



TRANSPORTATION DIVISION

STAFF REPORT

TO: PLANNING & TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION

FROM: Carl Stoffel **DEPARTMENT:** Planning

AGENDA DATE: June 12, 2002

SUBJECT: FIRST-YEAR REVIEW OF NEIGHBORHOOD TRAFFIC CALMING PROGRAM

RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends that the Planning and Transportation Commission recommend that City Council (a) review and comment on this first-year review of the Neighborhood Traffic Calming Program (NTCP); and (b) approve the revisions to the NTCP as described in this report and as included in the attached revised program booklet (Attachment E)—all as summarized below:

1. Increase strictness of qualifying criteria.
2. Remove volume reduction measures: full time turn prohibitions, diagonal diverters, median barriers, forced turn channelization and one-way and full street closures.
3. Add a “floor” of 150 vehicles per day increase to the acceptable diversion threshold.
4. Add speed cushions as a traffic calming measure.
5. Add education and enforcement as a traffic calming measure.
6. Require two alternative trial traffic calming plans for the project area survey and increase survey approval threshold to 60 percent for one trial plan.
7. Include a summary table of approving authorities for trial and permanent plans.
8. Exclude cul-de-sacs up to 800 feet in length as candidates for traffic calming projects.
9. Change definition of “project area” to include cul-de-sacs along the primary street.
10. Limit definition of “spot treatment” to approximately 8 blocks or 3000 feet.
11. Clarify consensus in Step 5 of the procedure.
12. Make typographical, editorial and graphical changes.

BACKGROUND

The City Council approved Palo Alto's Neighborhood Traffic Calming Program (NTCP) in April 2001. The NTCP is also referred to as the "spot treatment" program because it is intended to address traffic calming in only a small area or limited number of blocks or streets at a time. Full neighborhood-level traffic calming projects are not included in the NTCP. When it was adopted, staff anticipated that this program would need to be modified from time to time and that the first year of the program would be treated as a trial. Staff plans to return annually to the Commission and Council with a status report/evaluation, including any suggested changes.

SUMMARY OF IMPORTANT ISSUES AND RECOMMENDED CHANGES

Status of First Year of Traffic Calming Projects

In the first 13 months of application of the NTCP, five traffic calming projects were started—two on collector streets and three on local streets. One of the local street projects (Ross Road) was implemented as an education and enforcement program, with very minimal physical measures. A collector street project (Louis Road) is the first and only implementation of a trial physical installation in this first year. The other three projects are in various stages in the twelve-step NTCP procedure, potentially leading to implementation of trials. Staffs' experience with these projects confirms the workability of most aspects of the NTCP procedure, but demonstrates that some important changes are needed. The proposed changes are discussed below. The five traffic calming projects are described in more detail in Attachment A.

Number of Requests Received and Qualified

In the first 13 months of the program, 30 requests or inquiries for traffic calming were received. Of these, only eleven completed the first formal step of submitting a letter/petition with at least 25 percent of households indicating support for a study. Of these eleven, eight met or are expected to meet the qualifying criteria to be placed on the pending project list. Staff has been able to start work on five of these projects so far. Refer to Attachment B for a complete listing of all NTCP requests and projects to date. Before the program started, staff projected receiving about 20–40 traffic calming requests annually, with about half of those qualifying for the program. What actually occurred is that 30 requests were received, but a far smaller number of requestors (eleven) actually followed through with the initial letter of resident support. The eight qualified projects represent 70 percent of the eleven official requests. If many of the other requestors follow through with the initial petition and the qualifying rate continues at about 70 percent, the qualified project list would grow to be much larger than this program can support.

The length of the qualified project list should be realistic with regard to how many projects staff can work on each year. By keeping this list to a manageable number, fewer residents would be disappointed or frustrated at having long waits before their project could be started. Staff thus recommends that the qualifying criteria be made stricter, with

the goal of reducing the qualifying rate from the current 70 percent to about 50 percent of requests received. Even with this change, staff still expects that the number of qualified projects on the list will exceed the number that staff can actually work on at any given time. Refer to Attachment C for the proposed changes in the qualifying criteria.

Staffing and Budget

When the program was first developed, staff projected that a staffing level of 0.55 position FTE (full time equivalent position), combined with a capital budget of \$100,000, would result in an average of from 1 to 3 traffic calming projects being completed in permanent form annually. The number of projects that can be permanently installed is limited primarily by the \$100,000 budget. During the first year, Transportation Division staff has been able to work on five projects with an average staffing level of approximately 0.78 FTE (combined contributions of the Traffic Calming Manager, Assistant Traffic Calming Manager, City Traffic Engineer and the Chief Transportation Official). The Transportation Division expects to increase the staffing level in the next year of the program to approximately 1.0 FTE by increased contributions from some of the above staff positions.

Based on the first year's experience, it seems reasonable to assume that about 5 to 6 traffic calming projects can be in process during the coming year. However, the real expenditure of capital funds begins with the trial stage of a physical traffic calming project and only one project has progressed to that stage so far (Louis Road). That trial project has used \$50,000 out of the \$100,000 annual budget. The number of projects that can actually be implemented each year will be strictly limited by the capital budget. Staff's original estimate still seems reasonable—i.e., a long-term average of from 1 to 3 completed projects annually with a \$100,000 annual budget. Since the staffing level can initiate about 5 to 6 traffic calming projects per year, but the capital budget will permit actual implementation of only about 1 to 3 projects, it is obvious that an implementation backlog will soon develop due to a shortfall of capital funds. For example, this coming fiscal year, all four current projects with physical measures could be ready for trial installations, plus possibly 2 to 3 more projects, at an approximate total capital cost of \$150,000. Since this is greater than the \$100,000 expected to be available this coming fiscal year, this will be the beginning of the implementation backlog. Once these projects are ready for permanent installation, the needed capital funds increase greatly.

Time Line

With the exception of the Churchill Avenue project, the first-year projects have progressed at approximately the rate expected by staff as stated at the end of Chapter VI of the NTCP booklet. Staff has made some minor revisions to the time lines for this coming year. Due to the recommended removal of volume-reduction measures from the NTCP, the longest time frame for complex projects has been removed. Following are the revised approximate time lines for typical projects as included in Chapter VI of the NTCP booklet. These times do *not* include the waiting time between receipt of a resident

petition and the date staff is actually able to initiate the study; and do *not* include any delays due to lack of capital funds.

	<u>Local Street</u>	<u>Collector Street</u>
• Project initiation (Step 2) to approval of a trial plan (Step 6)	4-6 months	5-7 months
• Project initiation (Step 2) to installation of a trial plan (Step 8)	9-11 months	12-14 months
• Project initiation (Step 2) to approval of a permanent plan (Step 11)	16-20 months	22-26 months
• Project initiation (Step 2) to installation of permanent plan (Step 12)	26-30 months	32-36 months

Best case for speed hump/tables/cushions with high degree of resident agreement:

• Project initiation (Step 2) to installation of a trial plan (Step 8)	7-9 months	9-10 months
• Project initiation (Step 2) to installation of permanent plan (Step 12)	14-17 months	19-22 months

Volume Reduction Measures

When the Commission and Council discussed the proposed NTCP in 2001, many members thought that traffic calming should focus on speed reduction rather than cut-through volume reduction. Some members even considered removing volume reduction measures from the proposed program. However, in the end, the decision was made to retain cut-through volume reduction as one of the objectives of the NTCP. Based on staff’s experience with the Churchill Avenue collector street project (still in progress), and other past experience, staff now believes that volume-reduction measures are not appropriate for the NTCP, including the following measures: full time turn prohibitions, diagonal diverters, median barriers, forced turn channelization and one-way and full street closures (Measures 16–19 in the existing NTCP booklet). Staff believes that such measures should only be considered in a neighborhood-wide context.

The primary reasons are (a) these measures usually cause enough traffic diversion to side streets that the study area becomes too large for the NTCP (which is intended to be a spot treatment program); and (b) the amount of staff time required for analysis and public participation is much higher than for speed reduction projects. This results in slower progress on the other simpler traffic calming projects. A series of speed reduction measures will also reduce cut-through volumes—typically on the order of 10 to 15 percent. Thus, even without volume reduction measures in the NTCP, volume reduction would still occur—incidental to the primary purpose of speed reduction. Staff proposes that the NTCP be revised to remove references to the above measures in the text and appendix, including removing “reducing cut-through traffic” from Objective 1 of the traffic calming program and revising Guideline 4.

Diversion Threshold

Staff recommends that an exception be added to the 25 percent maximum allowable diversion threshold in Guideline 8. A “floor” would be added to the amount of diverted traffic allowed to an adjacent street due to a traffic calming project—an increase of up to 150 vehicles per day (vpd) would be acceptable on any local or collector street adjacent to a traffic-calmed street, regardless of the maximum allowed 25 percent increase. The

maximum total volume of 2500 vpd on a local street would still remain. The 150 vpd allowance is based on the program of Portland, Oregon, after which Palo Alto's NTCP is modeled. This minimum allowance would permit large percentage changes on very low-volume streets. The change would be noticeable to residents, but the total volume would still be very low. For example, with the proposed "floor", an existing volume of 100 vpd on an adjacent street could be permitted to rise to 250 vpd due to traffic diversion of 150 vpd (a 150 percent increase). Formerly, the maximum permitted increase would only be 25 vpd (25 percent increase) for a total of 125 vpd. The proposed floor would have decreasing impact up to 600 vpd, where it would equal the existing 25 percent maximum. This revision would result in acceptable traffic diversion to some low-volume side streets (where it might otherwise not be acceptable) due to a series of speed control measures on an adjacent traffic-calmed street.

Speed Cushions

The Louis Road collector street project employs a new traffic calming measure, the speed cushion, that is currently not included in the NTCP. Staff became aware of this measure only late last year as a "kinder" form of speed hump that the Fire Department was willing to allow on collector streets. The Louis Road trial is just now being implemented and has not generated any data or findings regarding speed cushions, but staff expects that they will be a useful measure, especially for collector streets. Thus, staff recommends inclusion of speed cushions in the NTCP as one of the suggested traffic calming measures (traffic calming Measure 15 in the attached program booklet).

Education and Enforcement

The current NTCP includes education and enforcement as methods to promote traffic calming. Council Members and Commissioners were particularly interested in including these measures in addition to physical measures. However, the NTCP does not currently include details of education and enforcement nor discuss how or when these measures could be implemented. Residents of Ross Road (one of the five traffic calming projects initiated this past year) chose education and priority enforcement as the sole measures for their trial program. Staff believes this is the first time any group of residents has deliberately selected education and enforcement instead of physical measures for traffic calming. In response, staff developed the program for Ross Road residents described in Attachment A and recommends that this program be included in the NTCP as a defined traffic calming measure. Staff further recommends that a subset of these measures be offered to residents whose request for traffic calming is qualified but is on the waiting list, as a start; and that education-only measures be offered to residents whose request did not qualify for the NTCP. These programs are described in traffic calming Measure 1 in Attachment E.

The Police Department supports priority and enhanced enforcement as traffic calming measures. However, the Department emphasizes that it does not have the resources to continue priority enforcement beyond the four-month trial period for the full

education/enforcement program. Nor can it provide enhanced enforcement for qualified requests on the waiting list if the list becomes too long. The Department has limited staffing for traffic enforcement in the face of a large volume of enforcement requests and calls for other types of service. Thus, the amount and quality of enforcement that staff is able to offer as part of the traffic calming program is limited to an “as available” basis.

Alternative Trial Plans and Resident Survey

The current NTCP allows, but does not encourage, residents to choose among more than one trial traffic calming plan. Based on this year’s experience, staff recommends that the residents’ working group develop two alternative trial plans (in addition to the “do nothing” alternative) to present to the project area for the neighborhood survey (Steps 4–6). One of these alternatives could be the education and enforcement program. The reasoning is that there are typically some residents who prefer a more stringent plan and others who prefer a less stringent plan, or who prefer one type of measure over another. Having two alternatives will give more residents a chance to choose something to their liking. The survey will allow residents to vote for both alternative plans if they feel strongly enough that either plan is preferable to the status quo. Staff also recommends changing the minimum resident approval rate in the project area survey (Step 6) from 50+ percent to 60 percent. Staff feels that 60 percent better reflects neighborhood consensus than a simple majority. In case both plans receive at least 60 percent approval, the one with the highest approval rate would go forward for City consideration.

Additional Minor Changes in the NTCP Booklet

A few minor recommended changes in the NTCP procedures are listed in Attachment D and have been included in the attached revised booklet. Numerous editorial and graphical changes have also been made that do not need Commission or Council review. Staff has not yet completed revision of some photographs and text of the traffic calming measures in the booklet appendix, but will do so in time for City Council final approval.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

There are no new policy implications from this annual review and recommended changes to the NTCP.

ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW

City Council adoption of the procedures and criteria for the traffic calming program does not constitute a project under Article 15378 of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). Trials of traffic calming projects are exempt under Article 15306 of CEQA. However, staff will prepare an environmental assessment for each trial traffic calming project for informational purposes. This assessment would be updated based on the actual results of the trial. The City Council or the Director of Planning and Community Environment would approve the environmental assessment if and when the Council or Director approves the project for permanent installation.

NEXT STEPS

Staff will implement the proposed changes to the NTCP as soon as City Council approval is received. For traffic calming projects that were already started before Council approved the revised program, staff will process these projects according to the changed criteria and procedures starting on the date that Council approves the revised program, to the greatest degree feasible. Projects that were not started before Council approval of the revised program (even if the initial petition had been received before the Council-approved revisions) will be processed under the revised program.

ATTACHMENTS/EXHIBITS:

- A. Status of Current Traffic Calming Projects
- B. NTCP Request/Project List
- C. Recommended Changes to Qualifying Criteria
- D. Recommended Minor Changes to NTCP
- E. Revised NTCP Booklet Dated June 12, 2002

COURTESY COPIES:

- 1. Residents who requested information on the traffic calming program since April 2001
- 2. Neighborhood Associations

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Reviewed by: Joseph Kott, Chief Transportation Official

Division Head Approval: _____

Joseph Kott, Chief Transportation Official

ATTACHMENT D
RECOMMENDED MINOR CHANGES TO NTCP

The following recommended minor changes are in addition to the larger changes discussed in the body of the staff report.

1. *In the NTCP Booklet, include a summary table of the various approving authorities for trial and permanent installations of local and collector street projects.* Discussion: This table was provided only in last year's staff reports for Councilmembers and Commissioners. In the five traffic calming projects in process so far, residents often asked who approves the installation. It would be helpful to residents and staff to having this information handy in the booklet. This table is now included at the end of Chapter 6 in the attached booklet.
2. *Exclude cul-de-sacs up to 800 feet in length from the NTCP.* Discussion: This year, one request was received from a short cul-de-sac, but it not meet the qualifying criteria. Typically, such streets will not qualify for the NTCP, but do require staff time to gather the data necessary for that determination. 800 feet is selected as the threshold because speeding can be an issue in greater than a two-block length.
3. *In Step 2, add to definition of "project area" all cul-de-sacs along the primary street that do not continue across the primary street (i.e., that have T-intersections with the primary street).* Discussion: Residents of such cul-de-sacs have no choice about driving on a portion of the primary street where traffic calming measures might be installed. This change will make it clear that these residents are included in the project area and survey area.
4. *Clarify definition of "spot treatment" in Guideline 10.* Discussion: "spot treatment" has been variously defined in the program as including multiple streets, but not an entire neighborhood. It is desirable to be more specific so that residents understand when a request can be accommodated by this program. The size of potential projects should be limited so that staff does not become overwhelmed by one large project at the expense of smaller ones. The proposed definition limits the total length where traffic calming measures could be installed in a single project to approximately 8 blocks, or 3000 feet.
5. *Determining Consensus for a Project Area Survey.* As currently stated in Step 5 of the NTCP procedure, "it is desirable for project area residents to reach consensus on the preferred plan at this point [the second project area meeting]" before proceeding to a project area survey (Step 6). Consensus is not defined in the NTCP, but is defined in the dictionary as "general agreement" or "group

solidarity”. The intention of Step 5 is that there be a “workable” consensus that the traffic calming plan (and alternative) are ready to go forward to the next step—the survey. There does not have to be consensus that a particular plan should actually be implemented at that point—just consensus that the proper plan(s) will be included in the residents’ survey. Based on experience with the Churchill project, staff recommends that Step 5 be clarified accordingly, as well as to require (rather than suggest) that consensus be reached in order to proceed to Step 6.

Note: Numerous typographical, editorial and graphical changes have also been included in the revised NTCP booklet.