

RE: NCWP Recommends Immediate Reversal of the Lane Reductions in Playa del Rey

Dear Councilmember Bonin:

We, the Neighborhood Council of Westchester/Playa, ask that you immediately reverse the lane reductions in Playa del Rey and implement other strategies to improve the safety, efficiency, and accessibility of our roads for pedestrians, cyclists, and vehicles. As representatives of your constituents and your elected advisory body, we believe strongly that this is the only remedy that addresses the constant, voluminous, community outcry on this issue.

In the history of our Neighborhood Council, no single issue has energized members of our community to become active and involved in such significant numbers. Although perhaps a well-intentioned effort to increase safety, it is impossible to overstate the frustration currently experienced by the majority of residents and stakeholders in Playa del Rey following the alteration of the streets and traffic patterns implemented two months ago.

Residents are experiencing significantly increased and oppressive traffic congestion, travel time, and collisions at all times of day – not just rush hour – and this is during summer, when school is out and we typically have the lowest traffic volume of the year. This takes precious time away from being with family with no real identifiable connection to an increase in safety that makes the sacrifice worthwhile.

Understand that we are all in favor of increased pedestrian, bicyclist, and vehicle safety goals of Vision Zero, but the exclusive use of lane reductions rather than alternative options cannot be afforded by our PDR community – least of all our PDR businesses. Furthermore, neither Pershing Drive, nor Culver Blvd. nor Jefferson Blvd. was prioritized by Vision Zero as being one of the “40 high injury corridors in the city” as you cited on NBC last week.

After two months and some attempted modifications, the massively overwhelming opposition in both our business and residential communities far outweighs the limited support we have heard in favor of the changes.

LOCAL BUSINESS IS SUFFOCATING DUE TO THE ROAD DIET:

Most urgently, our businesses which are the key to a vibrant Playa del Rey community are suffocating because of the oppressive traffic congestion and limited parking access that deters customers from patronizing their establishments during the “pilot” project. More than a dozen Playa del Rey businesses met with you last week to tell you firsthand how their businesses are suffering severe economic losses directly related to the “PDR Road Diet.” They are not satisfied with private apologies and are outraged that no consideration was given to the impact on business before the Road Diet was implemented. There are very real problems: Restaurants are seeing significant reductions in diners; gas stations cannot achieve minimum sales targets to meet their contractual obligations and retail businesses are experiencing severe losses of sales volume. We share their dire concern that the perception of Playa del Rey as a destination for business and pleasure is being permanently and irreparably damaged with every passing day. They reportedly requested immediate reversal of the roadway changes made two months ago, a request we share because we cannot wait for the Safe Streets Initiative Task Force to meet and then start considering what to do.

OPEN AND TRANSPARENT PROCESS:

People are frustrated - not just by the changes, but at the feeling that their voices are not being heard. We were told that the Safe Streets pilot project would be evaluated at 1-, 3-, and 6-month intervals; through the PDR traffic and road safety survey your office is sponsoring (http://www.11thdistrict.com/preventing_the_next_tragedy); and a Town Hall meeting. To date:

1. **Community Meeting** - The community was grossly disappointed by the indefinite postponement of the LADOT Open House merely days before it was to occur. The July 29th community meeting would have been an opportunity for those in support of and opposed to the road changes to express first-hand accounts of the Safe Streets impacts, as well as hear directly from LADOT on the plans for PDR streets in the name of safety. The NCWP asks that you ensure the LADOT community meeting is rescheduled within the next 30 days, and that there is a mechanism for public testimony with a timeline for responsiveness to their comments.

2. **Results From CD11's Playa del Rey Safety Improvements - Initial Feedback Survey**-You provided a mechanism for the community to register their opinion and suggestions through the survey sponsored by CD11 (http://www.11thdistrict.com/preventing_the_next_tragedy). However, as of this writing, the survey remains open and you have not revealed the results. We are concerned also that in discussions with constituents, there needs more outreach to inform community members of this survey including mailings as not everyone is internet connected and a timeline for when the final results of this survey including not only a summary but complete raw data will be released.

3. **Online Surveys of Local Residents Show Overwhelmingly Opposition to the Road Diet** – While we do not have the results of your online survey, we do have two others conducted on the Nextdoor website for Playa del Rey residents. One survey had over 400 participants and a second one almost 200 participants and each found by a ratio of more than 4 to 1 that locals (not South Bay commuters) do not support the Road Diet. While neither these surveys nor your survey are in any way scientific, the comments posted in the hundreds make it clear local residents want the Road Diet immediately removed and reversed.

4. **CD11 Safe Streets for PDR Task Force** – It would have been a great idea to have had such a task force meeting in public before implementing the road restrictions. After rolling back the Road Diet changes, such a task force can be helpful in assisting LADOT with ideas for safety, efficiency and accessibility without lane closures. But, we are concerned that the proposed membership selection process for the Task Force needs to be open, transparent, and balanced. The concern is to prevent the perception of creating a closed group comprised of hand-picked members to avoid public comment or “stack the deck” toward a pre-ordained outcome. We ask that the Neighborhood Council is given representation on the Task Force since they were created to specifically to advise the City Council and are comprised of elected representatives. If the community does not feel they were provided a fair and open process, they will likely not accept the outcome. We are further concerned that waiting 90 days for the task force to meet and make recommendations before any action is taken is another means of delay.

5. NCWP Safe Streets PDR June 2017 Motion - With your staff present, the NCWP passed the following motion on June 6, 2017:

Safe Streets PDR Motion to: 1) Request the implementation of mitigation measures designed to lessen the impact of the lane reductions on Culver Blvd. and Vista del Mar on the areas of upper Playa del Rey and Westchester; and, 2) Request that the Los Angeles Department of Transportation and/or the CD11 Council Office immediately provide a copy of any traffic study done in advance of the commencement of the lane closures included in the Safe Streets Initiative; and, a) Provide any available data regarding traffic on the community streets impacted by the Safe Streets Initiative for the area bounded by Sepulveda to the East, Imperial to the South, Culver to the North and Vista del Mar to the West; and, b) Provide a detailed plan for traffic enforcement for the next 90 days; and, c) Provide written explanation of the feasibility of reducing Vista del Mar to one lane each way commencing South of Imperial Highway; and, d) Respond in writing to all community suggestions and questions given at this meeting; e) create an Ad Hoc Committee to develop alternative and immediate mitigation measures for the Safe Streets Initiative; f) and set metrics for the success of the Vista del Mar pilot restriping project.

Although your Field Deputy, Mobility Director and DOT representative were all present at the June Board Meeting when this motion was passed, by this letter, we formally request for the information set forth in the motion as well as other information requested herein.

CRITERIA/COMPONENTS OF SUCCESS:

Although labeled as a “pilot” project, the criteria for success (accept, reject, modify) have yet to be shared. We believe that **the evaluation criteria should be safety, efficiency and accessibility.**

a) **Safety** – Grade “F”. We ask that you implement all parts of the Vision Zero “toolkit” to improve safety without first resorting to removing traffic lanes. We can keep traffic moving while protecting pedestrians and cyclists at the same time. LADOT recently gave testimony relating to Vista del Mar listing a plethora of recommended safety improvements -- without suggesting removing lanes in the name of safety. We strongly support better lighting, more crosswalks, pedestrian bridges, speed limit reductions and traffic enforcement. These and other safety improvements are lesser impactful ways of providing greater pedestrian safety that should be used first before taking lanes away. In the words of the LADOT official who spoke at our June 6th NCWP Board meeting, “We did what we were told to do by the resident group. We didn't study it.”

We want to know exactly how LADOT is monitoring the number of accidents on Culver/Jefferson/Pershing/VDM - both before and after implementation of the changes. A total of 24 accidents have been documented since the commencement of the Road Diet over two months and counting - some with injuries. By comparison, you have cited to an annual average of 11 accidents.

LAPD data is different but show accidents nearly doubled year over year. From May 21, 2017 through July 31, 2017 compared to the same period in 2016 there was an increase in accidents

from five in 2016 to nine in 2017 as reported on Pershing Drive between Imperial Hwy and Jefferson Blvd together with Culver Blvd between Vista Del Mar and Jefferson.

Both sets of data show that there have been more accidents after the Road Diet was implemented than before. If these statistics continue, it means Playa del Rey is experiencing a massive increase in accidents -- contrary to the stated intent of the project.

Further, a sad reality is that drunk driving is a huge part of the risk to safety and yet, removing traffic lanes does nothing to solve the drunk driving problem. The City's own Vision Zero Literature Review from March 2016 says that "Driving under the influence is a common contributing factor for collisions resulting in severe and fatal injury." We need more law enforcement to reduce the severity of this problem, not fewer traffic lanes.

The impact on commuters is very real as demonstrated by their expressed outrage on social media and in every outlet on which they can find a voice from radio to newspaper. Unless and until it can be proven that there is a demonstrable improvement in safety, lane reductions cannot be viewed as a success. Presently, at best they can be characterized as counterproductive.

b) **Efficiency** – Grade "F". The perceived portrayal of safety versus commute time is an inflammatory argument. Instead, the focus should be on reducing congestion without increasing risk to pedestrians or bicyclists. Time spent commuting takes away from family - and it does so each and every day of every week of the year. The tax payers recent passage of the multi-billion dollar Measure M to reduce Los Angeles congestion should be used to this end, not to reduce capacity and increase congestion. As stated previously, we fully support and need safety/protective measures. But if the issue is speed, then address it directly with law enforcement placed regularly and strategically throughout Playa del Rey. Removing lanes to reduce speed is ineffectual because it produces gridlock (as evidenced over the past two months). Gridlock is not safer nor is it better for the environment.

We can find better ways of slowing traffic without turning streets into parking lots. Surely speed reduction alone cannot be considered the determinant of success. If that is the metric of success, then 100% gridlock is the same as 100% better! We do have families to get home to and jobs to pay for the rent so we must be able to carry on our lives in an efficient manner.

In the further interest of efficiency, for many years the lower Playa del Rey business community has sought increased parking on Culver Boulevard. LADOT must investigate options for angled compact vehicle parking to provide parking spaces in close proximity to businesses on Culver. Angled parking was apparently dismissed early on because of the space required for two bike lanes. As discussed below, immediate efforts should be implemented to safely connect bicyclists to beaches, Playa Vista, and the extant seven miles of bike paths in Ballona. Congestion reduction and increased parking should be laudable goals - not enemies of safety. They should coexist through implementation of other safety measures as identified above.

c) **Accessibility** – Grade "F". Unrelated to safety, improvements to access for bicycles and pedestrians is a good thing, but must be weighed against the impact it creates. For every family

benefitting from better bike access there are scores of families who are losing precious time together to longer commutes. But we believe that in the project area we can accommodate improved access without removing traffic lanes (once restored).

The Ballona Bike Path and the Beach Bike Path together provide an uninterrupted path from Palos Verdes all the way to Culver City where the bicyclist can transit without ever once crossing a roadway with vehicles. A centerpiece of our efforts should be to make the Ballona path safely accessible to Playa Vista residents. If designed correctly, it would provide a safer, and more relaxing bike ride to the beach. Many helpful suggestions from the community have been made to achieve this “accessibility” goal instead of bike lanes through the wetlands at a fraction of the societal and economic cost of increased commute times.

CONCLUSION:

There was no sudden need to close down lanes on Pershing and Culver. Indeed, as noted above, the City of Los Angeles identified that these streets are not the priority for attention. The irony is that some of the support for the Road Diet has been from those who want a vital thriving downtown Playa del Rey yet the changes made are having the immediate and opposite effect. The reversal of Vista del Mar lane closures addresses the concerns of the South Bay while leaving your own constituents adversely impacted. However, the cut-through traffic on residential streets because of lane reductions remains a significant and dangerous problem. There is an overwhelming groundswell of opposition to the PDR pilot project as expressed to the NCWP. There is simply no question that the majority of the local community does not like it as it stands and wants the lanes restored without delay.

We are confident that you and your staff will respond to our questions and requests and facilitate other City agencies in being timely and responsive. More urgently, we hope that the flexibility you have already shown will be extended to reversing course and improving the planning, evaluation (both pre- and post-intervention), and proactive and transparent communication regarding the PDR Safe Streets initiative. The NCWP and your constituents look forward to collaborating with you in an alternate improved and comprehensive means of addressing safety, efficiency and accessibility other than the current pilot project reduced lanes.

Sincerely,

The Neighborhood Council of Westchester/Playa

CC: Seleta Reynolds, LADOT

Mayor Garcetti