WESTSIDE SPECIFIC PLAN STAKEHOLDERS ADVISORY COMMITTEE

MEETING # 4: August 18, 2021

MINUTES

MEMBERS PRESENT, Conference Room #3, City Hall: Jack Cline, Judith Merlo, Marisa Olguin, Kevin Wilson, Melissa Ybarra, Tony Shantobi
MEMBERS PRESENT via ZOOM: Brian Bailey, Steve Freed, Dale Jabour, Ming-Shin Kou, Richard Lucas, Doug Williams
GOVERNMENT REPRESENTATIVES PRESENT: Dan Wall, Manny Garcia, Angela Kimmey
CONSULTANTS PRESENT: Phil Burns, Lance Lowrey, Deepak Kaushik, Bob Paternoster

Introduction:

The meeting was called to order at 3:10 PM by Moderator Bob Paternoster.

Bob reviewed the Committee's progress through Meeting #1, which was largely introductory; Meeting #2, where six project goals were formulated and baseline studies discussed; and, Meeting #3, where current transportation issues were discussed and the Committee agreed upon three primary action areas (Santa Fe North, Santa Fe South, and Pacific/Hampton) for possible conversion from industrial to mixed use. He noted that the Committee felt that the greatest obstacle to the conversion of properties along Santa Fe to mixed use was the very heavy truck and automobile traffic. Although many Committee members recognized the potential for Alameda East to accept much of the truck traffic, they warned that truckers would not use it because of the substantial delays at intersections. He concluded that the sole topic of discussion for Meeting #4 is possible solutions to the primary problem identified by the Committee, the very heavy present traffic along Santa Fe.

Transportation Plan Report:

EXISTING CONDITIONS: Phil presented a summary of present traffic conditions in the Westside of Vernon, pointing out that 64% of the trucks traveling on Santa Fe are destined for businesses in the Westside, whereas only 17% of the automobiles are destined for Vernon. He stated that most of the trucks enter Vernon from the north, and a substantial number also enter from the east along Bandini; very few trucks enter from the south, and practically none from the west. He noted that traffic on Santa Fe south of Vernon Avenue is less than north of Vernon Avenue,

largely because automobiles destined for Huntington Park and communities east of Huntington Park are leaving Santa Fe at Vernon Avenue to utilize Pacific Boulevard.

The Committee briefly discussed the information presented by Phil on existing traffic conditions. Kevin expressed concern that the shift of traffic from Santa Fe to other north/south streets will aggravate congestion problems on those streets at Washington Avenue. He asked if the consultants had projected future traffic increases due to the proposed conversion of some properties from industrial to more intense uses. Phil replied that such projections had been made and that the model runs which he would describe utilized higher trip generation rates for such properties.

PROPOSED TRANSPORTATION SCENARIO: Phil then presented to the Committee the scenario which the consultant team devised to reduce traffic along Santa Fe. He said that it contains two big moves:

(1) Creation of a truck route system with two major routes serving the Westside: Alameda East serving Westside businesses west of Santa Fe Avenue, and Vernon/Pacific, serving Westside businesses south of Vernon Avenue and east of the railroad corridor; the only trucks allowed to use Santa Fe would be those serving businesses along Santa Fe and between Santa Fe and the railroad corridor.
(2) Lane reduction for Santa Fe south of Vernon Avenue from four lanes to two lanes; because there is no parallel route north of Vernon Avenue, Santa Fe North must remain four lanes, but curbside parking is added by removing most of the median left-turn lanes.

He continued that Alameda East is made more conducive to truck traffic by increasing the green time at intersections so that through traffic on Alameda and on Alameda West can run concurrently. Exclusive turn lanes are also added at the intersection with Vernon Avenue, which will be described in more detail in the following discussion of intersection improvements. He stated that the consultant team had considered an alternative which was to convert Alameda East and West to a couplet, with all northbound traffic on Alameda East and all southbound traffic on Alameda West. The consultants abandoned this alternative when they discovered that the benefit was not worth the large cost and when they realized its implementation would be politically difficult since the City of Los Angeles controls Alameda West.

EVALUATION OF PROPOSED SCENARIO: Phil then described how a computer model was utilized to project traffic flow with the proposed scenario in place. The travel demand model projected a very large reduction of truck traffic on Santa Fe, with the largest diversion being to Alameda East, where trips increased from about 4,000 per day to more than 8,000 per day (still less than

a comfortable capacity of the roadway). Santa Fe south of Vernon Avenue enjoyed a 10,000 trip per day reduction in traffic volume to about 18,000 trips per day, within the capacity for a two-lane roadway; these primarily automobile trips were diverted to several north/south roadways, with the largest diversion to Pacific Boulevard, well within its capacity. Traffic volumes on Santa Fe north of Vernon Avenue decreased very little, because as trucks left the corridor, automobiles from other north/south corridors replaced them.

Bob offered the Committee the opportunity to discuss the proposed scenario and the results of the model run before the team focused in on necessary intersection improvements. Marisa pointed out the plan causes increased truck traffic on 25th Street and on 37th and 38th Streets west of Santa Fe. Kevin noted that drop-off and pick-up of students at the Vernon City School just south of the Santa Fe/Vernon intersection would be more of a problem if Santa Fe were narrowed along the school frontage. Ming expressed concern that the projected increase in truck traffic on Alameda East would make present congestion at the Vernon intersection totally unbearable. Tony stated that two problems must be solved on Alameda East: the congestion at the Vernon intersection, and the center divider on Slauson which limits turning movements into the truck corridor. Bob urged Ming and Tony to hold their concerns until the team presents its proposed intersection improvements.

Jack asked how trucks could be prohibited from using Santa Fe. Phil replied that the team has discussed with the City four possible methods to actually reduce truck use of Santa Fe:

- Communication: Westside businesses and the City would inform truckers and trucking companies of the appropriate routes to utilize to reach their destinations, and the City would work to facilitate alternative access points to properties wherever possible.
- Signage: A plethora of new road signs would direct trucks to truck routes.
- Permitting & Enforcement: Police would initially give warnings to all but local trucks using Santa Fe, but gradually shift to issuing citations. Trucks serving businesses along Santa Fe and between Santa Fe and the railroad corridor would be given passes to allow their use of the street.
- Design: The planting of large shade trees, curbside parking and elimination of the center median turn lanes would discourage truck use and slow down automobile traffic.

Jack, Marisa, Doug and Ming all recommended that one-on-one discussions be held with effected businesses to explain the new system before it is adopted, and to make accommodation when necessary to relieve any substantial hardship. Melissa expressed concern that the proposed lane reduction of Santa Fe south of Vernon would push the traffic problem onto other streets and intersections in Vernon and in cities to the north and south of Vernon.

PROPOSED INTERSECTION IMPROVEMENTS: Phil introduced Deepak Kaushik from Iteris to discuss necessary improvement to key intersections to minimize congestion and delay when the proposed scenario is implemented. Deepak first focused on the intersection of Santa Fe with Vernon/Pacific. He said that the main geometric change was to narrow Santa Fe south of the intersection so as to have only one through lane southbound. The main change in signal phasing is to give priority to turning movements between Santa Fe North and Pacific Boulevard, reflecting the results of the model run showing a significant increase in these turning movements. With these changes, Deepak reported that an intersection operations analysis shows a slight increase in average delay at this intersection, but the resultant levels of service are within acceptable limits for urban intersections within a central business district during peak hours.

Deepak then focused on the intersection of Vernon Avenue with Alameda East and Alameda West. He pointed out that in order to permit Alameda East and West to run concurrently, all turns from Alameda East toward Alameda West would have to be prohibited, as would the right turn from Alameda West northbound to Vernon Avenue eastbound. Since the latter turn is an important movement, a cross-over of the railroad trench would be constructed about 350 feet south of the intersection to allow trucks and autos to move from Alameda West to Alameda East, from which the right turn onto Vernon Avenue would be permitted. Alameda East would be widened at the intersection to add exclusive turn lanes onto the Vernon/Pacific corridor, and pedestrian refuge islands would be constructed between the two Alamedas both north and south of the intersection to permit the pedestrian crossing to be accommodated in two signal phases rather than the current one long phase. With these improvements, Deepak reported that the level of service at the intersection would significantly improve over today's operation, even with the doubling of truck traffic on Alameda East. Specifically, present average delay for northbound vehicles on Alameda East of 77.5 seconds would be reduced to 57.5 seconds, and present average delay of southbound vehicles of 64.3 seconds would be reduced to 36.0 seconds.

Bob opened the meeting for final discussion of the proposal and its ramifications. In response to a question from Kevin, Deepak confirmed that the only major required construction over the railroad trench would be the cross-over 350 feet south of the intersection. Kevin asked if new left-turn lanes would be required along Alameda East at other intersections, and Deepak replied that he believed they would not, as the relatively few turns could be accomplished between oncoming traffic during the long green cycle, but further analysis may be required. Doug asked if acquisition of private property would be required to widen Alameda East at the intersection. Bob replied that none would be required south of the intersection, because the widening would take place along the concrete slab to the west, which lies over the railroad trench, thereby better aligning the traffic lanes north and south of the intersection. North of

the intersection, the widening could be accomplished by narrowing the 10-foot sidewalk to 5 feet and moving one utility pole, but a preferable approach would be to acquire a small sliver of land along the western edge of Doug's property.

Richard and Ming expressed doubt that the present PM peak congestion would be relieved; Ming cited frequent crashes at the intersection, the fact that through northbound traffic must often wait through two or three cycles behind vehicles trying to turn left, and the need for his employees to make a left turn from northbound Alameda East to westbound Vernon Avenue. Deepak stated that present congestion is definitely lessened under the proposed scenario, that safety should be improved because of the reduction in conflicting turning movements, and that the prohibition of the left turn will eliminate the delay of through traffic waiting behind turning vehicles. Phil noted that there is very little truck demand for left turns onto Vernon westbound, but that Ming raises a valid point about automobile demand for left turns which the team will examine further.

Dan emphasized that what was presented today was a conceptual plan, and that detailed engineering will be required before it can be implemented; but the results are certainly encouraging. Jack stated that he had been extremely skeptical about our ability to significantly reduce traffic along Santa Fe, but that the presentation today, particularly about the proposed improvements to Alameda East, had reduced his skepticism. He suggested that over time Ming's employees would find another way to move westbound, perhaps by travelling south to Slauson for that movement. He concluded that regardless of what else comes of this project, the proposed improvements to Alameda East to improve truck movement and reduce congestion stand alone as an important first implementation step.

Future Meeting Schedule:

Phil thanked all of the Committee members for their intense review and comment on the team's transportation proposals. As usual, the Committee members have given important first-hand insight on the issues, problems and opportunities. He pointed out that even though consultants love to come up with win-win solutions, often the plan recommendations result in tradeoffs between successful new opportunities and undesirable negative side effects. He opined that the need to provide long-term stability for the City of Vernon through added population and a broader economic base is a critical issue that is probably worth some tradeoffs. The consultant team hopes to bring the Committee at its next meeting some of these exciting new development opportunities within the action areas identified by the Committee at its last meeting. The team will also present a parking strategy for these new developments and provide recommendations for improving the entire pedestrian experience in the public realm.

Bob stated that he will notify the Committee on the date of the next meeting, which should be sometime within the next 30 days. He adjourned the meeting at 5:20 PM.

Respectfully Submitted,

Bob Paternoster, Moderator