



February 26, 2014

Mayor John Mirisch
Vice Mayor Lili Bosse
Councilmember William W. Brien
Councilmember Julian Gold
Councilmember Nancy Krasne

Dear Members of the City Council:

As an appointed North Santa Monica Boulevard Blue-Ribbon Committee member, I count myself privileged for being included in preliminary discussions about the future of our signature boulevard. The design choices that Council makes for this key regional corridor will affect how we use it, and how we will enjoy it, for decades to come.

In committee we heard arguments for and against various concepts. I want join my fellow committee members in supporting both an incremental expansion of the curb-to-curb width; the striping of a state-approved bicycle lane in each direction; and the inclusion of landscaped medians.

Our consultants highlighted to the committee the practical efficiencies of expansion: shorter timeline and lower cost among them. We agreed. Those who choose to travel by bicycle also cited the safety value of a separated lane, and here too the committee agreed. And we found broad consensus that we want to see a more beautiful corridor.

Looking back at the process, we spent most of our time focused on several issues so I would like to touch on them briefly here.

Impacts. Several committee members and members of the public suggested that expansion would negatively affect adjacent residents. Increased noise in particular was mentioned as a problem. But the committee ultimately rejected that argument because the necessary 4-6 feet of width was marginal (with respect to corridor width). Crucially, our consultants told us that expansion would place motor traffic no closer to adjacent homes than today, and no additional traffic volume is anticipated. Thus there should be no negative noise impacts after construction concludes.

We heard from Reverend Monsignor Thomas Welbers (Church of the Good Shepherd) that the extra width - and the addition of a bicycle lane he said - would actually benefit his congregation. The greater margin would allow emergency vehicles improved access to his church. At the same time, our consultants noted that the dashed-lines of the bicycle lane as it approaches each intersection would give right-turning motorists an opportunity to ease out of traffic to make their turn.

Better Bike

Mark Elliot, Organizer
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To: City Council
Re: Santa Monica Boulevard design

Parkway character. City Council identified as a project priority the maintenance of the character of the parkway. The committee agreed, but in the end wasn't unduly concerned because no significant change in boulevard function was ever on the table. Unlike past proposals to expand the boulevard for the addition of an additional traffic lane, here we're talking only about a few additional feet of surface and the possible addition of a bicycle lane. By contrast, travel lanes measure about 12' and do undermine character.

Moreover, from the beginning there was support for a landscaped median. As our consultant advised, any incremental loss of grass would be compensated (and then some) by the addition of mid-boulevard greenery. So once safety concerns were relieved by the police and fire departments, any threat to parkway character ceased to be an issue for the committee.

Safety. Though only implicitly invoked as a project priority, the safety of pedestrians, bicycle riders and motorists is of utmost importance. And it was a key concern among committee members too. Once first-responder concerns were addressed, our focus then shifted to design: which concept could make this corridor safer for all road users? City Council had identified 'complete streets' as a project priority, for example, and a central tenet of that design philosophy is that improvements must ensure safe access for all users regardless of age, ability, or mode of transportation.

Committee members broadly agreed that today's boulevard makes for treacherous crossing for riders. Transportation advocates agree too, and from across the Westside they contacted our committee to say that on-street bicycle lanes not only add a margin of safety for riders, but that they feel safer to riders too. In today's planner toolkit there exist a variety of facilities that can help to reduce road conflict. Foremost among them is the separation of bicycle from motor traffic.

The thrust of 'complete streets' is that we need not trade safety for convenience. Accordingly, the committee in the end agreed that making North Santa Monica safe for all road users by striping a bicycle lane is simply good transportation planning.

Other concerns have been raised that I want to briefly address here:

Some committee members wondered about the legality or advisability of using a bicycle on a congested corridor like Santa Monica. Our consultants assured the committee that state law allows riders on every public road (except for freeways). Still, is it advisable to ride a bicycle there? Yes. Both our General Plan Circulation Element and Sustainable City Plan expressly support cycling for transportation. (The latter explicitly calls on residents to ride more and drive less!)

In fact, we will be in good company when we do encourage cycling here in Beverly Hills. As a member of the Westside Cities Council of Governments we already support bikeshare and bike-friendly streets.

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Some community members have claimed that public notice for this process was somehow insufficient. City Council directed staff to notice the entire city. My household received a mailer in advance of the committee's first meeting in November, and again today another arrived to notice Tuesday's Council meeting. In addition, both newspapers published announcements before each Blue-Ribbon meeting. Moreover, several civic leaders either served on the committee or attended a Blue-Ribbon meeting. Notice appears to have been sufficient.

Recently I heard the claim that our committee had precluded expansion and/or the inclusion of bicycle lanes so there seemed no need to attend among those who held those as concerns. That is simply not the case: no decision was made before the final meeting. All design alternatives remained on the table until the conclusion of committee business. Also claimed: the full committee did not attend the final meeting. That is true: four appointed committee members evidently had other plans that evening. I'm sure the committee would have benefitted from their input, and I regret that they did not offer it.

In conclusion, our Blue-Ribbon Committee committee never lost sight of safety. On important project-specific issues like traffic flow and character-preservation, we found broad support for recommendations to Council. Make no mistake: we're all in this mobility thing together. We all travel our city streets. And our adopted city plans already call for reducing congestion and its accompanying emissions.

Tomorrow's Santa Monica Boulevard can help realize our policy objectives. As a Beverly Hills resident who both drives and rides, I urge the Council to support our recommended boulevard expansion, bicycle lanes and landscaped median so that all road users can safely enjoy Santa Monica Boulevard for decades to come.

Sincerely,



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