

CITY OF LOS ANGELES
INTER-DEPARTMENTAL MEMORANDUM

Date: September 29, 2022

To: Honorable City Council
c/o City Clerk, Room 395
Attention: Committee Chair

From: Connie Llanos, Interim General Manager
Department of Transportation

Subject: **SLOW STREETS L.A. PROGRAM UPDATE AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR A PERMANENT SLOW STREETS PROGRAM**

SUMMARY

In response to Council File Council File [21-1222](#), this report provides a status update and next steps for the Slow Streets L.A. program. This report includes 1) recommendations for transitioning Slow Streets to a permanent long-term program and 2) staff and budget needs to implement a permanent program.

RECOMMENDATION

That the City Council DIRECT the Los Angeles Department of Transportation (LADOT), with the assistance of the Office of the City Administrative Officer (CAO), to identify the necessary funding and complete the installation of more durable materials in the neighborhoods included in the initial Slow Streets L.A. Program, as described in this report.

BACKGROUND

On May 15, 2020 Mayor Garcetti launched the Slow Streets L.A. program to temporarily calm traffic on residential streets. The purpose of the program was to create space for neighbors to remain physically active while socially distant, in response to the closure of parks, gyms, trails, and other venues for recreation and exercise during the COVID-19 pandemic.

LADOT installed over 50 miles of Slow Streets in 30 neighborhoods throughout the City using temporary barricades and signage. Following this initial phase of the program, on November 4, 2020, Los Angeles City Council (Council) directed LADOT to stop the installation of new Slow Streets and focus on supporting existing streets with more durable materials in CF 20-0838-S1. LADOT worked with community partners to identify and implement a toolkit of more durable treatments. Two neighborhood sponsors decided not to move forward with more durable Slow Streets materials. To date, LADOT has installed comprehensive Slow Street treatments in ten Slow Street neighborhoods and are in various stages of design and implementation in the remaining twenty neighborhoods with Slow Streets areas.

On November 9, 2021, Council directed LADOT to report with a proposed permanent Slow Streets Program, a toolkit of available Slow Streets treatments, an approval process consistent with Assembly Bill (AB) 773, and a process for coordinating community-requested Slow Streets locations with existing City plans and programs that aim to increase neighborhood connections. Council also directed LADOT to

report with staff and budget needs to implement the program and a transition plan for existing program participants, including the status of each installation.

Signed into law on October 6, 2021, AB 773 allows local jurisdictions to adopt policies to temporarily or permanently restrict through traffic or implement street closures. The bill requires the local authority to meet specified conditions to implement a slow street, including a determination that closure or traffic restriction is necessary for the safety and protection of persons using the closed or restricted portion of the street, conducting an outreach and engagement process, and clearly designating any restriction with signage.

DISCUSSION

Established as a COVID-19 pandemic response program, Slow Streets reduces the volume and speed of vehicular traffic on neighborhood streets to create safer areas to recreate and gather. The goal is to create a safer and more comfortable pedestrian environment within the public right of way allowing for people to remain physically active and socially distant.

In the initial phase (Phase 1) of the Los Angeles Slow Streets program, eligible organizations nominated a small network of neighborhood streets to reduce and slow traffic. An eligible organization includes: block clubs, business associations, business improvement districts, church or faith organizations, council districts, homeowners associations, local nonprofit/community-based organizations, neighborhood councils, and school or parent teacher associations. These community sponsor organizations served as the primary liaisons to LADOT staff, who helped vet the street network, communicate about the proposed elements with local stakeholders, and maintained the network in their community. After vetting applications and confirming networks with community sponsors, the Bureau of Street Services (StreetsLA) and LADOT implemented temporary signage at intersections advising drivers to slow down for people using the street to exercise.

To implement Phase 2, LADOT assessed the original 30 temporary Slow Streets areas and developed an equity framework to prioritize and phase implementation across the city. The equity framework considered the following six social equity and safety metrics:

- whether the network is within a Slow Street Target Neighborhood defined under Phase 1 (communities most impacted by the lack of open space during the pandemic)
- population density
- income
- Los Angeles Countywide Parks and Recreation Needs Assessment score
- proximity to a High Injury Network (HIN) street
- total collisions within a quarter-mile of the network area

Before implementing Phase 2 treatments, LADOT shared the program guidelines and safety countermeasure toolkit with community sponsors. Once the sponsor organization confirmed the network and proposed treatments, LADOT prepares the final design plan. LADOT requires a letter of support from the community sponsor organization in order to move forward with implementation.

The Phase 2 Slow Street safety countermeasures toolkit includes durable street design elements that far exceeded the original, emergency deployment of the program, and have created lasting impacts in the

completed neighborhoods. These treatments include pavement markings, striping, vertical delineators (bollards), and signs, based on geometric and safety criteria. The complete toolkit also includes:

- Gateway Splitter Islands more clearly delineate lanes of travel, encourage slower vehicle speeds for vehicles traveling through, and demarcate the entrance to Slow Street segments.
- Mini Traffic Circles slow speeds and reduce serious collisions at unsignalized intersections.
- Mid-block Painted Medians create a curve in an otherwise straight street which encourages drivers to reduce their speed.
- Intersection Tightening reduces turning radii of corners to slow turning vehicles and improves visibility of pedestrians crossing at the intersection.
- Signs requesting vehicles to maintain slow speeds and for all road users to exercise caution.
- Pavement markings indicate a 15 mile speed limit, conveying that drivers to reduce their speed when entering the network of slow streets
- Edgelines visually narrow the roadway, encouraging people driving to use safer speeds

In 2021, LADOT selected and installed four Phase 2 pilot areas in order to test and ensure the feasibility and effectiveness of the Phase 2 treatments. After implementing the initial four pilots, LADOT pursued the remaining list in groups defined by the equity prioritization framework. LADOT has implemented Phase 2 treatments on ten Slow Street areas to date. Six Slow Street areas are in the queue for installation, five have final designs awaiting approval from community sponsors and seven are in the final stages of feasibility review. Two Slow Street areas are currently on hold at the request of their community sponsors.

Funding

In LADOT's October 14, 2020 report (CF 20-0838-S1), the Department reported an initial estimate that \$800,000 in identified Open Streets funding could support upgrading approximately half of the Slow Streets intersections with striping and metal warning signs. Based on substantive community feedback, the department has expanded the program, however, to include more substantive treatments that address safety concerns.

To date, LADOT has invested approximately \$595,000 in City Measure M Open Streets funding for Slow Streets Phase 2 treatments, including design, materials, and labor. The Department has sufficient funding to install treatments in six additional Slow Streets neighborhoods. Based upon the work completed to date, LADOT projects that the remaining 12 areas will require the Department to identify approximately \$720,000 in additional funding, composed of \$420,000 for materials and \$300,000 for labor to complete design and implementation.

Challenges

The Slow Streets program was designed as an emergency COVID-19 response. Implementing Phase 2 of the program has posed numerous challenges due to limited staffing and funding, and design challenges resulting from the need for individually-tailored solutions rather than a one-size-fits-all toolkit. Ongoing maintenance also poses a funding and staffing challenge for expanding a permanent program.

Slow Streets relies on staff from several divisions working overtime outside of their respective roles, as permanent positions were not allocated for this program. The current structure requires staff to

reprioritize the program relative to other projects or to defer Slow Streets work to meet other, more urgent needs.

Phase 2 of the Slow Streets program is primarily managed and implemented by LADOT's District Engineering Offices, whose primary responsibilities are to respond to a broad array of local constituent concerns about traffic and parking. For the Slow Streets program, District staff review the network of streets proposed by the sponsor, identify appropriate treatments to create slower and calmer neighborhood streets, and coordinate their installation with field crews. Each of the six District Engineering offices manage a portfolio of Slow Streets within their coverage areas. Community engagement staff support external communications and coordinate with sponsor organizations during each step of the process.

LADOT cannot develop a permanent program, including an application process for interested and eligible community sponsors or criteria to identify new priority neighborhoods without dedicated planning, engineering, design, and implementation staff. Additional staff and resources are also required to develop a process for community engagement, findings, and approval. However, the policy goals of Slow Streets are shared with other existing LADOT programs: to calm vehicle traffic by reducing speeds and volume to create conditions that are more conducive and comfortable for biking, walking, rolling and other slower-moving modes of transportation. Rather than create a separate parallel program to achieve these goals, LADOT recommends expanding existing work programs that can incorporate the Slow Streets toolkit.

Program Recommendations

Slow Streets is a request-based program that is driven by local neighborhood applicants. Request-based programs may inadvertently entrench citywide inequities in transportation infrastructure and safe streets because staff respond primarily to communities that ask for a service, rather than prioritizing resources to those of greatest need. While LADOT prioritizes Slow Streets implementation based on equity metrics that include access to parks and open space, air pollution, traffic safety, and other factors, the process only considers streets in requested areas and does not consider overlap with long-term infrastructure needs defined in the Mobility Plan 2035 and other policies and programs.

Once the planned Slow Streets Phase 2 treatments are implemented on the current, active list of 28 areas, LADOT recommends that the City transition to a long-term program that incorporates best practices learned from the program, to existing City plans and programs. This transition should also and rely on a more comprehensive data-based approach to selecting neighborhoods, streets, and treatment locations.

Some of the programs that would be augmented to include Slow Street Phase 2 toolkit elements include: Stress-Free Connections, Safe Routes to School, Active Transportation, Vision Zero, and the Speed Hump program, all of which address improvements on the Neighborhood Enhanced Network (NEN).

LADOT's efforts to identify and prioritize mobility improvements on the NEN is the Stress Free Connections Program. Council recently adopted a report ([Council File 17-1196-S1](#)) that outlines the next steps for the SFC program, which include implementing two traffic-calmed corridors in each of the initial four focus areas on local neighborhood streets. In addition, Council directed staff to incorporate identified SFC investments into existing work programs and identify additional focus areas to expand

planning and community engagement efforts beyond the initial four focus areas. Where existing Slow Street areas overlap with priority planning areas, there may be long-term opportunities to explore and develop permanent treatments and seek funding for the original Slow Street networks.

This data-driven framework can continue to incorporate and center community-based design and feedback, but would establish clear metrics in order to ensure a prioritized and equitable selection process.

To incorporate the Slow Streets program goals and toolkit into existing programs, LADOT requires additional staff and resources. The following positions would provide additional capacity to support planning, design, and implementation as follows:

- Two Transportation Planning Associates that report to an existing Supervising Transportation Planner
- One Transportation Engineering Associate III
- One GIS specialist

FINANCIAL IMPACT

To implement Slow Streets Phase 2 treatments, LADOT has used approximately \$595,000 in City Measure M Open Streets funding and has been reporting such expenditures for COVID-relief tracking purposes. Of the original \$800,000 identified for this program in FY 2020-21, LADOT included \$100,000 in Metro Open Streets Cycle 3 grant funds.

To complete the remaining 12 Slow Streets areas, the Department estimates it will need to identify \$420,000 for materials and \$300,000 for labor.

To support future installations, LADOT will need to secure additional project construction funding through the annual budget or through grant programs to support advance planning and long-term, permanent implementation of neighborhood networks.

The estimated cost for the four new positions outlined in this report may have an impact on the General Fund. Through the budget process, LADOT will define staff positions and salaries that would impact the General Fund.

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