



TO: Mayor and Councilmembers

SUBMITTED BY: Jaime A. Valdez, Assistant City Manager

SUBJECT: Transportation and Circulation Standing Committee

RECOMMENDATION:

Provide direction on the formation of a proposed Transportation and Circulation Standing Committee of the City Council.

BACKGROUND:

On December 20, 2016, Councilmember Kasdin requested consideration to create a transportation committee and at that meeting, Council requested additional information on the idea. On February 21, 2017, a Council vote was taken to table the establishment of a Traffic and Transportation Standing Committee.

In early February of 2025, the Mayor and Mayor Pro Tempore requested that Council have an opportunity to discuss the creation of a new Council standing committee, with a proposed working name of "Transportation and Circulation Standing Committee."

On February 18, 2025, during the 2025-27 Strategic Plan Updates & Future Priorities Workshop, staff requested direction on whether to form a new committee tentatively called the Transportation and Circulation Standing Committee. By the time the agenda item came up, one councilmember had left the meeting. There was no vote taken to provide direction.

In early April of 2025, the Mayor and Mayor Pro Tempore requested that Council revisit the creation of a new Council committee, with the proposed working name of "Transportation and Circulation Standing Committee." Councilmember Kasdin provided the attached document entitled "Transportation Safety and Circulation Committee" stating the reasons for why such a committee should be created. (Attachment 1).

DISCUSSION:

Council should have a discussion about the merits of such a committee and, if Council decides such a committee should be created, provide direction on its purposes. If Council directs the formation of this committee, staff will return to Council at a future date with the final suggested name of the committee, a summary of the purpose of the committee, the

frequency of meetings, and request that Council select two councilmembers to serve on the committee.

FISCAL IMPACTS:

Other than staff time needed to convene and prepare for standing committees, no additional funding would be needed.

ALTERNATIVES:

The Council could elect not to form a standing committee of two councilmembers or provide direction to form a different type of committee or commission.

LEGAL REVIEW BY: Isaac Rosen, Acting City Attorney

APPROVED BY: Robert Nisbet, City Manager

ATTACHMENTS:

1. "Transportation Safety and Circulation Committee"

ATTACHMENT 1

Transportation Safety and Circulation Committee

TRANSPORTATION SAFETY AND CIRCULATION COMMITTEE

A. ASSUMPTIONS

- One of the areas our residents are most concerned about and that is in the purview of Goleta City government is our transportation system, which includes roads and overpasses, bike, pedestrian, parking, traffic calming and more.
- As we all know, our roads constitute our largest capital asset. Maintaining and improving these with assets impacts the entire city's budget, limiting other non-CIP activities.
- Residents increasingly seek more input into transportation related decisions beyond a 3-minute speech at council meetings. We always seek opportunities for increased public engagement.
- Other jurisdictions have committees dedicated to transportation, recognizing the need for an integrated approach to planning and safety issues relating to roads, bikes, sidewalks, parking etc.

B. WHAT PROBLEMS ARE WE TRYING TO ADDRESS?

- The work is among the most challenging and costly in the city's budget. We have just borrowed funding to accelerate some CIP projects. The transportation goals are created by the General Plan, which establishes the level of standards levels on our roads. As much as street trees deserve a forum for extended discussion, so too do our roads.
- The goal of a committee is not to replace the CIP workshop or other such activities. The goal of the committee is to focus on policy, not projects, except to the extent that Public Works staff believes that there would be a benefit from the committee discussion, such as indicating where additional information or analysis is needed or where an additional alternative may be helpful for the subsequent council discussion, and additional public participation.
- For example, as we try to incentivize more bike traffic, it is important to recognize that making only a segment of a road safe won't encourage people to ride bikes if a large portion of the road remains unsafe. A casual bicyclist's sense of safety is going to be based on the whole route – the weakest link may discourage them from commuting by bicycle. We need to reconsider how to treat the bike and pedestrian master plan so the choices are not just ad hoc, based on the paving schedule. So, we need to choose the routes carefully – both which routes have the most potential to add commuters and students – that is, which routes are likely to have the most potential travelers, and which would most benefit from the safety improvements.

By the way, one of the biggest issues bedeviling the Santa Barbara city council seems to be the treatment of e-bikes on some bike paths (notably State Street). It too may be an issue that would benefit from public discussion.

- The work relies on grants, and it may be help if grants are discussed ahead of time in a public forum. To not bog down council meetings, grant applications are kept on the consent calendar. It is valuable for the public to understand that the receipt of the future grants will not handcuff us, forcing us to pursue projects that are lower priorities or according to a timetable that is difficult to manage.

C. THE NEED FOR BETTER AND MORE PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

- Among the most public-facing activities the city conducts are in public works. People see the results of our projects on a daily basis. They may not know if we are doing a good job with green energy, but they know if our roads are in bad shape.
- Public works projects are generally geographic specific. That is, they impact a select group of people more directly and immediately than many other programs. Childcare and homelessness policies, for example, cover the whole city, but a road repair or restriping project is local. People will care about these projects because the impacts are so personal. We want to have a forum for them to advocate for or against the project.
- We can improve the public feedback. Consider the changes on Cathedral Oaks, both in adding bike lanes and back-in parking. We had a council meeting where this was an agenda item. The only folks commenting (as I recall) were people from the bike coalition in Santa Barbara. Maybe there were comments offered by political candidates since it was just before the election, but I don't recall. The point is that there was no workshop or committee level discussion about the proposed changes.

Second, after a council discussion about the potential for adding an extra bike lane on Cathedral Oaks, there was no public or council review of the new proposed design. Would the public have supported the multiple bike lanes upon seeing how it looked? It's certainly an adjustment, so some additional public discussion would be nice. I am not suggesting anything would have been changed. But if we are willing to have public meetings to discuss what happens to individual trees, we should treat major changes in our roads with the same seriousness and offer the public additional opportunities to participate.

One last observation. Because many of the PW projects are neighborhood specific, it could be helpful to hold committee meetings outside of city hall. Maybe we hold meetings in the neighborhoods where the projects are going to take place. the Community Center, Ellwood School, the library or the GUSD building, Direct Relief, etc. could each host committee meetings.

Especially if we hold meetings in neighborhood-specific locations (like schools) would be to solicit priority projects from the residents. What do they think are the most pressing issues? The public may not be well versed in finance committee issues, but they will know what roads and parks projects are their most important.

D. HOW WOULD A TRANSPORTATION COMMITTEE WORK?

- There are many options for structuring the committee. It could be set up as a full commission, like our Planning, and Parks and Recreation Commissions, composed entirely of members of the public. It could be a standing committee, like Economic Development and Green Issues. Or it

could be something in between, like our Grants Committee used to operate with a combination of council members and appointed members of the public.

- Because it is such an essential and important part of a city's operation and its budget, many cities have a transportation committee. The city of Santa Barbara's Transportation & Circulation Committee relies on a 7 Members, of which 5 must live within the city, while two others can be city or county residents. The Committee meets on the fourth Thursday of every other month, although additional meetings may be scheduled in off-months as needed. They anticipate approximately four hours per quarter for meetings and related activities. Laguna Beach and La Cañada Flintridge have similar commission structures for their Parking, Traffic and Circulation Committee and Public Works and Traffic Commission, respectively.
- There are pros and cons to the different approaches. The commissions made entirely of members of the public requires considerably greater work for staff, but there may be a greater potential for public participation. The standing committee is a simpler staff burden, and council member input prior to going to council is greater, but many of our committees do not receive significant public participation. Perhaps the Grants Committee format may offer the Goldilocks solution.
- Public Works could decide on when to hold meetings, similar to how other committees, like Economic Development, Human Services, etc. operate. Public works would call a meeting when there are significant policy issues that would benefit from a discussion or when it would be valuable to air a topic ahead of time for the public to respond to.

E. INTERACTIONS WITH REGIONAL BODIES.

- Like most of our committees and commissions the proposed Transportation committee would be advisory only. Second, none of the committees in Goleta operate independently from regional bodies. All committees must operate within a web of external state and county rules and mandates, and incentives, like grants and penalties. The committee would not overturn state, county, or regional policy.
- The council makes decisions on road projects, even where SBCAG also exists. Having an advisory body discussing projects before the council considers a project would not undermine our decision making or hinder us in coordinating with SBCAG.
- The issue of the Brown Act has not been an issue in other committees where there is a regional body. For example, there is the county-wide Elected Leaders Forum on Homelessness, which overlaps with the responsibilities of the city's Homelessness Committee.
- There had been a suggestion that council membership on a regional body, like SBCAG or MTD, meant that person had to serve on the standing committee. However, for child care, we currently have a council member chosen to represent the city for a regional committee

(organized by the United Way) and for CommUnify who is not on the Human Services Committee.

- The committees help us to accomplish our policy goals in the context of the external policy boards. For homelessness, it is a key that we must coordinate with the county. The committee is helpful both in enabling us to understand county policies and goals, and helping us to work together.

F. Workload Impacts

It does not seem that Public Works is currently excessively burdened by having to staff committees or commissions. Having a meeting several times per year can be a worthwhile investment of time, if the value of the meeting is worthy. To illustrate, our existing commissions and committees consist of:

- **Planning has a total of 4:** 3 commissions (Historic Preservation Commission, the Planning Commission, Design Review Board) and 1 standing committee (Energy/Green Issues Committee)
- **City Manager has a total of 4:** 1 commission (the Public Engagement Commission) and 3 committees (Economic Development and Revitalization Committee, Budget and Finance, and Human Services)
- **Neighborhood Services has a total of 4:** two commission (Library Advisory Commission, and Parks and Recreation Commission) and 2 committee (Homelessness, and Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness)
- **Public Works has a total of 2:** 1 commission (Public Tree Advisory Commission) and 1 committee (Watersheds and Waste Reduction)

The workload for staff from these committees and commissions varies since the frequency that their meeting. Budget and Finance meets quarterly. Planning is based on need, but meets frequently, perhaps monthly.

For Public Works, the Watersheds and Waste Reduction Committee meets based on need, currently roughly annually. The Public Tree Advisory Commission apparently has met once in the past two years.

G. CONCLUSIONS:

- A committee dedicated to Transportation Safety and Circulation can offer a benefit to the city and its residents.
- We have internal and external models for how such a committee would work.
- The added workload will not be an excessive burden for staff.