

DATE ISSUED: October 21, 2005

REPORT NO. 05-215

ATTENTION: Public Safety and Neighborhood Services Committee

SUBJECT: School Area Traffic Standards and Guidelines

SUMMARY:

THIS IS AN INFORMATION ITEM ONLY. NO ACTION IS REQUIRED ON THE PART OF THE COMMITTEE

BACKGROUND

During public comment at PS&NS Committee meeting of September 7, 2005, a representative of the City Heights Community Development Corporation and other community members inquired as to why three schools (Cherokee Point, Herbert Ibarra, and Edison Elementary Schools) within the San Diego Unified School District (SDUSD), were being built or modified without incorporating public improvements similar to those constructed recently at Euclid Elementary School. One specific item that was mentioned was the lack of “laddered crosswalks” at some intersections. Traffic Engineers from the Transportation Operations Division of the Engineering and Capital Projects Department subsequently reviewed the improvements at all three schools in relation to state and federal standards.

The City of San Diego School Pedestrian Safety Guidelines

The City’s School Pedestrian Safety Guidelines consolidate federal and state standards for traffic signing and markings within school zones. These guidelines have been developed in close coordination with all school districts within the City of San Diego, and in close cooperation with the San Diego Police Department, San Diego City Schools Police, and Children’s Hospital. This document provides additional guidelines that address more specific issues such as the placement and operation of school safety patrols and school crosswalks. The guidelines have recently been updated to conform to recent revisions in the federal and state standards. The updated guidelines are currently under final review by SDUSD and we expect to present a summary of those guidelines at a future PS&NS Committee meeting.

The MUTCD and “Laddered Crosswalks”

Traffic safety in the vicinity of a school can be enhanced by means of traffic control devices (stop signs, crosswalks, school signs, striping, etc.) or by means of public improvements (pop-outs, traffic signals, raised medians, sidewalks, etc). All jurisdictions within the State of California follow federal standards contained in the Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices for Streets and Highways (MUTCD), and state standards contained in the accompanying California Supplement to the MUTCD. These documents set standards and guidelines for signing and marking of traffic control devices in the public right-of-way statewide and nationwide. The City development review process assures that new or remodeled schools meet the standards as set by the MUTCD and the California Supplement.

“Laddered crosswalks” are permitted under the newly adopted MUTCD, and it has been the City’s practice to install this type of crosswalks at uncontrolled school crosswalk locations. “Uncontrolled crosswalks” are defined as marked crossing locations that are not protected by a stop sign, traffic signal, or any other type of traffic control device that affords positive right-of-way assignment. The rationale that has been used by all those involved in developing the guidelines is that laddered crosswalks serve to clearly designate and differentiate crosswalks where both children walking to school and motorists are expected to use caution and due care above and beyond what is expected at other crossing locations where the right-of- way is assigned by more stringent traffic control devices. This practice is discussed in the City’s “School Pedestrian Safety Guidelines.” Transportation Engineering staff has recommended that laddered crosswalks in the vicinity of the 3 new schools be only installed at locations that meet the above stated criteria. This approach provides consistency citywide and provides a clear message to both motorists and pedestrians.

The California Safe Routes to School Program

The California Safe Routes to School (SR2S) program allows agencies to identify public improvement and traffic control techniques to mitigate and improve safety conditions at specific locations based on accident history and a comprehensive traffic engineering evaluation. Intersection improvements and other innovative traffic control devices such as pop-outs, laddered crosswalks, fluorescent green school signs, and flashing beacons can be utilized in school zones with identified specific safety needs through this program. Such improvements are generally considered to be above and beyond what would normally be required from a typical development project.

The main objectives of the Safe Routes to School Program are as follows:

“The goals of the program are to reduce injuries and fatalities to school children and to encourage increased walking and bicycling among students. The program achieves these goals by constructing facilities that enhance the safety for pedestrians and bicyclists. By enhancing the safety of the pathways, trails, sidewalks, and crossings, the likelihood of attracting and encouraging additional students to walk and bike increases.”

The following are factors that the State considers in order to determine which locations should be awarded grant funding:

- (1) Demonstrated needs of the applicant (accident history, infrastructure deficiencies, etc)
- (2) Potential of the proposal for reducing child injuries and fatalities.
- (3) Potential of the proposal for encouraging increased walking and bicycling among students
- (4) Identification of safety hazards.
- (5) Identification of current and potential walking and bicycling routes to school.
- (6) Consultation and support for projects by school-based associations, local traffic engineers, local elected officials, law enforcement agencies, school officials, and other relevant community stakeholders.

The SR2S program awards grants of up to \$450,000 and requires a 10% match from the local agency for a maximum project cost of \$500,000. In 2002 the City of San Diego received a Safe Routes to School grant for \$436,200 to implement school traffic safety improvements in the vicinity of Euclid Elementary School in City Heights. Construction of the traffic safety improvements was completed in 2004. Other schools that have received SR2S funding are as follows:

<u>Fiscal Year</u>	<u>School(s)</u>	<u>Project Cost (Grant award)</u>	<u>Status</u>
FY 2002	John J Adams Elementary	\$485,000 (\$436,500)	In construction
	Euclid Elementary	\$485,000 (\$436,500)	Complete
FY 2003	Gompers Secondary/ Horton Elementary	\$498,000 (\$448,200)	Complete
FY 2004	Rosa Parks Elementary	\$478,000 (\$430,200)	Design
FY 2005	Willow Elementary	\$500,000 (\$450,000)	Design

The City and the School Districts Responsibilities

It is the City’s responsibility to provide and maintain traffic control devices and improvements on the public right-of-way for the safety of school children. School Districts are responsible for providing public improvements that meet federal and state standards when a new school is built or an existing school is remodeled. Improvements that would mirror the SR2S grant proposals can be provided when a new school is built or when an existing school is remodeled, or they can be provided at a later time. It may be preferable to provide such enhancements when a new school is planned and new public improvements are provided. However, there is an added cost to provide such improvements that the school district is not required to fund. In addition, SR2S improvements are generally proposed to address existing circulation problems which may not be evident before a new school opens and traffic patterns emerge.

The City has provided these higher level types of improvements by applying for SR2S grants. We have leveraged CIP 68-017.0 Annual Allocation - School Traffic Safety Improvements (\$100,000 in FY ‘05) to cover the required matching funds to accept the grants. In total, the City has been awarded \$2,201,400 in SR2S funds over the past four years.

However, public improvements require substantial funding, and in order to provide a higher level of safety improvements we must identify a local source of funding. Staff will continue to pursue SR2S grants and any other grants available to improve traffic safety around schools. If a funding source within the City was dedicated for the purpose of improving safety around schools, staff would be more effective in leveraging grant funds, and partnering with the school districts and other agencies in order to provide the needed public improvements. Staff recommends that the School Traffic Safety Improvements Annual Allocation be substantially increased when regional sales tax (Transnet) funding is available in the next few years. SANDAG should also be encouraged to allocate a portion of the regional funding for this purpose.

CONCLUSION

For the purpose of traffic signing and markings, the City follows the federal (MUTCD) and state (California Supplement) standards for school zones. Laddered crosswalks are permitted in the MUTCD, and the City's School Pedestrian Safety Guidelines contain criteria for the installation of laddered crosswalks in the vicinity of schools. Staff applies these standards when reviewing improvements to all school locations.

The State of California's "Safe Routes to School" competitive grant program is a funding source for established schools with an identified safety problem that can be improved or mitigated by public improvements in coordination with traffic control devices. Such improvements may include features that are at times above and beyond the normally required standards. The City will continue to apply annually for grant funding in coordination with school districts and other public safety agencies.

The City's School Safety Guidelines will be completed in the near future and will be forwarded to the PS&NS Committee. Staff will also seek additional federal, state, and local funding for the purpose of providing significant improvements at school sites citywide.

Respectfully submitted,

Patti Boekamp
Director
Engineering and Capital Projects

Approved by:
Richard Mendes
Deputy City Manager