



9/7/2012

VIA EMAIL

Dana L. Allen, Associate Planner
City of Sacramento, Community Development Department
Environmental Planning Services
300 Richards Boulevard, Third Floor
Sacramento, CA 95834

RE: Freeport Boulevard Bike Lanes Project Draft Focused Environmental Impact Report (State Clearinghouse Number: 2012012028)

Dear Ms. Allen:

WALKSACRAMENTO has reviewed the Draft Focused Environmental Impact Report for the Freeport Boulevard Bike Lanes Project and appreciates the opportunity to provide our comments. The effort to provide a more balanced transportation system on Freeport Boulevard while improving the pedestrian environment is laudable.

Transportation projects that lead to more walking and active travel are critical to our community's future. Human beings need moderate exercise, such as walking, for about 30 minutes a day in order to prevent the development of chronic disease and overweight. Only 38% of the population in the Sacramento region is active at this minimal level, often due to limitations placed by a built environment not suited to walking and other types of physically active travel. A 30-minute walk is about one and a half miles. If more people could obtain regular exercise by walking and bicycling to their regular destinations, in lieu of driving, it could yield significant health improvements to the resident population of this area. Reduced driving would also decrease vehicle emissions and the prevalence of asthma, cardiovascular disease, and other air pollution-related conditions. More trips by walking and bicycling could help reduce the current expensive burden on the health care system of providing medical care to more and more people with chronic conditions due to inactivity and poor air quality.

The changes proposed by the Freeport Bike Lanes Project will provide several pedestrian benefits. Foremost, much of the bike riding that now takes place on the sidewalks should shift to the street when the street is made safer for bicycling. Walking along Freeport Boulevard blocks will also be more pleasant because noise and vehicle emissions experienced on the sidewalk will be reduced as traffic lanes will be further away. The reduction in traffic lanes on Freeport Boulevard will reduce the number of potential conflicts with cars as pedestrians try to cross the road.

Pedestrian crossings may not improve overall with the project, though. The project proposes changing the traffic signal timing to 100-second cycles from the current 70-second cycles. This change is proposed to improve the traffic flow through the corridor by reducing vehicle queuing and improving the operation of the signalized intersections. Overall, the improvement obtained by the 100-second cycle time for vehicles is minor, but the impact to pedestrians could be significant. However, the traffic study did not analyze pedestrian operations at the 100-second cycle nor the 70-second cycle conditions.

The increased traffic signal cycle time from 70 seconds to 100 seconds could cause the following impacts to pedestrians. One of the results of the analysis is traffic speeds are higher at the studied intersections and the average vehicle speed is higher. Higher speeds can result in more collisions and more severe injuries and fatalities, especially at mid-block crossings. The 100-second cycle time may also reduce the frequency of gaps in the traffic, making opportunities to cross less frequent and increasing the number of risky crossings attempted. Some pedestrians may also make unsafe crossings against the red light at the signalized intersections if the waiting time is too long. Crossing the unsignalized side streets that intersect with Freeport Boulevard may also be riskier as impatient drivers waiting for gaps in the traffic focus solely on cars rather than all modes on the street.

WALKSacramento requests that the traffic signals continue to operate on a 70-second cycle time until a traffic study that analyzes pedestrian operations is conducted. Such a study should examine pedestrian crossing opportunities at the signalized intersections and the major unsignalized intersections, including gap frequency and length in time, vehicle speeds, and waiting time at signals.

It appears the traffic analysis used 4 feet per second for the pedestrian speed. We question why that number was used when the City of Sacramento Pedestrian Safety Guidelines uses 3.5 feet per second.

The Draft Focused Environmental Impact Report provides quite a bit of information on the Freeport Boulevard Bike Lanes Project but is lacking in the analysis needed to make an informed opinion about the potential impacts to pedestrians. Thank you for this opportunity to comment and we forward to hearing your response.

WALKSacramento is working to support increased physical activity such as walking and bicycling in local neighborhoods as well as helping to create community environments that support walking and bicycling. The benefits include improved physical fitness, less motor vehicle traffic congestion, better air quality, and a stronger sense of cohesion and safety in local neighborhoods.

Sincerely,

Chris Holm
Project Analyst