



CITY OF

NEWPORT BEACH

City Council Staff Report

August 14, 2018
Agenda Item No. 21

TO: HONORABLE MAYOR AND MEMBERS OF THE CITY COUNCIL

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TITLE: Newport Heights Neighborhood School Traffic Study

ABSTRACT:

At the June 14, 2016 City Council meeting, the City Council discussed efforts to implement initiatives to improve traffic circulation around school areas. The City Council directed staff to examine innovative ideas, seek community perspectives, and report back to the Council on how to enhance and improve ways to get to and from schools. The initial focus area would be paths of travel to and from Newport Heights Elementary, Ensign Intermediate, and Newport Harbor High School. Staff has hosted three (3) community meetings at the Mariners Library to discuss the project. This study has been presented to the community as a school-focused traffic analysis. The Newport Heights Neighborhood School Traffic Study is now complete.

RECOMMENDATION:

- a) Determine this action is exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) pursuant to Sections 15060(c)(2) and 15060(c)(3) of the CEQA Guidelines because this action will not result in a physical change to the environment, directly or indirectly;
- b) Receive and file the Newport Heights Neighborhood School Traffic Study; and
- c) Direct staff to implement and install the recommended improvements outlined in the Newport Heights Neighborhood School Traffic Study or as directed by the City Council.

FUNDING REQUIREMENTS:

The current adopted budget includes sufficient funding to install all proposed signage and striping improvements. It will be expensed to the General Fund account in the Public Works Department, 01201927-980000-19T03. Additional funding may be necessary to address any directed sidewalk installations or additional crossing guards.

DISCUSSION:

At the June 14, 2016 City Council meeting, the City Council discussed efforts to implement initiatives to improve traffic circulation around school areas. The City Council directed staff to examine innovative ideas, seek community perspectives, and report back to the Council on how to enhance and improve ways to get to and from schools. The initial focus area would be paths of travel to and from Newport Heights Elementary, Ensign Intermediate, and Newport Harbor High School.

In July 2016, a meeting was held with the community to summarize their overall concerns. Councilmembers Dixon and Petros attended, in addition to the Newport-Mesa Unified School District and staff from the Public Works Department, Police Department, Fire Department, and City Manager's Office. The discussion included possible infrastructure improvements around the three schools in Newport Heights. Education for parents and children was also discussed in this meeting.

On March 27, 2017, a Community Meeting was held at the Mariners Library to discuss Newport Heights school traffic, student statistics and existing traffic calming improvements in the neighborhood. It was discussed with the community that the planned study was to be focused on school traffic issues, specifically during the peak school hours in the morning and afternoon. In June 2017, the City Council approved the Fiscal Year 2017-2018 budget that included \$ 80,000 for the preparation of the Newport Heights Traffic Study.

The scope of work for the study was prepared in September 2017 and the collection of traffic volume, pedestrian, bike and parking counts started after the beginning of the new school year. Additionally, three new crossing guards were assigned to the intersections of Irvine Avenue at 15th Street, and Irvine Avenue at Beacon Street at the start of the 2017- 2018 school year.

On November 16, 2017, a second Community Meeting was held at Mariners Library to discuss the scope of the study, and the work status regarding data collection. Also discussed at the meeting were initial observations at each school during pick-up and drop-off times. Residents provided comments and thoughts about the study. Requests were made by the residents to significantly expand the study area to include specific additional intersections and roadway segments. Many comments were provided regarding enforcement of stop sign violations, speeding, parking violations, and driving while texting. Requests for parking restrictions and additional student education were also discussed. Based on the numerous requests to expand the study area, a revised scope of work was prepared for the study. The revised scope was submitted on December 5, 2017. After the school holiday break, new data was collected in January 2018 for those intersections and roadway segments specifically identified by the community in the meeting.

On March 14, 2018, a third Community Meeting was held at Mariners Library to discuss the progress of the study, new observations, and preliminary ideas for improvements. Parking, traffic volume and speed data were presented and analyzed in detail. Student drop-off and pick-up activities at each of the three schools were discussed in detail. The proposed improvements at each school were presented.

The residents provided another list of additional locations they would like incorporated into the study. Based on the requests of the public to further expand the study area, a second revised scope of work was prepared.

The Newport Heights Neighborhood School Traffic Study is now complete. The study was posted on the city website on May 16, 2018. Residents that provided their e-mail addresses at the community meetings were notified of the study availability. Neighborhood leaders and the three school principals were contacted. A letter was sent to over 1,000 residents and property owners in the study area outlining the key issues in the study and providing a link to review the study. Additionally, the public was notified of the study on the Nextdoor app and e-mails sent from the Newport Heights Neighborhood Association.

Requests and Comments Received:

Sidewalks

Some residents have requested new sidewalks be built on various streets within Newport Heights that currently do not have them. Those streets include Clay Street, Santa Ana Avenue, 15th Street, Tustin Avenue, Westminster Avenue, Beacon Street and Irvine Avenue.

City Council Resolution 88-88 designates certain streets in residential districts as “significant links”. On those designated streets, the property owner is required to construct sidewalk and street improvements in conjunction with any substantial construction on their adjacent private property. Cliff Drive, Riverside Avenue south of Cliff Drive, Irvine Avenue, 15th Street and Westminster Avenue are all currently designated significant links in Newport Heights.

Many of the streets used by students in Newport Heights have existing sidewalks. There are continuous sidewalks on both sides of 15th Street from Clay Street to Santa Ana Avenue. Most of Irvine Avenue, from 16th Street to 15th Street, has sidewalks on both sides with some short unimproved segments. Irvine Avenue south of 15th Street has continuous sidewalk on the east side. Riverside Avenue south of Cliff Drive has continuous sidewalk on the west side. The majority of Cliff Drive between Riverside Avenue and St. Andrews Road has sidewalk on the north side, with some unimproved segments.

The project study is silent on the issue of adding sidewalks throughout Newport Heights given the lack of support by residents when the sidewalk issue has been discussed at various community meetings over the last 20 years. Comments from residents in the past have referred to sidewalks as “urbanization” of the neighborhood. Residents have stated they want to keep the existing landscaping in front of their homes and maintain the “rural” feel. Also, there are many existing encroachments in the public right-of-way which would present issues regarding the provision of continuous sidewalks. These encroachments include landscaping, fencing, walls, non-standard steps, mailboxes, etc. In general, sidewalks on non-“significant link” streets do not have wide property owner support.

Stop Signs

Requests have been made for more stop sign installations along Clay Street. Currently, eight (8) out of twelve (12) intersections along Clay Street between St. Andrews Road and Westminster Avenue are 4-way stop controlled. Typically, a residential neighborhood with a grid pattern of streets has stop signs located every two (2) blocks. By comparison, on most flower streets in Corona del Mar there is a pattern of stop signs on alternating blocks. Additionally, there is no history of accidents at the intersections along Clay Street without 4-way stop control. The lack of accident history, together with low traffic volumes, would indicate a warrant is not met to install new stop signs.

Newport Mesa School District

The enrollment at Newport Harbor High School is approximately 2,400 students. Ensign Intermediate has 1,230 students. Newport Harbor and Ensign have a combined 3,640 students. Newport Heights Elementary has 686 students. There are over 4,300 students in the three neighborhood schools.

By comparison, Corona del Mar High School/Middle School has 2,601 students. Eastbluff Elementary has 410 students. Estancia High School in Costa Mesa has 1,200 students. Costa Mesa High School/Middle School has 1,855 students. Some residents have suggested a discussion should take place with the School District regarding student enrollment levels and possibly changing the enrollment areas to balance the student load.

When reviewing school traffic in Newport Heights, it should be noted that there are a combined 3,100 students that leave the three schools in the busiest fifteen (15) minute peak period (the end of the school day). The three schools are each located within ½ mile of the other.

Police Enforcement

During the Town Hall meetings, and in written correspondence, residents have repeatedly requested more traffic enforcement in the neighborhood. Common issues raised included stop sign violations, texting, speeding and illegal parking/stopping.

Traffic Speeds

Traffic speed data was collected as part of the study. Based on the measured speeds on the streets, there are no streets within Newport Heights with a “demonstrated speed concern” as defined in City Council Policy L-26. Thus, the streets would not qualify for traffic calming features such as speed bumps. Continued speed enforcement has been discussed at the community meetings.

Bicycle Lane on Clay Street

As part of the study, bicycle counts were collected on streets throughout the neighborhood. It was determined through the counts that many Ensign Intermediate students ride to school on Clay Street. In the morning peak hour, there are 82 cyclists between Tustin Avenue and Irvine Avenue and 40 cyclists between Santa Ana Avenue and Tustin Avenue. In the afternoon peak hour, there are 43 cyclists west of Irvine Avenue and 25 cyclists west of Tustin Avenue. Staff recommends striping of bike lanes on Clay Street with school day parking restrictions on the south side from 7 a.m. – 9 a.m. and on the north side between 2 p.m. – 4 p.m. This is consistent with the current bicycle lanes and time-specific parking restrictions on Irvine Avenue between 16th Street and Cliff Drive.

A number of comments have been received from residents objecting to the proposed bike lanes on Clay Street. Staff recognizes that residents will have to change their parking routines, and that this could be challenging.

History of School Area Improvements

It is important to note that in the last 10 years, the City has completed many traffic and school improvements including the following in Newport Heights:

- ❖ New crossing guards at 15th Street @ Irvine Ave, 16th Street @ Irvine Avenue and Beacon Street @ Irvine Avenue.
- ❖ Installation of a flashing beacon at Irvine Avenue @ Margaret Drive. Improved pick-up and drop-off adjacent to Newport Harbor High School.
- ❖ Traffic calming on Cliff Drive (medians and chokers to lower speeds), and 15th @ St. Andrews (choker at pedestrian crosswalk).
- ❖ Sidewalk additions on south side of 15th Street between Irvine Avenue and Santa Ana Avenue, and on east side of Irvine Avenue near Ensign Intermediate.
- ❖ Upgraded crosswalk striping to high visibility continental-style striping. Also, upgraded school signing through Newport Heights.
- ❖ Median construction on 15th Street @ Santa Ana Avenue (school driveway turn restrictions).
- ❖ Sidewalk construction on the east side of Irvine Avenue between Cliff Drive and 16th Street.

Recommended Improvements as a Result of the Study and Community Input:

The proposed new improvements are focused around the high activity areas directly adjacent to the schools. The proposed improvements include: new pick-up and drop-off zones at the schools, improved bike racks at Ensign, additional crossing guards, school sign and crosswalk upgrades, educational improvements including efforts with each school on preparing “Suggested Route to School” plans, and adding a bike lane on Clay Street.

Newport Heights Elementary School:

- Add a crossing guard at Santa Ana Avenue/15th Street intersection.
- Establish and post signs for a pick-up and drop-off zone on north side of 15th Street between Redlands and the school driveway.
- Install “No Pedestrian Crossing” signs along 15th Street between San Bernardino Avenue and Redlands Avenue. Install “Use Crosswalk” signs with arrows pointing toward the adjacent striped crosswalk.
- Install a new stop sign at Broad Street and Catalina Drive intersection.
- Consider possibly adding a marked crosswalk across 15th Street at San Bernardino Avenue.
- Consider possibly designating east side of Santa Ana Avenue adjacent to school as pick-up and drop-off zone.
- Continue discussions with School District regarding plans to reconstruct school parking lot.

Ensign Intermediate School:

- Designate a pick-up and drop-off zone along the north side of Cliff Drive adjacent to the school.
- Add a crossing guard at the Irvine Avenue at Coral Place intersection.
- Post signs for pick-up and drop-off on Coral Place.
- Relocate the bike rack gate from the corner of Irvine Avenue and Coral Place to enter/exit onto Coral Place. Construct sidewalk from new gate location to intersection.
- Change parking time restrictions on northbound Irvine Avenue to incorporate Wednesday early day release.
- Designate a pick-up and drop-off zone on both sides of Beacon Street between Irvine Avenue and Fullerton Avenue.

Newport Harbor High School:

- Post “No Stopping” signs on north side of 15th Street east of Irvine Avenue to eliminate blocking of right turn lane.
- Place time restrictions on a few angled parking spaces on the south side of 15th Street next to St. Andrews Church parking lot, and west of St. Andrews Road.
- Continue to work with School District on reconstruction of 15th Street parking lot.
- Add pedestrian warning signs along 15th Street between Clay Street and St. Andrews Road.
- Relocate existing pedestrian crossing signs at crosswalk on 15th Street at St. Andrews Road.
- Stripe new crosswalk and install pedestrian crossing signs on 16th Street adjacent to the school parking lot on the north campus area.

General Improvements (Pedestrians):

- On Tustin Avenue between 15th and 16th Street, add signage encouraging pedestrians to use sidewalk on west side of street. Would require approval of City of Costa Mesa.
- Construct in-fill sidewalks on west side of Irvine Avenue between 15th Street and 16th Street.

General Improvements (Signage):

- Replace faded or damaged school signs.
- Upgrade existing legally conforming school signs in the area to fluorescent yellow-green.
- Add school-related advance warning signs.
- Add “Stop Ahead” and pedestrian crossing ahead signs for southbound Irvine Avenue north of 16th Street.
- Add “Bike Lane” signs where required.

General Improvements:

- Work with the Newport Mesa Unified School District, each school individually, and the Police Department to prepare “Suggested Route to School” plans. Once completed, distribute to parents and students and post on social media.
- Continue working with School District and each school to incorporate education programs in the classroom and at school assemblies.

- Update existing yellow school crosswalks to new high-visibility “Continental” crosswalk striping, consistent with newer crosswalk markings in area.
- Stripe bike lanes on both sides of Clay Street between Santa Ana Avenue and Irvine Avenue. Post “No Stopping” signs on south side from 7 a.m. – 9 a.m., and north side from 2 p.m. – 4 p.m. on school days.

ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW:

Staff recommends the City Council find this action is not subject to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) pursuant to Sections 15060(c)(2) (the activity will not result in a direct or reasonably foreseeable indirect physical change in the environment) and 15060(c)(3) (the activity is not a project as defined in Section 15378) of the CEQA Guidelines, California Code of Regulations, Title 14, Chapter 3, because it has no potential for resulting in physical change to the environment, directly or indirectly.

NOTICING:

The agenda item has been noticed according to the Brown Act (72 hours in advance of the meeting at which the City Council considers the item).

ATTACHMENT:

Attachment A – Newport Heights Neighborhood School Traffic Study