

8. Reduce a collector street traffic calming project trial from six months to four months.

BACKGROUND

The City Council approved Palo Alto's Neighborhood Traffic Calming Program (NTCP) in April 2001. The NTCP is often referred to as the "spot treatment" program because it addresses traffic calming in only a small area or limited number of blocks or streets at a time. 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 approximately annually to the Commission and Council with a status report/evaluation, including any suggested changes. The first report was presented to the Commission on June 12, 2002, and the Commission approved 12 staff recommendations for the revised NTCP. At the conclusion of that meeting, the Commission requested that staff return with more information on a few NTCP topics at a study session on August 14, 2002. The Commission did not take any action at the study session. A total of nine different residents spoke at the two meetings. The Commission's discussion focussed on the following issues: qualification criteria, neighborhood-wide traffic calming, education and enforcement, and cost/funding. The staff reports and minutes for both Commission meetings are attached. Later, on September 25, 2002, the Commission discussed staff recommendations for the Churchill Avenue traffic calming study. One of staff's recommendations, approved by the Commission, was to change the NTCP notification and survey procedure for collector street projects (refer to attached excerpt from September 25, 2002 staff report).

DISCUSSION OF IMPORTANT ISSUES AND ADDITIONAL RECOMMENDED CHANGES

About one year has passed since the Commission made its June 12, 2002 recommendations for revisions to the NTCP. For various reasons, staff has not yet presented the Commission's recommendations to the City Council for approval. Since last year's Commission review, staff has gained considerable practical experience with several traffic calming projects. Additionally, state and local budget problems have become acute, focusing increased staff attention on funding and cost-effectiveness. Staff is therefore making some additional recommendations for procedural changes that were not presented to the Commission last year. Staff is also including a few recommendations that follow up on Commission actions from last year's review. Proposed text changes in the program are reflected in the revised NTCP manual pages in Attachment C. Staff will revise the manual's appendix (the inventory of traffic calming measures) once Council has made its decisions regarding the program revisions. The complete existing April 9, 2001 manual is attached for reference.

Qualification and Ranking Criteria. At the June 12 Commission meeting, staff proposed making the qualifying criteria stricter in order to control the number of qualifying

requests and to focus the selection predominantly on traffic speed and volume. The Commission agreed, but felt that streets such as those found in Barron Park should be given some extra weight at the qualifying stage. The concern revolved around bicycle and pedestrian safety on school routes that are narrow and lack sidewalks or bike lanes. Accordingly, the Commission recommended that the following four additional criteria be added as qualifying or ranking criteria or both, with the emphasis on qualifying criteria: (i) school commute route, (ii) total absence of sidewalks, (iii) absence of bike lanes or adequate width for bicyclists to share a traffic lane with vehicles, (iv) existing or proposed bicycle boulevard.

Staff has made the requested changes to the qualification and ranking criteria (Attachments A and B). Staff believes that the first three additional criteria should be added to the list of qualifying criteria, but combined so that a school commute route would not be a stand-alone criterion. The focus of the PTC discussion was on school commute routes that lack space for walkers and bicyclists, therefore posing some safety risks. Staff will use the terminology “official school commute corridor” to correspond to the existing Transportation Division project to formally identify school commute corridors, thus making it clear which streets meet this criterion. The criterion “official school commute corridor” has been added to the list of ranking criteria. Staff proposes that the criterion “existing or proposed bicycle boulevard” be used only as a ranking criterion.

Neighborhood vs. “Spot Treatment” Traffic Calming. Commissioners only touched upon this topic briefly. Some Commissioners were concerned that the City does not have a program or funding to deal with neighborhood traffic issues, and feel that such a program is needed, but no action was taken. The Commission suggested that the name of the NTCP be changed to reflect its true small or spot focus, rather than a neighborhood focus. Staff proposes that the new name be “Residential Street Spot Treatment Traffic Calming Program”, abbreviated “RTCP”.

Composition of Residents Working Group for Collector Street Projects (NTCP Step 3). As an outcome of the Churchill Avenue traffic calming project, staff recommended and the Commission approved another change to the NTCP procedures for collector street projects. (Refer to the attached excerpt from the September 25, 2002 staff report to the Commission on the Churchill project.) This approved change requires that an appropriately sized “wide area” beyond the immediate project area will be notified of the project and also be included in the resident surveys for the trial and permanent installations. In keeping with this change, staff proposes to ask for wide area participation in the residents working group that is formed at the first project area meeting (Step 3). Such participation was required by the Commission for the second round of the Louis Road traffic calming project (refer to May 14, 2003 Commission staff report on this project.) Staff proposes that up to one-third of the working group membership can be

representatives of the wide area, if there are interested residents. All working group members must be willing to support the purpose of the working group, which is to help develop traffic calming plans for the project area. Staff selected the one-third/two-thirds ratio because it is important that the residents of the project area have the predominant voice in determining the acceptability of traffic calming measures on their street. All cities follow this principle because the residents of the project area experience the traffic problems continually and directly in front of their homes. They would have to live with any physical traffic calming measures placed in front of their homes and would have to traverse them for all their trips. On the other hand, the wide area residents do not live directly and continually with the problems, and they use the project street for only some of their travel.

Restrict the Use of Speed Cushions. This new traffic calming measure was tested on Louis Road for a three-month trial, ending in November 2002. The measures were controversial and produced some safety problems in that location and were removed. As a result of the Louis Road trial, staff has concluded that speed cushions are not appropriate for collector streets. The Fire Department and the Valley Transportation Authority found the cushions to be an acceptable form of speed humps, due to the slots designed to allow trucks and buses to pass through. Because of the advantage to the Fire Department, staff believes that speed cushions should remain in the inventory, but be limited to low-volume local streets that are not designated or proposed as bike routes and to not have rolled curbs. This proposal was presented to the Commission at its October 16, 2002 meeting when staff recommended removing the Louis Road speed cushions. Staff did not request formal approval on retention of speed cushions in the traffic calming measure inventory, and the Commission did not specifically address it. Staff now requests the Commission's approval of this matter. The description of speed cushions in the traffic calming booklet appendix would be revised to show their proposed limited use. A forthcoming information report will provide an update on the Louis Road and other traffic calming projects.

Maintain Existing Procedure for Alternative Trial Plans and Survey Approval Threshold

On page 6 of the June 12, 2002 staff report to the Commission, staff had proposed revisions to Steps 4–6 of the procedure to require that the working group develop two alternative trial plans to be presented to the neighborhood, and to require 60 percent resident support of one of the plans. After several more months of program experience, staff now proposes to reword Steps 4–6, but maintain the existing policy of permitting one alternative to go forward and to continue with the requirement for 50+ percent resident support (i.e., simple majority). To keep the program flexible, staff believes it is best if the residents working group decides on the number of alternatives based on the particular situation. The 50 percent support threshold is consistent with other voting thresholds in the procedures and is appropriate for the usual case of voting on one alternative.

Revised Purpose of Second Project Area Meeting

In Attachment D to the June 12, 2002 staff report, staff had proposed a clarification of “consensus” in NTCP Step 5 (second project area meeting). However, based on recent experience, staff now proposes not to require consensus as an outcome of this meeting. In practice, sometimes it has been difficult for staff to determine if consensus has been reached, and there seems to be a range of opinions as to what constitutes consensus. Furthermore, by the time Step 5 is reached, the working group has spent considerable effort to develop one or more plans to present to the neighborhood. The plan(s) should not be subject to derailment at that point—only minor modifications if necessary. Staff believes the fate of the plans should be decided by the whole project area in Step 6 (project area survey).

With this change, the purpose of the second project area meeting for local street projects would be to present the work of the working group to the project area and entertain suggestions for any improvements before sending the plan(s) out for a project area survey. For collector street projects, the purpose of the meeting would be mostly informational—to present the work of the working group. Because of participation of a wider area for collector street projects, it becomes too complex and potentially unfair to entertain changes to the plan(s) or to determine their acceptance by trying to determine consensus among the limited number of residents with widely varying view points attending the meeting. The fate of a collector street plan should be decided by the entire survey area in Step 6 (the project area and wide area surveys).

Quality of Design/Cost Issues/Neighborhood Funding. In last year’s review, the Commission raised some concerns about cost-effectiveness and funding sources for traffic calming, but no changes were proposed. Staff now believes that some changes are needed in the traffic calming program to reflect the new budget realities anticipated for the foreseeable future. Staff, citizens and Council have a long history of desiring, designing and approving traffic calming measures that are in the mid to high range of aesthetic and maintenance quality. These designs are characterized by concrete curbing (rather than asphalt), landscaping (rather than hardscape or no-fill), integrated drainage if feasible (instead of gutter slots), and other materials or design considerations that look good and minimize maintenance. The lower cost designs have been reserved for temporary measures that are eventually replaced with the higher cost, permanent designs. Staff now believes that, in most cases, the high cost designs are not in keeping with the severely restricted General Fund resources. Staff proposes that the least expensive designs be used for trials, with simple improvements for permanent installations that would raise the quality level enough that they could remain permanently. Lower cost designs would necessarily be less pleasing aesthetically. A good example of low-cost designs that could remain permanently are the street closures and gateways that are being installed in the Downtown North neighborhood.

Staff recommends that higher cost permanent design enhancements for measures such as street closures, traffic circles, medians, bulbouts, chokers and some others, be funded *only* by the residents requesting the traffic calming measures. Otherwise the initial lower cost designs would remain permanently. Some other cities require resident funding for traffic calming measures, using the same procedure as proposed by staff (refer to pages 6–7 of the attached August 14, 2002 staff report to the PTC). Since that report, staff has discovered that Portland, Oregon, a pioneer in traffic calming measures and methodology, no longer funds any traffic calming measures. All projects must be paid for by residents—either self-funded, or through an improvement district. The procedure for resident funding in Palo Alto would be the same as already included in the existing NTCP (Chapter VI) except that it would be required for implementation of higher cost design enhancements. The simple self-funding procedure requires residents to come up with the appropriate funds in any manner they want, including a single individual providing the entire amount. No assessment district or other legal entity would be required. Assuming Council approves this change, staff will reorganize the manual’s appendix to illustrate examples of the low-cost measures that the City would install and the high cost measures that would be realized only through neighborhood funding.

Change Collector Street Trial Length to Four Months

The NTCP currently requires a six-month trial for collector street projects and four months for local streets. After experience with the Louis Road speed cushion trial (which staff shortened to three months because of problems with the cushions), staff believes that four months would be sufficient length for a collector street trial. A six-month trial would still be required for neighborhood traffic calming projects, such as Downtown North, which are much more complex than the NTCP projects. A shorter trial would noticeably reduce the overall time frame for a traffic calming project. Staff therefore recommends that all NTCP trial projects be four months long.

UPDATED STATUS REPORT ON NTCP

It has now been approximately two years since the NTCP was adopted. In those two years, staff has initiated a total of ten projects. Four of these have been on collector streets (Churchill, Louis and two projects on Channing) and the remainder on local streets. Trials have been implemented for four of the ten projects; four are nearing a possible trial (two for the second time); three projects are just starting; one (Churchill) ended with no trial plan.

In the two-year period, approximately 50 inquiries or requests for traffic calming were received. Of these, 20 completed the formal step of submitting a letter/petition or neighborhood association vote demonstrating the required resident support (the other 30 never continued on to submit the petition). Of the 20 submitting the required petition or vote, 13 met the qualifying criteria to be placed on the project list. A separate forthcoming informational staff report will provide a description of the eight active

projects as well as a list of the projects that staff expects to work on this coming fiscal year. Attachment D is a spreadsheet showing all 50 requests.

In the past two years, three particular trends or issues are worth noting. Foremost is that the traffic calming procedures must be applied flexibly. Staff has found that there will always be differences in the various project areas that require slight changes from the stated procedure. This was recognized even as the NTCP was being developed, with the need for flexibility noted in the last paragraph of the existing NTCP Introduction (Chapter I). Flexibility has been needed most in the resident survey procedure and this need was also noted in Step 6 of the existing Procedures (Chapter VI).

Second, at virtually all project area meetings residents have inquired why traffic problems cannot be solved by increased police enforcement. The implication is that residents would prefer permanently increased law enforcement to physical traffic calming measures. Police Department staff has occasionally attended the meetings if the residents are particularly interested in this. Either Police or Transportation staff have to explain that it is too expensive to provide the staffing level in the Police Department that would be needed to provide permanent ongoing enforcement in all the neighborhood areas where residents have complained of traffic problems. The Education and Enforcement traffic calming measure mentioned earlier in this report is not a popular choice for residents because they understand that it provides only temporary increased enforcement.

Third, with the increased staff and community emphasis on cost effectiveness, staff has promoted the use of the “vertical measures”--speed humps and speed tables as the best measures. They are also the easiest to implement because the designs are simple and standardized. As the number of these measures increases in the future, Transportation staff will need to work carefully with the Fire Department because of the negative impact of such measures on the Fire Department’s mission. Future emphasis may be needed on speed tables (and speed cushions in certain situations) as opposed to speed humps, because tables and cushions are more acceptable to the Fire Department than humps.

RESOURCE IMPACT

There is no resource impact from the PTC or staff recommendations for revisions to the NTCP. Staff’s recommendation to require resident funding for quality designs of permanent traffic calming measures would benefit the NTCP by saving an average of approximately \$30,000 annually out of the \$100,000 annual traffic calming budget.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

The recommended changes are consistent with existing City policies.

ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW

City Council adoption of the procedures and criteria for the traffic calming program, as well as any modifications, 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 a brief 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.

ATTACHMENTS

- A. Comparison of Existing and Proposed Qualifying Criteria
- B. Comparison of Existing and Proposed Ranking Criteria
- C. Revised RTCP Booklet (with Appendix to be revised)
- D. Spreadsheet of Requests for Traffic Calming
- E. June 12, 2002 Transportation Division Staff Report to the PTC
- F. Minutes of June 12, 2002 PTC Meeting
- G. August 14, 2002 Transportation Division Staff Report to the PTC
- H. Minutes of August 14, 2002 PTC Meeting
- I. Excerpt from September 25, 2002 Transportation Division Staff Report to the PTC

PREPARED BY: Carl Stoffel, Transportation Division

Division Head Approval: _____

Joseph Kott, Chief Transportation Official

cc: Citizens who requested information on the traffic calming program since April 2001
Neighborhood Associations
Citizens who sent correspondence for or attended the June 12, 2002 or August 14, 2002
Commission meetings.

ATTACHMENT A RECOMMENDED CHANGES TO QUALIFYING CRITERIA

Qualifying and ranking criteria for traffic calming requests are listed in Chapter VII of the NTCP. Following is a comparison table of existing and new recommended qualifying criteria. Project requests usually are unable to meet the accident criterion (#3), so the focus of the qualifying effort will be on the speed and volume criteria and narrow school commute corridors.

<u>Existing Qualifying Criteria</u> (Adopted April 2001)	<u>Staff- Recommended Qualifying Criteria</u> (June 12, 2002 Staff Report)	<u>PTC- Recommended Qualifying Criteria</u> (As Recommended in This Current Staff Report)
<p>Required: Initial qualifying petition signed by at least 25 percent of households.</p> <p>At least two of the following five criteria must be satisfied:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Minimum 85th percentile speed of 32 mph for local streets, and 35 mph for collector streets;¹ 2. Minimum volume of 1,200 vehicles per day (vpd) for local streets and 4,000 vpd for collector streets;² 3. Location within 1,000 feet walking distance of a school, senior citizen facility, facility for the disabled, park, community center, or other site with significant pedestrian activity; 4. Evidence (survey or field evaluation) of significant cut-through (i.e., through or non-neighborhood) traffic; 5. Unusual accident history (as defined by six or more crashes, or one fatal crash, in the prior three consecutive years—crashes due to parking, vehicle equipment, drug/alcohol, and certain other causes clearly not solvable by traffic calming will usually not be counted.) 	<p>Required: Initial qualifying petition signed by at least one-third of households.</p> <p>At least two of the following three criteria must be satisfied:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Minimum 85th percentile speed of 32 mph for local streets, and 35 mph for collector streets;¹ 2. Minimum volume of 1,200 vehicles per day (vpd) for local streets and 4,000 vpd for collector streets;² 3. Unusual accident history (as defined by six or more crashes, or one fatal crash, in the prior three consecutive years—crashes due to parking, vehicle equipment, drug/alcohol, and certain other causes clearly not solvable by traffic calming will usually not be counted.) 	<p>Required: Initial qualifying petition signed by at least one-third of households.</p> <p>At least two of the following four criteria must be satisfied:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Minimum 85th percentile speed of 32 mph for local streets, and 35 mph for collector streets;¹ 2. Minimum volume of 1,200 vehicles per day (vpd) for local streets and 4,000 vpd for collector streets;² 3. Unusual accident history (as defined by six or more crashes, or one fatal crash, in the prior three consecutive years—crashes due to parking, vehicle equipment, drug/alcohol, and certain other causes clearly not solvable by traffic calming will usually not be counted.) 4. Primary school commute route <i>and</i> one or both: (i) total absence of sidewalks; (ii) absence of bike lanes or adequate width for bicyclists to share a traffic lane with vehicles.

¹ Speed measurements will be multiplied by ± 5 percent to allow for measurement error and random daily variability. If any point in the resulting speed range meets or exceeds the above minimum, this criterion will be satisfied.

² Volume measurements will be multiplied by ± 10 percent to allow for measurement error and random daily variability. If any point in the resulting volume range meets or exceeds the above minimum, this criterion will be satisfied.

ATTACHMENT B RECOMMENDED CHANGES TO RANKING CRITERIA

Qualifying and ranking criteria for traffic calming requests are listed in Chapter VII of the NTCP. Following is a comparison table of existing and new recommended ranking criteria.

<u>Ranking Criteria</u> (Adopted April 2001)	<u>PTC- Recommended Ranking Criteria</u> (As Recommended in This Current Staff Report)
Speed at, or up to, 10% above, the minimum speed criterion—one street: 3.0 points	Speed at, or up to, 10% above, the minimum speed criterion—one street: 3.0 points
Speed at, or up to, 10% above, the minimum speed criterion—two+ streets: 6.0 points	Speed at, or up to, 10% above, the minimum speed criterion—two+ streets: 6.0 points
Speed more than 10% above the minimum speed criterion—one street: 4.0 points	Speed more than 10% above the minimum speed criterion—one street: 4.0 points
Speed more than 10% above the minimum speed criterion—two+ streets: 8.0 points	Speed more than 10% above the minimum speed criterion—two+ streets: 8.0 points
Volume at, or up to, 20% above, the minimum volume criterion—one street: 1.5 points	Volume at, or up to, 20% above, the minimum volume criterion—one street: 1.5 points
Volume at, or up to, 20% above the minimum volume criterion—two+ streets: 3.0 points	Volume at, or up to, 20% above the minimum volume criterion—two+ streets: 3.0 points
Volume more than 20% above the minimum volume criterion—one street: 2.0 points	Volume more than 20% above the minimum volume criterion—one street: 2.0 points
Volume more than 20% above the minimum volume criterion—two+ streets: 4.0 points	Volume more than 20% above the minimum volume criterion—two+ streets: 4.0 points
Within 1000 feet walking distance of a school, senior citizen facility, facility for the disabled, park, community center, or other site with significant pedestrian activity—one site: 2.5 points	Within 1000 feet walking distance of a school, senior citizen facility, facility for the disabled, park, community center, or other site with significant pedestrian activity—one site: 2.5 points
Within 1,000 feet walking distance of a school, senior citizen facility, facility for the disabled, park, community center, or other site with significant pedestrian activity—two+ sites: 5.0 points	Within 1,000 feet walking distance of a school, senior citizen facility, facility for the disabled, park, community center, or other site with significant pedestrian activity—two+ sites: 5.0 points
Evidence (survey or field evaluation) of significant cut-through (i.e., non-neighborhood) traffic—one street: 1.0 points	Evidence (survey or field evaluation) of significant cut-through (i.e., non-neighborhood) traffic—one street: 1.0 points
Evidence (survey or field evaluation) of significant cut-through (i.e., non-neighborhood) traffic—two+ streets: 2.0 points	Evidence (survey or field evaluation) of significant cut-through (i.e., non-neighborhood) traffic—two+ streets: 2.0 points
Request supported by more than two-thirds of households on problem street(s): 2.0 points	Request supported by more than two-thirds of households on problem street(s): 2.0 points
	Official school commute corridor—one street 2.5 points
	Official school commute corridor—two+ streets 5.0 points
	Existing or proposed bicycle boulevard—one street 2.5 points
	Existing or proposed bicycle boulevard—two+ streets 5.0 points

ATTACHMENT I

EXCERPT FROM SEPTEMBER 25, 2002 STAFF REPORT TO THE PLANNING AND TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION RE CHURCHILL TRAFFIC CALMING PROJECT

Pages 7-8:

Wider Notification Area for Collector Street Projects

Two NTCP projects on collector streets have been in process recently -- the Churchill Avenue project, and the ongoing Louis Road speed cushion trial. In both cases, residents on adjacent streets have been surprised by these projects because they had not been directly notified that a traffic-calming project was underway, nor had they been invited to participate in the project. The NTCP, being a "spot treatment" program that is designed to be as streamlined as possible, specifically limits the project area and the survey area (refer to NTCP steps #2 and #6).

Based on staff's experience with these two projects, it is becoming apparent that a wider area should be notified by mail that a collector street project is taking place. Collector streets are supposed to connect neighborhood traffic to arterial streets and they generally carry higher volumes than local streets. Thus, they have a larger "constituency" and it is natural that this wider constituency would have an interest in traffic calming proposals for collector streets. Nevertheless, staff believes strongly that the actual "project area" and the "survey area" be strictly limited as defined in NTCP step #6. Only residents actually living on the street should be included in the survey process for projects that do not result in substantial traffic diversion (except for cross streets where traffic circles are installed). Keeping the project and survey areas compact is an essential component of the "spot treatment" aspect of the NTCP. This will be easier in the future since the Commission recently recommended that volume-control measures (e.g., street closures) not be included in the NTCP. Thus, few future projects (if any) will result in adjacent streets being affected by excessive traffic diversion, which is one of the primary concerns of residents living near a traffic calming project area.

In addition to wider notification, staff proposes to implement an "advisory survey" for the wider service area of a collector street. The "advisory survey" would be conducted at the same time as the "project area survey" of the residents on the actual project street (NTCP step #6). Staff would *not* use the results of the "advisory survey" in determining whether or not a trial project should be recommended, but would report the survey results to the Commission. The Commission would thus have a clear indication of the wider-area resident opinion of a proposed collector street project. Staff is following this procedure for the Louis Road traffic-calming project involving the speed cushions. For each collector street project, staff would thus determine the appropriately sized "notification area" that would be notified of the collector street project and be included in the "advisory survey". Staff recommends that this additional change in the NTCP procedure be added to the list of modifications already approved by the Commission at its June 12, 2002 meeting (all of which staff will transmit to the City Council for its approval later this year).