



**TRANSPORTATION SAFETY & ADVISORY COMMISSION**

**CITY OF HARRISONBURG, VIRGINIA**

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**TO:** Transportation Safety & Advisory Commission Members, Council members, City Manager Kurt Hodgen, Assistant City Manager Anne Lewis

**FROM:** Brad Reed, Transportation Planner

**DATE:** Wednesday, September 17, 2014

**RE:** Transportation Safety & Advisory Commission Summary from September 10, 2014 Meeting

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The Transportation Safety & Advisory Commission met on Wednesday, September 10, 2014 at 8:30 AM in Room 205 of the City Municipal Building, 345 S. Main St.

Members and Advisory Members present included: Bill Blessing (Citizen Member), Calvin Ferrell (Citizen Member), Russell Presnell (Citizen Member), Brad Reed (Public Works Member), MPO Greg Deeds (Police Member), Sgt. Philip Ritchie (Police), Thanh Dang (Public Works), Doug Stader (DMV), Ian Bennett (Fire), Paul Helmuth (Fire), Reggie Smith (Public Transportation), Lee Eshelman (JMU)

Guests Present: None

*Commission meetings are open to the public and citizens are provided the opportunity to voice their views/concerns about any item before the Commission. It is the policy of the Commission to move relevant agenda items to the beginning of the meeting when citizens are in attendance to avoid detaining them for the entire meeting.*

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*Welcome*

*Old Business*

**1. Update on by-law changes through City Council**

Mr. Blessing informed the Commission that he and Mr. Reed presented the previously agreed upon Commission by-law changes to City Council on August 25. City Council voted unanimously to proceed with the changes, which later went into effect at a second reading at their September 9 meeting. An advertisement for an additional Commission member has since been

posted on the City website. Members noted their appreciation for the positive comments made about the Commission by several City Council members at the August 25 presentation.

### *New Business*

#### **2. S Mason St & Martin Luther King, Jr. Way Pedestrian Safety Complaint**

Mr. Reed shared a citizen complaint regarding southbound vehicles on S Mason St not yielding to pedestrians in the crosswalk when turning left onto Martin Luther King, Jr. Way. The citizen described having near misses with vehicles on multiple occasions and having drivers yell at her because they do not understand that they must yield to pedestrians when turning. She requested that the exclusive crosswalk movement be returned to the intersection to stop all vehicular traffic while pedestrians are crossing. Public Works sent this information to Sgt. Ritchie and Ofc. Westfall, asking the Police Department to review this intersection.

The citizen also expressed frustration that this Commission meets during working hours, limiting the ability for citizens to attend. She was invited to attend the Bicycle & Pedestrian Subcommittee meeting in September, which takes place in the evening. For this reason, the Commission is asked to discuss options to bring to the Subcommittee. After the Subcommittee meeting, the Commission will discuss the issue again and come to a conclusion at its October meeting.

Mr. Reed explained that the operation of this traffic signal was changed in August 2011 from an exclusive pedestrian crossing to a standard pedestrian crossing with the addition of a leading pedestrian interval after review by this Commission (see August 2011 summary for details). After the change was made, the intersection was reviewed extensively by Public Works and Police Department staff and was found to be operating well, with no issues observed with vehicles not yielding to pedestrians. With the leading pedestrian interval northbound and southbound, the green left turn arrow comes up for north and/or southbound traffic first (if there are vehicles present in the turn lane), then goes red, then the pedestrian Walk signal turns on for 7 seconds (if the button was pressed), then the green ball comes on during which vehicles can proceed straight or turn right or left as a permissive movement that must yield to pedestrians and oncoming vehicles. This operation reduces the wait time for both vehicles and pedestrians and allows the signal to operate much more efficiently than it did with the exclusive pedestrian crossing. Prior to the removal of the exclusive pedestrian crossing, this traffic signal was easily the most complained about in the City. MPO Deeds added that traffic backups were bad before the change was made.

Mr. Smith suggested that the southbound left turn volume from S Mason St may have been higher while Grace St was closed for construction, which was when the complaint was received. There is no traffic count evidence available to corroborate this, but this might explain an increased urgency by drivers to make a left turn under heavier traffic conditions.

Mr. Reed shared traffic data from a period when Grace St was open, which indicates a very low left turn volume during peak periods of the day, which is accommodated well by the available time programmed for the green arrow. He suggested HPD enforcement of pedestrian yielding issues at this location to piggyback on upcoming enforcement efforts of similar issues on S Mason St.

Mr. Blessing asked whether there is signage to yield to pedestrians when turning left. Mr. Reed showed that there is a "Turning Vehicles Yield to Pedestrians" sign for vehicles turning right and that there is also a standard "Left Turn Yield on Green (Ball)" sign beside the signal for the left turn lane. Ms. Dang asked whether we can move the "Right Turn Yield to Pedestrians" between the two lights and alter it to apply to Right and Left turns. Mr. Reed pointed out that there is a City policy for installing these signs based on volume of turning vehicles and that since the left turn volume is too low to warrant a sign, we should consider what precedence would be set if we installed the sign.

It was also noted that this issue could occur anywhere where there is a permissive left turn even with low turn volumes, so this issue is a broader one possible caused by distraction and not knowing the law. Mr. Reed and Ms. Dang mentioned that the Share the Road education campaign is meant to help address this issue, but can't reach everyone. Mr. Stader stated that cars on the road think they have the right of way. Pedestrians also have been taught that they have the right of way. This conflict is difficult to overcome.

Mr. Blessing commented that we need to be careful about doing something for one person and need to thinking about all users. Mr. Reed added that the complainant said she has heard similar complaints from others, but the City has not heard from anyone else. Public Works and the Police will need to do more observation to understand whether this is a rare or common occurrence.

Sgt. Ritchie said that Ofc. Westfall is getting with TV3 and the Breeze to do education for motorists and pedestrians. He went on to note that anytime a complaint is received, HPD will observe the intersection and provide enforcement. HPD will put more time and effort on this.

Mr. Reed asked what JMU's plans are for Grace St and Mason St; will JMU close Grace Street and Mason Street in the future? Mr. Eshelman said that it is possible, but does not know when or whether it would be one or both streets. Mr. Reed noted that this would change traffic patterns and this pedestrian issue would need to be re-evaluated at that point if left turn volumes increase. Mr. Eshelman said that he will find out when JMU's schedule for closing Mason St and Grace St is.

Mr. Reed noted that there are a couple options to address the left turn issue, but that they should only be considered if problems are still observed after enforcement and education. The left turn arrow can be programmed to have more green time if traffic patterns have changed and not enough time is being given at present. This would decrease the number of vehicles turning on the permissive green ball. The other option would be to take away the permissive left turn movement, making the left turn protected only with just a green arrow. This will increase delays for drivers and may set a precedent that would be very difficult and inadvisable to follow elsewhere in the City from the standpoint of street capacity.

Mr. Blessing said that he doesn't think we have enough information to warrant a decision on any changes at this point and that we need to know what the pedestrian movements during peak and non-peak hours are. Mr. Blessing asked how we can educate people on this issue? Ms. Dang responded that the Share the Road campaign and Ofc. Westfall's efforts are helpful, but we don't know their effectiveness. Information is out there, but what else can we do to make people read it?

Mr. Eshelman shared that JMU is looking into possibly requiring students to do a quiz to educate them on traffic laws, but that there is still the question of educating the general public.

Mr. Reed said that people think the wrong way parking campaign and enforcement worked very well and asked whether we can take that same approach to the issue of pedestrian safety.

The Commission will hear more on this issue at its October meeting, including a report from the Bicycle & Pedestrian Subcommittee's September 22 meeting.

#### *Other Business / Announcements*

### **3. Update on Old Town Neighborhood Traffic Calming Program**

Mr. Reed informed the Commission that installation of the trial half street closure on E Bruce St at its intersection with Ott St has been completed. As discussed at the August Commission meeting, this project is being completed through the Old Town neighborhood's enrollment in the Neighborhood Traffic Calming Program and is identified on the Old Town neighborhood's Traffic Calming Plan, which was developed by consensus of the neighborhood and adopted by City Council in 2011.

Several citizen comments have been received regarding this traffic pattern change, with almost all of them being negative. Most of the negative comments came from owners and patrons of businesses in the vicinity that now must circle the block to arrive at their parking location.

A traffic study will be completed this month to assess the impacts of the half closure, after which City staff and neighborhood representatives will consider these effects as well as comments submitted by the public.

### **4. City Project Updates**

Mr. Reed and Ms. Dang provided updates on various City projects, including the following:

- National Bicycle & Pedestrian Documentation Project
  - <http://www.harrisonburgva.gov/bicycle-pedestrian-count>
- Be Heard Harrisonburg
  - <http://beheardharrisonburg.org/>
- Downtown Streetscape Project Phase II
  - <http://www.harrisonburgva.gov/downtown-streetscape-next-steps>
  - To be completed December 2014
- Downtown Traffic Signal Programming
  - Traffic signals in the downtown area no longer operate in flash mode from midnight to 6 am. During this time, signals run in coordination but operate on the shortest possible cycle to minimize delays.
  - This change was made to:
    - Improve pedestrian safety by providing a period of stopped traffic flow on Main Street to facilitate street crossings
    - Control speeds, which have been found to be well over the speed limit while signals are flashing (85<sup>th</sup> percentile average of 40+ mph)
    - Improve safety for vehicles entering from side streets with poor sight distance

- E Market Street Sidewalk Phase IV
  - <http://www.harrisonburgva.gov/transportation-projects>
  - Project completed in August
- Bluestone Trail
  - <http://www.harrisonburgva.gov/Bluestone-Trail>
  - JMU portion completed from Port Republic Rd to Butler St
  - City portion from Butler St to Beery Rd to be completed December 2014
- S Main Street Traffic Signal Upgrades
  - S Main St & Pleasant Hill Rd and S Main St & Mosby Rd
  - Upgrade from span wire to mast arm pole signals
  - Addition of pedestrian signals and crosswalks
  - To be completed November 2014
- City Bike Map
  - City staff have partnered with JMU and the Central Shenandoah Planning District Commission (CSPDC) to create Harrisonburg's first bike map
  - Map will indicate the "level of traffic stress" of all streets in the City and JMU to help cyclists find the best route for their comfort level and to help planning staff identify infrastructure deficiencies in the cycling network
  - Draft map should be available on the City website in early 2015
- Safe Routes to School - Stone Spring Elementary
  - Grant has been received to design and construct sidewalk on Peach Grove Ave and a traffic signal on Peach Grove Ave at the school entrance
  - [http://harrisonburg.k12.va.us/HarrisonburgCitySchools/media/images/Documents/Community/DNRonline\\_Safe\\_Routes\\_SSES.pdf](http://harrisonburg.k12.va.us/HarrisonburgCitySchools/media/images/Documents/Community/DNRonline_Safe_Routes_SSES.pdf)
  - Project is under design by the Public Works Department and will be bid out for construction in 2015

Mr. Smith asked what the anticipated traffic on Peach Grove Ave would be after Stone Spring Rd is completed in Rockingham County. Mr. Reed suggested that traffic volumes may increase, but it's hard to know at this time. MPO Deeds said this was a hot topic at the last Coffee with a Cop.

Mr. Smith asked about updates on installing sidewalk on Country Club Rd. Ms. Dang said that there have been challenges working with property owners to get Right-of-Way for the sidewalks and that the Mayor is helping with these discussions. Because of this, we don't know which side of the street the sidewalks would be on. Mr. Smith added that that is an important segment, but all of Country Club Road needs to be improved with sidewalk. Ms. Dang said that, at present, the piers of the existing I-81 bridge over Country Club Rd make it hard to improve the street. She went on to mention that the Harrisonburg-Rockingham Metropolitan Planning Organization (HRMPO) is currently performing an interchange study on I-81 Exits 245 and 247 and adjacent City streets and that the findings may ripple into changes to this bridge.

Mr. Blessing commented that it is difficult to see the lane markings on Country Club Road, especially at the I-81 bridge, especially when it is wet after dark. Mr. Reed said that this will likely be helped when the road markings are repainted, which occurs on an annual basis, but he will have Traffic Engineering review this issue.

*Adjourn*