



City of Santa Barbara
Transportation & Circulation Committee
Staff Report

DATE: February 27, 2020

TO: Transportation and Circulation Committee Members

FROM: Jessica W. Grant, Supervising Transportation Planner

SUBJECT: Milpas Street Corridor Planning Effort

RECOMMENDATION: That the Transportation Circulation Committee recommend that the Milpas Corridor Plan is consistent with the City's Vision Zero Strategy, Circulation Element, and Pedestrian Master Plan.

SUMMARY:

A major pavement maintenance project is being planned for Milpas Street. The pavement maintenance project is a good opportunity to reevaluate the Milpas Corridor's design features and make adjustments based on the City's master planning policies and Council's Vision Zero Strategy. After completing a thorough public outreach process, staff is coming to the Transportation Circulation Committee (TCC) with the proposed Milpas Corridor Plan (Plan) for review. Staff will also be taking the Plan to City Council for direction regarding an Active Transportation Planning (ATP) grant.

BACKGROUND:

Milpas Street is one of the City's main principal arterial streets carrying approximately 20,000 vehicles per day, and serving as primary access to Highway 101 and the Eastside, Lower Eastside, Eucalyptus, Riviera and East Beach neighborhoods. Milpas Street is one of twenty-three corridors highlighted as a Vision Zero High Priority Corridor in the recently City Council adopted Vision Zero Strategy, due to the pattern of collisions associated with distracted driving. In fall 2019, the City Public Works Department initiated a bilingual outreach effort to receive community feedback about walking, biking, traffic, parking, and lighting along Milpas Street between Canon Perdido and the Milpas Roundabout at US Highway 101, where the majority of the collisions have occurred. The City is requesting community feedback in advance of the planned pavement maintenance project and the potential for grant funding from the state's Active Transportation Program Cycle 5, which will be released in March 2020. The combination of the planned pavement project and potential grant funding present an opportunity to install safety enhancements along the Milpas corridor.

COMMUNITY OUTREACH:

On October 1, 2019, the City’s Public Works Department held a Listening Workshop to discover community desires and needs for the future of Milpas Street, from Highway 101 to Canon Perdido Street. Specifically, City staff requested feedback about three themes: 1) Walking and Biking, 2) Driving and Parking, and 3) Lighting. Based on these themes, feedback was sought on what is working, what is not working, what needs to change, and what needs to stay the same. A follow up community survey was also publicized during October and November 2019, asking the same questions that were posed at the Listening Workshop. The City received 224 survey responses.

Below is a brief summary of the community feedback highlights:

| Themes | Community Feedback Highlights |
|----------------------------|---|
| <i>Walking and Biking</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Varied responses on crossing and pedestrian flashers • Hard to cross Milpas Roundabout • Sidewalks are narrow and in poor condition • Bikes and vehicles do not mix well on Milpas • Concern of Milpas being a speedway if bike lanes are removed • Bike infrastructure is inconsistent but people like the bike lanes • More bike parking needed |
| <i>Driving and Parking</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Signal timing is good • Need for left hand turn arrows • Need better visibility of driveways • General consensus not to reduce parking • Concerns about commercial loading in center lane of Milpas • Varied responses on number of vehicular lanes |
| <i>Lighting</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Responses varied on lighting • General consensus that lighting should be improved at intersections • Lighting fixtures should be consistent |

Based on community feedback and the Vision Zero Traffic Safety Analysis, the City held an Approach Workshop on January 30, 2020, to review proposed solutions. The goal of the Approach Workshop was to gain community insights into the approaches in order to fine-tune the proposed solutions.

PROPOSED PLAN:

The proposed approaches focused on safer crossings, enhanced street lighting at intersections, tree management and sidewalk widening, left turn arrows, and lane reconfigurations, which are discussed below.

Safer Crossings

City Staff recommended crosswalk enhancements along each intersection along Milpas Street from Canon Perdido to the Milpas Roundabout (Attachment 1). As part of the upcoming paving project, all of the intersections will have high visibility ladder style crosswalks. An additional pedestrian flasher on a mast arm at the intersection of Milpas and Yanonali Street was also recommended to increase pedestrian visibility along this four lane section of Milpas Street. Two new pedestrian activated flashing beacons are also recommended to be installed at the Milpas roundabout's exit points at the freeway on ramp and at Carpinteria Street. Although not along Milpas Street, Staff also recommended high visibility ladder style crosswalks along Haley at Quarantina Street and Nopal Street intersections along with the addition of potential curb extensions and/or pedestrian flashers. All of the safer crossing recommendations received majority support from the workshop participants.

Enhanced Street Lighting at Intersections

In line with safer crossings, City Staff suggested adding two additional street lights to every intersection to highlight all legs of the intersection (Attachment 2). The additional street lights would be the slim line street light, which currently is the main streetlight fixture along Milpas Street. The majority of the workshop participants supported the additional lighting.

Tree Management and Sidewalk Widening

The City received varied responses on tree management and sidewalk widening during the Listening Workshop and follow up community survey. Comments ranged from, "do not touch any of the trees and just repair the sidewalks", to "remove all the trees, widen sidewalks, and plant new trees". Staff suggested a phased approach that involves curb extensions at the intersections and curb realignment along each block to accommodate larger planter areas for some of the existing trees (Attachment 3). When a tree is ready to be removed (removal could fluctuate 10-30 years or so), a new tree would be planted and then the sidewalk would be widened to approximately 7 feet to 8 feet. This new widened sidewalk would not meet the Pedestrian Master Plan Guidelines of 15 feet, which consists of a 0.5 foot curb zone, 4 foot furnishing/planting zone, 8 foot through pedestrian zone, and 2.5 foot frontage zone. That said, the sidewalk will be more in conformance with the Pedestrian Master Plan and will be functional over time, while still preserving the City's urban forest. Approximately 2 to 3 on street parking spaces would be removed per side for each block. Workshop respondents were favorable towards this phased approach in concept. More outreach on specific design details for each block is necessary if grant monies are received for design. Please note that repair to the existing sidewalks that are uplifted by existing trees is included in the upcoming paving project.

Left Turn Arrows

Many community members requested dedicated left turn arrows along Milpas Street for easier transition to neighborhood streets. The City's Traffic Engineer confirmed left turn arrows at the intersections of Milpas Street and Cota, Gutierrez, and Montecito Streets can work without significantly affecting signal timing (Attachment 4). Workshop respondents varied on their responses. Some respondents were concerned that signal timing would cause more congestion. Other workshop respondents supported left turn arrows and thought all road users could benefit from assigned right of way of left turning vehicles and slower traffic. City Staff felt there was not enough support to move forward with this solution.

Lane Reconfigurations

Potential lane reconfiguration changes were presented at Milpas and Cota, Haley, and Mason Intersections (Attachment 5). At Milpas and Cota Streets, there is a potential to add a southbound lane between Ortega and Cota Streets. This lane configuration will lessen the southbound queue towards the freeway. This will also mean that the on street bike lane would need to be removed along that block. The lane configuration at Haley Street will allow for a southbound left onto Haley and a dedicated northbound right turn onto Haley Street. The lane configuration at Milpas and Mason Streets will allow for a dedicated left turn from the neighborhood street of Mason onto Milpas. This lane configuration requires parking removal of approximately 5 to 6 spaces. Workshop participants had varied responses and the lane configuration was not unanimously supported at any of these intersections.

FUNDING STRATEGY:

The upcoming paving project will install the high visibility ladder style crosswalks and will repair the existing sidewalks that are uplifted by trees. The remaining safety enhancements consisting of curb extensions, curb realignments, and street lighting will require grant funding. The City plans to go to City Council in March 2020 requesting a Resolution of Support to seek grant funding for the safety enhancements along Milpas Street. The City will not proceed with left turn arrows or new lane configurations at this time and these enhancements are not crucial to implement from a safety perspective.

POLICY CONSISTENCY ANALYSIS:

The proposed safety enhancements are in alignment with the Circulation Element's and Pedestrian Master Plan's goals to increase walking by providing safe and efficient paths of travel. The additional intersection lighting, high visibility ladder style crosswalks, and the additional pedestrian activated rapid flashing beacons will be consistent with the Pedestrian Master Plan's Policy 1.2, which calls for improved pedestrian safety and comfort at intersections. The proposed safety enhancements are consistent with the Vision Zero Strategy to reduce severe collisions and deaths in the City.

ATTACHMENTS:

1. Proposed Crosswalks Improvements
2. Proposed Lighting Upgrades
3. Proposed Phased Approach to Tree Management and Sidewalk Widening
4. Potential Left Turn Arrows
5. Potential Lane Configuration