds from the Traffic Signal Upgrades CIP to cover the cost to implement these Phase 1 improvements at this location. The cost to implement this project was estimated at $10,000.

UC Berkeley Complete Streets Safety Assessment (CSSA)

With school route safety in mind, early this year, staff saw the opportunity to take a new approach to evaluating complete streets options for our local roads. With that purpose, staff applied for one of the available spots of the Complete Streets Safety Assessment (CSSA) program to take the opportunity to learn valuable information from the UC Berkeley experts through the CSSA process.

Staff learned that the CSSA process is a comprehensive transportation safety assessment that focuses on pedestrian and bicycle safety to help identify and implement traffic safety solutions that lead to improved safety for all roadway users. As part of the assessment, the traffic safety experts review the local agency's pedestrian and bicycle traffic safety programs, conduct a site visit, assess the safety conditions, and then suggest new strategies to improve safety for all modes of transportation in the community.

In February 2022, the City of Claremont was selected to be part of this year's CSSA program. Claremont requested that a corridor assessment be conducted for Mountain Avenue for its function as a school route. The complete streets safety assessment was conducted in March, with great success. As part of this process, staff met with UC Berkeley experts, John Ciccarelli and Afsaneh Yavari, to conduct the field assessment component of the study. The CSSA team is in the process of completing a draft report for Claremont which will include a number of suggestions to be considered for the future design of the corridor. The UC Berkeley CSSA process and its positive benefits, were memorialized in the "Prioritizing Pedestrian and Bicycle Safety: Complete Streets and Walking School Bus in Claremont" article published in the California Active Transportation Safety Information Pages (CATSIP) (Attachment). At tonight's meeting, John Ciccarelli will provide an overview of the assessment conducted for Mountain Avenue.

In light of the CSSA positive experience and valuable feedback received, the City decided to move forward with the budgeting of a CIP project for the Mountain Avenue corridor as part of the most recent budget preparation process. The recently adopted 2-year budget includes funding for the design and construction of the Mountain Avenue Corridor Complete Streets Project. This project will incorporate new complete streets features to the portion of the roadway from Base Line Road to Foothill Boulevard, and will add more complete street components to the portions of the roadway where a "road diet" was implemented years ago, between Foothill Boulevard and Bonita Avenue. Staff will use the upcoming CSSA assessment report and suggestions, from the UC Berkeley expert assessment and knowledge of best practices in traffic engineering and planning, to work with a consultant to plan this new safety improvement project.

Next Steps

With funding now available for both segments of the project, staff will move forward with engaging a consultant to prepare the plans for this upcoming project. Consistent with the city's Complete Streets Policy, staff will have the Commission review and provide feedback throughout the design process.

In the upcoming months, staff will begin working to procure a scope of work and secure a contract with a traffic engineering and planning firm to begin the design. Staff anticipates the design process will begin in the first quarter of 2023. Construction for this project would follow, and is currently estimated to start in 2024.

CEQA REVIEW

This item (Mountain Avenue Corridor Study) is not subject to environmental review under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) pursuant to CEQA Guidelines Section 15060(c)(2) (the activity will not result in a direct or reasonably foreseeable indirect physical change in the environment) and Section 15060(c)(3) (the activity is not a "project" as defined in section 15378). CEQA Guidelines Section 15378(b) (2), (4), and (5) excludes "continuing administrative ... activities," "government fiscal activities, which do not involve any commitment to any specific project which may result in a potentially significant physical impact on the environment," and "administrative activities of governments that will not result in direct or indirect physical changes to the environment" from its definition of "project."

Additionally, under CEQA Guidelines Section 15061(b)(3), it is covered by the general rule that CEQA applies only to projects that have the potential for causing a significant effect on the environment. Presenting an update on a project to the Commission will not have a significant effect on the environment because the action will not result in or lead to a physical change in Claremont. Therefore, no additional environmental review is needed.

PUBLIC NOTICE PROCESS

The agenda and staff report for this item have been posted on the City website and distributed to interested parties. If you desire a copy, please contact Natalie Reagan at nreagan@ci.claremont.ca.us.

Submitted by:

Maria B. Tipping, P.E.
City Engineer

Attachment:
California Active Transportation Safety Information Pages (CATSIP) Article

Prioritizing Pedestrian and Bicycle Safety: Complete Streets & Walking School Bus in Claremont, CA

The largest issue that makes parents hesitate to allow their children to walk to school is potential danger, but our walking school bus ensures that all participating students are safely guided to school."

Mayor Jed Leano, City of Claremont

For this installment of Stories from You, we're excited to feature a story from Maria Tipping, a City Engineer with the City of Claremont, California. In this story, Maria highlights how the City addressed community concerns to improve pedestrian and bicycle safety adjacent to school sites on Mountain Avenue through a new approach to evaluating complete streets options, piloting a Walking School Bus program in partnership with parents, school staff and almost 40 students at Condit Elementary School, and prioritizing funding for future safety improvement projects.

Since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, City of Claremont staff have noticed an increase with traffic safety and speeding concerns, reflected in the large number of residents contacting the city with requests for traffic calming and bicycle and pedestrian improvements as a means of slowing traffic down. As many experts agree, during the stay at home orders, while fewer people were on the road, those that remained on the road often engaged in riskier, unsafe driving behaviors (https://www.nhtsa.gov/sites/nhtsa.gov/files/2021-06/Update_Traffic%20Safety%20During%20COVID-19_4thQtr-060121-web.pdf). Though roads have become crowded again, excessive speeding and traffic safety continue to be a major source of concern for the community, especially on streets nearby or adjacent to local school sites. One of the local streets that draws much of the attention was Mountain Avenue, between Base Line Road and Bonita Avenue. This is a 1.7-mile minor arterial that provides access to two elementary schools and the only intermediate school in town.

Prioritizing Pedestrian and Bicycle Safety Around Schools in Claremont

Historically, traffic congestion and pedestrian and bicycle safety around schools have been one of the most common concerns shared by the residents. In response, the City has focused on prioritizing projects that address bicycle and pedestrian safety adjacent to school sites, by applying for competitive grants. This has been the necessary approach to fund these projects because the City does not have a dedicated funding mechanism to construct these types of projects. The City receives a limited amount of allocated local return funds such as Gas Tax including SB1, Measure R, and Measure M, which are prioritized for roadway maintenance, as part of the City budget adoption process. With limited resources, Claremont has been successful in obtaining numerous grants to fund projects to improve bicycle and pedestrian safety using the guiding principles of the City's Complete

Streets Policy as part of the roadway maintenance program. Over the years, the amount of grant funds received exceeds $20 million dollars, all invested in the community for bicycle and pedestrian safety improvements, adjacent to schools or along routes connecting to schools.

With school routes' safety in mind, early this year, staff saw the opportunity to take a new approach to evaluating complete streets options for our local roads. With that purpose, staff applied for one of the available spots for the UC Berkeley Safe Transportation and Research Center (SafeTREC) Complete Streets Safety Assessment (CSSA) program (https://safetrec.berkeley.edu/programs/complete-streets-safety-assessments-cssa) to take the valuable opportunity to learn from the road safety experts through the CSSA process.

Staff learned that the CSSA process is a comprehensive transportation safety assessment that focuses on pedestrian and bicycle safety to help identify and implement traffic safety solutions that lead to improved safety for all roadway users. As part of the assessment, the traffic safety experts review the local agency's pedestrian and bicycle traffic safety programs, conduct a site visit, assess the safety conditions, and then suggest new strategies to improve safety for all modes of transportation in the community.

The CSSA and the Claremont Walking School Bus

Condit Elementary School Walking School Bus group photo in Claremont, CA (Photo: Mayor Jed Leano)

In February 2022, the City of Claremont was selected to be part of this year's CSSA program. Claremont requested that a corridor assessment be conducted for Mountain Avenue for its function as a school route. The complete streets safety assessment was conducted in March, with great success. To start the process the UC Berkeley experts (John Ciccarelli and Afsaneh Yavari) met with City staff at the Condit Elementary School site. The assessment team was joined by school parents familiar with the student pick up and drop off challenges at this location, in an effort to get first-hand information on traffic congestion and traffic patterns around the school.

Claremont Mayor, Jed Leano, volunteered to join the group as a Condit Elementary School parent. The field assessment and parents' feedback led to a very positive exchange of ideas, including the possible implementation of a Walking School Bus to help alleviate the traffic congestion and promote healthy options for children to get to school. During the assessment, John Ciccarelli and Afsaneh Yavari shared information on the Walking School Bus program and Mayor Leano saw a great opportunity to introduce the concept to the

Claremont community by organizing a Walking School Bus at his son's school. The pilot program was a huge success with the participation of almost 40 kids towards the end of the school year. Their picture made it to the front page of the local newspaper.

Mayor Jed Leano leads the Condit Elementary School Walking School Bus (Photo: Mayor Jed Leano)

The following provides testimony from Mayor Leano, on the implementation of the very first Claremont Walking School Bus:

"Last school year, a few of us Condit Elementary parents formed the walking school bus for our students, held on the last four Wednesday mornings of the Spring '22 semester. After speaking with a Berkeley traffic engineer and reading multiple studies on walking to school taught me that walking school groups are a wonderful way for students to walk to school with adult supervision. The largest issue that makes parents hesitate to allow their children to walk to school is potential danger, but our walking school bus ensures that all participating students are safely guided to school.

The biggest learning outcome from creating the walking school bus was learning how many parents drive their kids a very short, walkable distance to school. Among the many benefits, students and parent leaders improve their health by increasing their physical activity. Students spend more time outside with their friends, and parents improve their time management. Parents can reduce car traffic and unnecessary pollution. Families can reduce their carbon footprint in an easy, community-building way. Our walking school bus has become very popular, and I look forward to seeing it expand during the upcoming school year."

Funding Future Safety Improvements

In light of the CSSA positive experience and valuable feedback received, the CSSA not only inspired the Condit Elementary School Walking School Bus, the City also decided to move forward with the budgeting of a Capital Improvement Project (CIP) for the Mountain Avenue corridor as part of the most recent budget preparation process. The recently adopted 2-year budget includes funding for the design and construction of the Mountain Avenue Corridor Complete Streets Project. This project will incorporate new complete streets features to the portion of the road in front of Condit Elementary and will add more complete street components to the portions of the roadway where a "road diet" was implemented years ago. Staff will use the CSSA assessment and suggestions, based on the UC Berkeley expert assessment and knowledge of best practices in traffic engineering and planning, to plan this new safety improvement project. Claremont is excited to share this success story, which has inspired so many positive outcomes for our community.

This Stories From You was coordinated in collaboration with UC Berkeley SafeTREC. The opinions and perspectives expressed are those of the author and not necessarily those of SafeTREC.

TOPICS

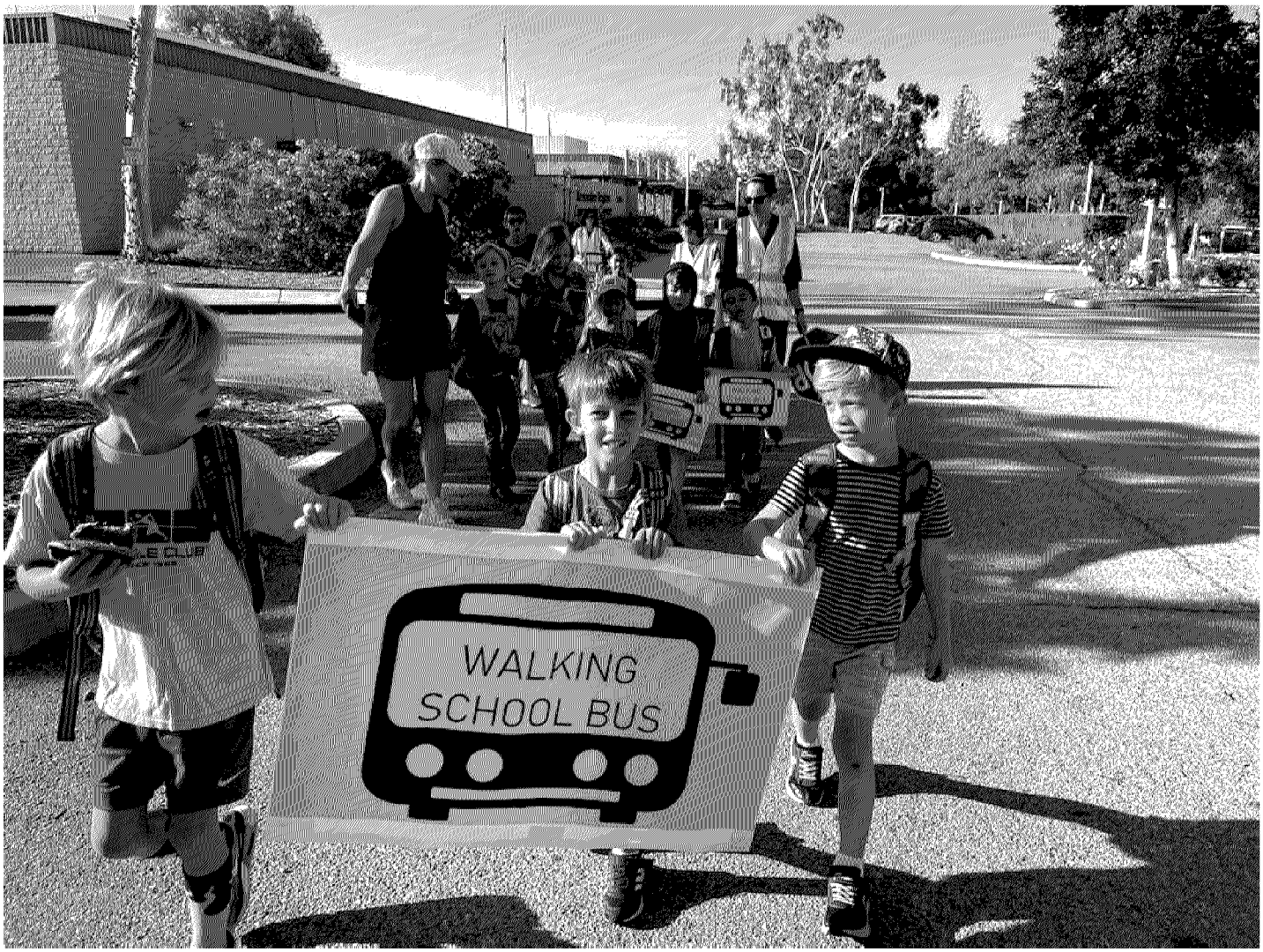
Bicycle (/topics/bicycle)

Stories (/topics/stories)

Pedestrian (/topics/pedestrian)

Complete Streets (/topics/complete-streets)

Safe Routes to School (/topics/safe-routes-school)



RELATED RESOURCES

- City of Claremont, Engineering Division (https://www.ci.claremont.ca.us/government/departments-divisions/engineering-division)
- Complete Streets Safety Assessment Program (CSSA) (https://safetrec.berkeley.edu/programs/complete-streets-safety-assessments-cssa)

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