

August 1, 2017

Hon. Mike Bonin
Los Angeles City Council, District 11
200 N. Spring Street #475
Los Angeles, California 90012

Dear Councilmember:

Those of us who live in Playa del Rey are now trapped. We are experiencing significantly increased traffic congestion and travel time at all times of day – not just rush hour. If this was to improve our quality of life, it is a failure and takes precious time away from being with family with no identifiable connection to true safety. In fact we have observed a significant increase in accidents since the Safe Streets initiative went into effect.

When you appeared on Channel 4's Newsconference Extra this past weekend, you said that “There are 40 high injury corridors in the city” but what you didn’t say was that not one of our Playa del Rey streets that are part of the “Road Diet” are identified as unsafe by the City of Los Angeles High Injury Network (HIN)! “The first outcome of the Vision Zero Los Angeles Safety Study will be a prioritized list of locations for safety projects.” To that end, the HIN spotlights streets with a high concentration of traffic collisions that result in severe injuries and deaths, with an emphasis on those involving people walking and bicycling. “By focusing resources on these streets, we can get closer to our Vision Zero goal.” **But as you know, neither Pershing Drive, nor Culver Blvd. nor Jefferson Blvd. is identified or prioritized as being a dangerous street!**

We are heartened that you have been willing to reverse some of your decisions, but largely these have been to the benefit of South Bay commuters and not the citizens of Playa del Rey that you represent. Other than returning one lane east of Nicholson, the changes made are still there unchanged and we remain trapped.

Open and Transparent Process:

In the history of our Neighborhood Council, no single issue has energized members of our community to become active and involved in such significant numbers. Not just the typically active members of the community, but the many people who filled the community room to over-capacity and are engaged with thousands of posts on local social media ranging from Facebook to Nextdoor to local newsgroups. And they are frustrated - not just by the changes, but at the feeling that their voices are not being heard. You told us that the project would be evaluated at the 1-month, 3-month and 6-month intervals and through your survey and the LADOT meeting canceled last weekend they could register their opinion and suggestions. But the complete raw

results of your survey have not been released (and must be immediately) and the LADOT meeting was indefinitely postponed. Not only that, but it was scheduled as an open house rather than a public hearing - there must be an opportunity for public testimony.

Likewise, your latest proposal to create a closed group comprised of hand-picked members appears like an attempt to avoid public comment and truly appears as though you are trying to “stack the deck” toward a pre-ordained outcome which will result from the choices of who and how many members are on this committee. If the people don’t feel they were provided a fair and open process, they will not accept the outcome.

We are your Neighborhood Council duly elected and representing the Playa del Rey and Westchester Communities being impacted by this road diet and yet you have ignored our input for two months. With your staff present, we passed the following motion in June:

Safe Streets PDR Motion to 1) Request the implementation of mitigation measures designed to lessen the impact of the lane reductions on Culver Blvd. and Vista del Mar on the areas of upper Playa del Rey and Westchester; and, 2) Request that the Los Angeles Department of Transportation and/or the CD11 Council Office immediately provide a copy of any traffic study done in advance of the commencement of the lane closures included in the Safe Streets Initiative; and, a) Provide any available data regarding traffic on the community streets impacted by the Safe Streets Initiative for the area bounded by Sepulveda to the East, Imperial to the South, Culver to the North and Vista del Mar to the West; and, b) Provide a detailed plan for traffic enforcement for the next 90 days; and, c) Provide written explanation of the feasibility of reducing Vista del Mar to one lane each way commencing South of Imperial Highway; and, d) Respond in writing to all community suggestions and questions given at this meeting; e) create an Ad Hoc Committee to develop alternative and immediate mitigation measures for the Safe Streets Initiative; f) and set metrics for the success of the Vista del Mar pilot restriping project.

We got no response to any part of this motion. We again ask that you respond to that motion and call for a transparent process that allows for true public participation.

Criteria/Components of Success:

You have indicated that this is a “pilot” project. What you didn’t identify is what the criteria are for determining whether the “pilot” project should be modified or abandoned altogether. We believe that the evaluation criteria should be safety, efficiency and accessibility.

1) Safety – No one can ever argue against safety being a good thing. We believe that there are many measures that can and should be implemented. In fact you also said on NBC that the Vision Zero initiative has a “whole toolkit” of options available to improve safety. We agree and ask that you try implementing all parts of that toolkit to improve safety first before resorting to removing traffic lanes. We can keep traffic moving while protecting pedestrians and cyclists at the same time.

LADOT recently gave testimony relating to Vista del Mar listing a whole plethora of recommended safety improvements - without even once suggesting removing lanes in the name

of safety. We strongly support better lighting, more crosswalks, pedestrian bridges, speed limit reductions and traffic enforcement. In the words of the DOT official who spoke at our June board meeting, "We did what we were told to do by the resident group. We didn't study it." These and other safety improvements are lesser impactful ways of providing greater pedestrian safety that should be used first before taking lanes away.

We also want to know exactly how LADOT is monitoring the number of accidents on Culver/Jefferson/Pershing/VDM - both before and after implementation of the changes. Informally, there have been 24 accidents and counting - some with injuries. You have cited to an annual average of 11. That means we are seeing a massive increase in accidents to the contrary of the stated intent of the project.

On Vista del Mar, although the parking spaces are gone, we note that unfortunately the pocket park remains an attractive nuisance that needs to be relocated near to a crosswalk/pedestrian bridge or removed altogether to remove any reason for dangerous jaywalking.

The impact on commuters is very real as demonstrated by their expressed outrage on social media and in every outlet on which they can find a voice from radio to newspaper. Unless and until it can be proven that there is a demonstrable improvement in safety, lane reductions cannot be viewed as a success. Presently, at best they can be characterized as counterproductive.

2) Efficiency – It is a false choice to portray this as a safety vs. commute time argument. We should be able to reduce congestion without increasing risk to pedestrians or bicyclists. In fact we just voted to increase our taxes to reduce congestion by passing Measure M giving billions of dollars to government and yet your first action related to traffic after the election was to reduce capacity and increase congestion! Voters did not expect that when they voted for Measure M!

We can find better ways of slowing traffic without turning streets into parking lots. Surely speed reduction alone cannot be considered the determinant of success. Carried to its ultimate conclusion, once all traffic stops moving we will be at 100% success! We do have families to get home to and jobs to pay for the rent so we must be able to carry on our lives in an efficient manner.

We are all for safety, that's a no brainer. And cars that aren't speeding are certainly safer. But if the issue is speed, then address that issue directly with enforcement. Removing lanes to reduce speed is at most an indirect means of trying to produce a reasonable slowing of traffic by producing gridlock. Gridlock is not safer and it's not better for the environment. There is no nexus between taking lanes away and increasing safety - especially when all the major incidents you cited happened late at night - not during commuting hours when traffic is at a standstill.

The sad reality is that drunk driving is a huge part of the risk and yet, removing traffic lanes does nothing to solve the drunk driving problem. The City's own Vision Zero Literature Review from March 2016 says that "Driving under the influence is a common contributing factor for collisions resulting in severe and fatal injury." We need more enforcement to reduce the severity of this problem - not less traffic lanes.

As part of efficiency, for many years the business community has sought increased parking on

Culver in lower playa del Rey. LADOT should be required to look at an angled compact vehicle parking which would provide parking spaces in close proximity to Culver shops. Angled parking was apparently dismissed early on because of the space required for two bike lanes. As discussed below, Culver is not an ideal place for bike lanes and Playa Vista should instead be safely connected to the Ballona bicycle path.

Congestion reduction and increased parking should be laudable goals - not enemies of safety. They should coexist through implementation of other safety measures as identified above.

3) Accessibility – Unrelated to safety, improvements to access for bicycles and pedestrians is a good thing, but must be weighed against the impact it creates. For every family benefitting from better bike access there are scores of families who are losing precious time together to longer commutes. Time spent commuting takes away from family - and it does so each and every day of every week of the year not just on the occasion a family chooses to go to the beach. But we believe that in the project area we can accommodate improved access without removing traffic lanes.

The Ballona Bike Path and the Beach Bike Path together provide an uninterrupted path from Palos Verdes all the way to Culver City where the bicyclist can transit without ever once crossing a roadway with vehicles. A centerpiece of our efforts should be to make the Ballona path safely accessible to Playa Vista residents. If designed correctly, it would provide a safer, and more relaxing bike ride to the beach. Many suggestions have been made to achieve this goal instead of bike lanes through the wetlands including the following: a) Creation of a bike path on the south bank of Ballona Creek that extends east; b) Where Alla Road, Bay Street and Playa Vista Drive now dead end at the south bank, open bicycle-pedestrian connections to the south bank bicycle path. Perhaps the path and an opening can be extended as far east as Grosvenor Blvd., just west of Centinela; 3) Build a bicycle-pedestrian-only bridge to link a south bank bicycle path to the existing bike path on the north bank of Ballona Creek. Such a bicycle path provides riders with the safety of total separation from traffic on Jefferson, Culver and Lincoln. In the interim, better signage and outreach should be done to draw Playa Vista cyclists to existing access points at Inglewood, Centinela and McConnell as alternatives to cycling on Lincoln.

Likewise, better safe access to the beach crossing at Waterview would assist accessibility for residents living in the areas to the east of Pershing. A pedestrian/bicycle bridge there would also address the reality that Playa del Rey hill is a de facto beach parking lot during the summertime and would get beachgoers across Vista del Mar more safely.

We need two more lighted crosswalks in Playa del Rey on Culver – one mid-block as it is a long way from one end to the other and another crossing at the Nicholson intersection adjacent to the Inn at Playa del Rey. Additionally two more should be added crossing Pershing at Waterview and Manchester.

We note the costs of these accessibility ideas is a fraction of the societal cost of increased commute time and only a fraction of the funds created by the passage of Measure M and the funds it returns to the municipalities.

Impact on Local Business/Immediate Reversal of the Modifications Implemented by the Safe Streets Pilot Project:

We are sincerely concerned about our Playa del Rey businesses suffocating during the “pilot” project. We have been advised that you met with more than a dozen Playa del Rey businesses who told you firsthand how their businesses are suffering severe economic losses directly related to the Road Diet. These same businesses asked that you immediately reverse the roadway changes made two months ago. We share their tremendous concern that we cannot wait 90 days for your task force to meet and then start to consider what to do. Restaurants are empty. Gas stations can't meet minimum sales targets to meet their contractual obligations. These are very real problems. Until you come up with a plan that will not shut down our business community you must reverse course immediately. There was no sudden need to close down lanes on Pershing and Culver. Indeed as noted above in fact the City of Los Angeles has identified that these streets are not the priority for attention. The irony is that some of the support for the Road Diet has been from those who want a vital thriving downtown Playa del Rey and yet the changes made are having the immediate and opposite effect.

To this we must report that in polling on Nextdoor two polls with over six hundred people participating by a ratio of more than 4 to 1 your constituents oppose the Road Diet. They want it immediately removed. Please understand that it is also a false argument to make it appear that the only ones opposed to the Road Diet are rich commuters from Manhattan Beach. This Playa del Rey Nextdoor website is for Playa del Rey residents only and ironically, you already reversed the related Vista del Mar lane closure addressing the concerns of the South Bay while leaving your own constituents adversely impacted. We at the Neighborhood Council of Westchester/Playa del Rey have also seen an overwhelming groundswell of opposition to the project. There is simply no question that the local community does not like it and wants the lanes restored without delay.

We sincerely hope that you and your staff will respond to our questions and requests. But even more urgently, we hope that the flexibility you have already shown will be extended to reversing course and doing a better job of planning before coming back to us and your constituents as a whole to evaluate an alternative better means of addressing safety, efficiency and accessibility than the current pilot project.

Sincerely,

Cyndi Hench, President
Neighborhood Council of Westchester-Playa