

**MINUTES OF TORRANCE PLANNING COMMISSION
GENERAL PLAN WORKSHOP #5
CIRCULATION & INFRASTRUCTURE ISSUES**

1. CALL TO ORDER

The Torrance Planning Commission convened in a Workshop on Circulation and Infrastructure Issues at 7:09 p.m. on Wednesday, April 13, 2005, in City Council Chambers at Torrance City Hall.

2. SALUTE TO THE FLAG

The Pledge of Allegiance was led by Commissioner LaBouff.

3. ROLL CALL

Present: Commissioners Drevno, Fauk, LaBouff, Uchima and Chairperson Muratsuchi.

Absent: Commissioner Horwich.

Also Present: Planning Manager Isomoto; Planning Associate Cutting; Sr. Planning Associate Chun; Transportation Planner Semaan; Associate Civil Engineer Symons; and Laura Stetson and Diana Gonzalez, Cotton Bridges Associates.

4. GENERAL PLAN PROCESS REVIEW

Laura Stetson, Cotton Bridges Associates (CBA), reported on the progress of the General Plan Update, providing a brief summary of Workshops 1-4. She noted that during the workshops three issues have been raised repeatedly: 1) Quality of life; 2) Traffic issues; and 3) Historic preservation.

Ms. Stetson explained that tonight's workshop focuses on the Circulation Element, which addresses all the ways people get around in Torrance, including vehicular, bicycle and pedestrian traffic, as well as public transportation. She noted that this element also encompasses the City's infrastructure, such as the water and sewer systems.

5. CITYWIDE TRAFFIC STUDY UPDATE

Transportation Planning Manager Semaan reported on the progress of the Citywide Traffic Study currently underway, which is being conducted by RBF Consulting in conjunction with the General Plan update. He noted that holiday traffic counts were collected in December 2004 around Del Amo Mall and other major shopping centers; that traffic counts will continue to be collected throughout the City on weekdays and weekends until school ends in June; and that, in addition, a license-plate survey will be done to identify "pass-through" traffic. He explained that the data will then be used to provide a complete picture of current traffic conditions; forecast near-term and long-term conditions based on developments already approved and projected growth; and identify traffic improvements to mitigate the impact of this growth to an acceptable level.

With regard to traffic flow, Transportation Planner Semaan advised that the City has set as its goal a Level of Service "D". He reported that the tentative completion date for the traffic study is October 2006, however, it is dependant on the completion of Land Use Element of the General Plan update.

6. ISSUES AND OPPORTUNITIES TO BE STUDIED

Ms. Stetson explained that the Commission and the public would be asked to provide input on key circulation issues in Torrance, including areas of congestion, obstacles to pedestrian traffic, and safety concerns, as well as positive comments about things that are working well.

7. COMMISSION/COMMUNITY INPUT

Ms. Stetson invited comments from the Commission.

Commissioner Faulk mentioned Crenshaw Boulevard, between Sepulveda and Torrance Boulevard, as an area of congestion, especially on Tuesdays when there is a Farmer's Market, and related his experience that Del Amo Boulevard, between Crenshaw and Western, and Maple/235th Street, between Sepulveda and Crenshaw, are areas where traffic generally flows freely.

Commissioner Drevno echoed comments about Crenshaw Boulevard, attributing some of the problems to the unusual configuration of traffic signals in the vicinity of the park. She noted that traffic is particularly congested around schools because children rarely walk to school anymore.

Commissioner Uchima reported that the intersection of Skypark and Hawthorne Boulevard is becoming increasingly congested. Noting that traffic backs up for motorists turning left from Skypark onto southbound Hawthorne Boulevard, he suggested the possibility of designating a second left-turn lane.

Commissioner Drevno related her observation that the traffic signal at Crenshaw and Sepulveda does not provide enough time for handicapped students attending SCROC (Southern California Regional Occupational Center) to get across Sepulveda and suggested the possibility of lengthening the "walk" cycle during school hours.

Chairperson Muratsuchi noted that the width of major intersections makes it difficult for pedestrians to cross within the allotted time and suggested that consideration be given to finding a way to make streets more pedestrian-friendly.

Ms. Stetson related her understanding that cities are experimenting with new types of traffic signals and suggested that emerging technology, while expensive, could provide innovative solutions to traffic problems.

Commissioner Faulk reported on a new signal that senses the speed of a vehicle and turns red or green based on that information.

Ms. Stetson asked about issues pertaining to bicycles. Commissioner Drevno, echoed by Commissioner LaBouff, expressed concerns about the safety of the City's curb-lane bike paths.

Commissioner Faulk reported that Artesia Boulevard seems to be moving much better since recent improvements, however, it still becomes congested in the area of South Bay Galleria

Commissioner Drevno noted that eastbound Pacific Coast Highway at Crenshaw, where the roadway narrows from three lanes to two, is a bottleneck that causes traffic backups during morning and evening peak hours.

With regard to long-range plans, Chairperson Muratsuchi stated that he would like to see discussion of extending the Metro rail system to Torrance, maintaining that there will have to be a greater reliance on public transportation in the future. He also suggested the possibility of a light rail or rapid bus system going up and down Hawthorne Boulevard during business hours to help relieve the traffic caused by people leaving their offices to go to lunch and/or shopping.

Commissioner Faulk suggested that it might be helpful to review Torrance Unified School District's transportation element because of the amount of traffic generated by schools. He noted that some districts have come up with some innovative ideas, such as incentive programs for students who walk to school, and one high school designated its parking lot for carpool parking only.

Chairperson Muratsuchi expressed an interest in having definitive statistics on the impact of higher density housing on traffic in Torrance, explaining that despite the fact that the Commission has been routinely presented with traffic studies that show that commercial and retail uses generate more traffic than any kind of residential development, there is a common perception among the public that new condominium developments have had a significant impact on traffic.

Ms. Stetson invited comments from the public.

Robert Feldman, Cathann Street, noted the following areas of traffic congestion: Anza/Del Amo Boulevard; Anza/Sepulveda Boulevard; Sepulveda/Hawthorne Boulevard; Skypark from Hawthorne to Crenshaw; and Lomita Boulevard from Anza to Crenshaw. He requested that traffic counts be taken at recently completed residential developments to confirm that traffic projections were correct so that the public will have more confidence in them. He suggested the possibility of implementing a law requiring developers to pay a fine if the traffic exceeds what their experts have projected.

Irene Griffith, 229th Street, proposed a campaign to improve the attitude of pass-through traffic by posting signs, such as "Smile You're in Torrance" or "You Have a Friend in Torrance." She reported that it's very difficult for pedestrians to get around Del Amo Fashion Center, especially for people in wheelchairs and mothers with strollers. She praised the City's senior taxi program and recommended that the bus system be subsidized rather than insisting that routes be cost-effective so that people will have a greater choice of routes. She called attention to a major cut-through from Western to Hawthorne Boulevard, via 235th Street> Nadine Circle> 229th Street> Madison Street> 230th Street.

Linda Gottschall-Sayed, Donora Avenue, reported that 190th Street and Anza is a dangerous intersection for pedestrians because at the same time there is a left-turn arrow for westbound motorists there is a "walk" sign for pedestrians in their path.

Tom Brewer, Evalyn Avenue, reported that Anza Avenue has become a major artery, with frequent backups at Torrance Boulevard, Sepulveda Boulevard, and Lomita Boulevard, however, Hawthorne Boulevard functions pretty well due to its synchronized signals. He suggested that consideration be given to installing red light cameras, which do a good job of keeping intersections clear. He related his positive experience with free bus service in Park City, Utah, which eliminated the need for a rental car, and indicated that he would be more inclined to take the bus if bus stops were more convenient to his neighborhood. He explained that he is more affected by residential traffic, as opposed to commercial/retail/industrial traffic, because this is the traffic that travels with him to and from work and on weekend errands. He noted that bike lanes could be lost as traffic lanes are reconfigured to accommodate more traffic.

John Mirassou, Anastasi Development, stated that his company has been exploring the possibility of bringing a commuter rail line into Torrance, noting that Anastasi owns property at Del Amo and Prairie, which is next to railroad tracks that traverse Torrance and Redondo Beach and end up at the green line station. He reported that he has discussed this with the Metropolitan Transit Authority (MTA) and they support the idea, but no funding is available in the foreseeable future. He suggested that consideration be given to a public/private partnership whereby developers would join forces with the cities of Torrance and Redondo Beach to provide a rail line or rapid bus system next to high density housing. He indicated that his company is very interested in developing a state-of-the-art transit village, which would combine restaurants, shopping and services along with high-density housing.

Ms. Stetson noted that Torrance has a lot of railroad tracks and spurs due to its industrial history and suggested that it's important to look at the opportunity they might present before the land they are on is developed and these opportunities are lost.

Steve Warner, Delos Drive, stated that the closure of neighborhood schools combined with the elimination of school buses has contributed to the increase in traffic. He commented on traffic problems associated with exiting Robinson Helicopter employees, who leave en masse when their shift ends every afternoon. He reported that the intersection of PCH and Crenshaw is a disaster where motorists run red lights and turn left from through-lanes out of frustration and expressed concerns that the situation will worsen if the proposed golf course is built on the landfill site.

Kevin Riley, Loftyview Drive, echoed comments about Crenshaw and PCH and suggested that the situation could be improved if Rolling Hills would agree to widen Palos Verdes Drive to take some of the pressure off this intersection.

Ed Strobel, Richville Drive, stated that a combination of residential and commercial development has caused a significant increase in traffic and parking problems and expressed concerns that the City was caving in to economic interests at the expense of residents' quality of life. He also expressed concerns that the traffic study is not scheduled to be complete until October 2006, maintaining that this information should be available to the public before any changes are made to the General Plan.

Ms. Stetson explained that the traffic study will coordinate with the General Plan update; that traffic counts will be completed by June 2005; and that this information will be posted on general plan website.

Mark Chen, Talisman Street, suggested that it would be helpful to survey bus ridership to find out who is riding the bus and whether the buses are on schedule. He related his experience that the buses are either too early or too late and that some bus drivers are discourteous and give people the wrong information. He stated that traffic around middle schools, such as Jefferson, is very congested and reported problems crossing the street at the intersection of Hawthorne and Carson Street because of motorists who fail to yield the right of way to pedestrians. He noted that motorists often fail to stop for emergency vehicles and suggested the possibility of installing a video camera on fire trucks so those who fail to stop can be cited.

Charles L. Deemer, Talisman Street, stated that all major cities have the same problem with traffic congestion but there is nothing that can be done because there is no room to build more streets or widen existing ones. He contended that traffic-calming efforts simply shift the traffic from one street to another and that the only real solution is to stop all development.

Greg Robinson, Arlington Avenue, reported that speeding is a common problem in the downtown area, which endangers pedestrians and makes it difficult for residents to exit their driveways, and proposed the installation of speed bumps or some other device to slow traffic. With regard to schools, he suggested that school boundaries may need to be redefined because children are not always assigned to the school closest to their home. He expressed concerns that people are being allowed to split lots in the downtown area and replace one 900 square-foot home with two 1800 square-foot condominiums. He voiced his opinion that it is unsafe to ride a bike on any of the City's thoroughfares.

Kurt Nelson, JCC Homes, pointed out that it's impossible to freeze everything in a time warp and the General Plan update provides an opportunity to plan for future growth. He stressed the need to locate future residential developments near major employment/commercial centers and noted that pedestrian-friendly housing tends to be higher density, as does more affordable housing. He maintained that people are entitled to develop their property unless someone wants to buy it at market price and expressed concerns that the State of California could take the planning process out of the hands of local governments should cities fail to provide for orderly growth.

Charles Michel Deemer, Talisman Street, related his understanding that Crenshaw Boulevard could be widened to four lanes in each direction from the San Diego Freeway to the southern boundary of the City and suggested that developers who build projects along this corridor should bear the cost. With regard to extending the green line rail system, he noted that there is a railroad right-of-way along Madrona that could accommodate this extension and allow for stops near City Hall, the L.A. County Courthouse and Del Amo Fashion Center. He suggested the possibility of clustering medical buildings around senior housing with a fixed-route to transport seniors to medical appointments.

Alvin Smithhart, Crenshaw Boulevard, contended that the City has not made enough of an effort to synchronize traffic signals to expedite traffic and as a result, motorists must wait through 3 to 4 cycles before they can make a left turn at busy intersections. He reported that he is frequently disturbed by drivers with loud "boom boxes" even though the Vehicle Code prohibits noise from being emitted more than 50 feet from a vehicle and expressed concerns about the City's lack of enforcement.

Arthur Evans, Arvada Street, suggested that the City meet with the Torrance Unified School District to find out how they intend to accommodate additional students that will be generated by new developments, estimating that there could be 140 new students in the West High area. He related his observation that most schools are already using portable classrooms due to overcrowding and expressed concerns that the lack of adequate school facilities could be a major problem. Referring to written material submitted for the record, he estimated that there will be another 1200 vehicles on the road in the vicinity of Hawthorne and Torrance Boulevard once already approved residential developments have been completed. He proposed adding a second right-turn lane on westbound Torrance Boulevard at Hawthorne Boulevard and Anza Avenue. He commented on traffic congestion and parking problems in the vicinity of Little Company of Mary Hospital and the Albertson's shopping center. He voiced concerns about the impact on traffic once the Del Amo Boulevard extension is completed, particularly in the West High area. He related his understanding that funding has already been allocated to enlarge four intersections in Torrance, including Hawthorne/Sepulveda, Maple/Torrance Boulevard, and Anza/190th Street and expressed concerns about the impact on adjacent shopping centers. He proposed relocating the recently closed Transit Center at Del Amo Fashion Center to either 208th Street/Crenshaw or Madrona Avenue/Del Amo Boulevard.

The Commission recessed from 9:13 p.m. to 9:20 p.m.

Mary Ann Reis, Engracia Avenue, reported that Cravens/Engracia is a very dangerous intersection; recommended that stop signs be installed at all five points of the intersection of Arlington/El Dorado/Engracia; and requested that the crosswalk at Arlington and Engracia be restored for safety reasons, noting that a water control valve is missing its cover at this location.

Liz Fobes, Andreo Avenue, suggested that bicycle lanes be designed to accommodate electric vehicles used by those with limited mobility in addition to bicycles. To encourage more use of the City's bus system, she recommended that buses run with more frequency and that the distance between the stops be reduced so that they will be more convenient for the aging population. She also suggested that the City revisit its policy of refusing federal and state funding because these funds could be used to improve transit and the infrastructure. She requested that traffic improvements in the downtown area be historically sensitive and proposed a one-way traffic grid to relieve congestion on narrow streets and speed bumps to slow traffic in this area. She recommended that developers be required to incorporate pedestrian and bike paths throughout new developments to open them up to the community and make them less dense and forbidding.

Alvin Smithhart reiterated his concerns about loud music coming from vehicles on Crenshaw Boulevard in the vicinity of his home. Chairperson Muratsuchi noted that Mr. Smithhart's comments would be forwarded to the Police Department, which is the proper agency to address this issue.

Dick Perkins, Christine Avenue, reported the following congested intersections and offered suggestions to improve traffic flow: 1) 190th Street and Inglewood Avenue – he proposed a double left-turn lane on westbound 190th Street at this intersection; 2) Anza and Lomita Boulevard – he proposed a double left-turn lane on southbound Anza or a lead/lag left-turn signal at this intersection; and 3) Crenshaw

Boulevard/Jefferson/Plaza del Amo – he proposed the elimination of the signal at Jefferson or realigning Jefferson to intersect with Plaza del Amo. He echoed concerns about congestion at Lomita Boulevard/Crenshaw and Lomita Boulevard/Hawthorne. He suggested that a map of turning restrictions would help identify problem intersections because these restrictions are typically put in place to thwart cut-through traffic caused by motorists seeking to circumvent congested intersections. He proposed that traffic signals on parallel arterials be synchronized in opposite directions, i.e. Torrance Boulevard synchronized for westbound traffic and Carson Street synchronized for eastbound traffic to allow motorists to travel at a consistent speed without stops. As an alternative, he proposed making arterials one-way streets, which would allow motorists to make right and left turns without interrupting the flow of traffic. He recommended the implementation of the following capital improvement projects: 1) the interconnection of Jefferson/Plaza del Amo across the railroad right-of-way to provide an east/west route between Sepulveda and Carson Street; 2) the Del Amo Boulevard extension; and 3) the realignment of eastbound Torrance Boulevard between Cabrillo and the railroad bridge to eliminate the S-curve.

Ed Strobel questioned why bus turnouts are not utilized at congested intersections, particularly on Pacific Coast Highway at Crenshaw. Transportation Planning Manager Semaan explained that it is very difficult for buses to merge into traffic from turnouts and they can cause significant delays in bus service.

8. SUMMARY AND NEXT STEPS

Ms. Stetson summarized areas of concern and reviewed the schedule for upcoming workshops.

9. ADJOURNMENT

At 10:05 p.m., the meeting was adjourned to the Planning Commission meeting of April 20, 2005.

Approved as Written September 14, 2005 s/ Sue Herbers, City Clerk
