

CITY OF LOS ANGELES

INTER-DEPARTMENTAL MEMORANDUM

Date: October 20, 2021

To: Honorable City Council
c/o City Clerk, Room 395
Attention: Honorable Bob Blumenfield, Chair, Public Works Committee

From: Seleta J. Reynolds, General Manager 
Department of Transportation

Subject: **COUNCIL FILE (CF) 20-1469 / PROTOCOLS TO MINIMIZE PUBLIC IMPACTS DURING CONSTRUCTIONS**

SUMMARY

In response to direction in Council File (CF) 20-1469, this report provides insight and recommendations on how to improve coordination of construction activities and minimize public impact resulting from construction on all public streets and sidewalks within the public right-of-way.

RECOMMENDATION

That the City Council, subject to approval of the Mayor:

1. DIRECT the Los Angeles Department of Transportation (LADOT), Bureau of Engineering (BOE), Bureau of Street Services (BSS), Bureau of Contract Administration (BCA), and other departments as deemed appropriate, to report back on the resources needed to establish a pilot program to actively manage street, lane and sidewalk closures (SLS Closures) in the public right-of-way within one or two designated areas with a high volume of closures, and to develop policies and protocols utilizing the Public Way Reservation System (PWRS). The proposed pilot program would improve the coordination of SLS Closures by construction projects and other activities that ensures pedestrian, bicycle, and vehicular impacts are minimized.
2. DIRECT LADOT, BOE, BSS, BCA, and other departments as deemed appropriate, to report back one year after the establishment of the pilot program with findings and recommendations for the expansion of the program citywide.

BACKGROUND

On February 9, 2021, City Council adopted a report from the Public Works Committee that instructed LADOT, in coordination with BOE and BSS, to develop protocols for SLS Closures that ensure pedestrian, bicycle, and vehicular detours and impacts are minimized during all construction projects.

Construction activities have increased in the City of Los Angeles in recent years, and certain areas such as Downtown and Hollywood have seen multiple closures in close proximity and/or timeframe. Closures from construction projects in conjunction with SLS Closures due to special events, filming, and routine infrastructure maintenance have exacerbated the impact on residents and businesses. Lane and sidewalk closures on adjacent blocks within the same street are not unusual in these neighborhoods,

and can lead to significant traffic congestion and gridlock. Although the aforementioned closures are essential to the City's economical and service needs, enhanced coordination and planning will reduce traffic impacts and improve the quality of life for all road users.

The BOE report, dated June 15, 2021, on PWRS provided updates on its development, limitations, and future enhancements as a passive project coordination management tool. This report provides recommendations to more actively manage and coordinate SLS Closures using PWRS.

DISCUSSION

Roles and Responsibilities

City departments such as LADOT, BOE, BSS, Bureau of Street Lighting (BSL), Bureau of Sanitation (LASAN), and Department of Water & Power (DWP) manage certain construction activities that require SLS Closures. Aside from these public infrastructure projects, applicants that conduct construction or other activities within the public right-of-way involving the closure of a street, lane, or sidewalk must apply for a permit from the City's permitting agencies. BOE issues most construction permits, but BSS issues permits for other activities such as building materials, tree pruning/removal, and special events. FilmLA – a non-profit that functions as the City's official film office – issues all filming permits in consultation with appropriate City departments. When deemed necessary by the permitting agencies, LADOT supports the permitting process by reviewing site-specific worksite traffic control plans to ensure the safe and efficient movement of vehicular and pedestrian traffic through the construction and/or closure area. To streamline the permitting process, LADOT does not require site-specific plans for typical SLS Closures and instead, if applicable, allows the applicants to use standard plans authorized by Federal standards (California Manual of Uniform Traffic Control Devices), the Work Area Traffic Control Handbook manual, and LADOT standards. The monitoring and enforcement of SLS Closures are investigated by BCA and BSS inspectors.

Existing Challenges

Municipal Code section 62.61.1 requires all applicants implementing any SLS Closures to reserve the public right-of-way for any work or activity that takes longer than four hours, and to coordinate that work or activity using PWRS. PWRS is an effective tool to coordinate SLS Closures amongst various users because it makes project work and closure information available in geographic and spatial format. It is also easily accessible and its content is digestible to users of all levels. However, as with any information tool, PWRS is only effective if the users' input is accurate and timely. One on-going issue is that project construction and SLS Closure dates do not remain accurate after initial proposal since applicants rarely update their construction dates.

Another challenge for the PWRS is passive management of project conflicts. Currently, the system requires self-regulation of all users to communicate and coordinate their closure activities, as well as make decisions to either implement or delay their closures where there are possible conflicts. Since there is no single entity that controls coordination efforts, this has resulted in multiple SLS Closures occurring in close proximity, thus creating unnecessary and preventable impacts to other road users.

Lastly, the current staffing levels at the City's enforcement agencies limit their ability to oversee the increased number of constructions and other activities in the public right-of-way.

Active Management

In order for the City to actively manage all SLS Closures, BOE, LADOT, BSS and BCA will require additional staff to monitor, manage, and resolve conflicts identified by PWRS, in real time. LADOT recommends establishing a pilot program in high construction areas, such as Downtown and Hollywood, in order to determine the resources and improvements needed to support this new task citywide. The pilot program should establish the core working group structure, select the limits of the areas of evaluation, recommend and establish policy, rules, and protocols for successful implementation of active management of activities in the public right-of-way, recommend improvements to PWRS and any other related tools, and other activities that would support the general effort.

Furthermore, the success of actively managing the closures relies heavily on the enforcement of all SLS Closures. Staffing inspectors from BCA and BSS to cite non-permitted closures and projects that violate the terms of permitted closures will greatly reduce potential conflicts.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

The budget process will determine the future financial resources needed.

SJR:vc