

Olympic West Pico East

A fiscally unsound, untested plan with the potential to harm neighborhoods and businesses alike.

Everyone understands that traffic is a critical problem that must be addressed. Many believe that band-aid solutions are no longer effective. Speed bumps and other traffic-shifting strategies no longer have any impact. DOT has stated that all such mitigations have been used or are now ineffective.

We are now faced with the Pico/Olympic plan as a potential “solution.” DOT has stated that the plan will work, even though it is unstudied and untested in any U.S. City. Residents and businesses alike have come together asking that the plan be studied before implementation so that obvious and serious problems can be addressed.

Councilman Rosendahl has stated: *“When it comes to fighting traffic gridlock, we need a coordinated, comprehensive strategy that addresses transportation issues in specific communities. We can no longer have a piecemeal approach to traffic congestion.”*

Councilwoman Greuel stated: *“We are never going to solve our transportation crisis with a piecemeal solution. During the last 20 years, the region’s transportation leadership has failed Angelenos by focusing on short-term political gains rather than long-term investments. We must have a comprehensive citywide vision and invest in long-term planning.”*

Even Councilman Weiss, a supporter of the Mayor’s plan, stated *“I was shocked to learn that Los Angeles – the most congested City in America – has no concrete plan for reducing traffic. We are never going to solve our traffic crisis with piecemeal solutions.”*

Of course, they are correct. The Pico/Olympic plan represents, by DOTs own admission, a plan that has not been integrated into a comprehensive strategy. Its impacts on future light rail access, north/south traffic and local trip length remain, by DOT’s own admission, unstudied. The current Pico/Olympic plan is a politically expedient answer, not a real answer.

We urge our elected officials to focus on a fiscally responsible, comprehensive plan for handling traffic and out-of-control development.

Blank Check or Empty Promises

When the Santa Monica Boulevard project was implemented, a \$700,000 fund was established to handle and pay for unexpected impacts after the project was implemented. A \$300,000 fund was created to handle impacts during implementation. The Santa Monica Boulevard project was a 2.5 mile project.

The Pico/Olympic plan covers SIX TIMES more roadway. Given City budget constraints, can the City really guarantee that money will be available to react to critical and unexpected impacts as promised? Can the City dedicate a pool of funds exclusively for unexpected project impacts? From a fiscal responsibility standpoint, is it appropriate to state a budget for the project that does NOT include a mitigation fund?

Approving the project without committing resources to mitigation is either approving a blank check OR giving empty promises of future mitigation for which there will be no funding.

In this time of decreasing revenue and tight budgets, can the City afford to write a blank check for mitigations? Will the City be opening itself up to lawsuits for irreparable harm to local businesses? Is it unethical to promise that mitigations will be forthcoming when no money has been budgeted for those mitigations?

The bottom line: Unfunded mandates are bad planning.

CEQA – The City Must Prepare an EIR

CEQA does not provide for categorical exemptions to projects which will have an impact on the environment. CEQA also does not permit segmentation of a plan into separate phases for review where each phase may not have an impact but the aggregate will. City officials have been exceptionally clear that the Pico/Olympic project is a three phase project. Traffic is likely to increase by more than 10% on various streets, parking will be impacted and increased traffic flow will impact air quality. For reference, this is the exception language from CEQA:

15300.2. Exceptions

- a. Location. Classes 3, 4, 5, 6, and 11 are qualified by consideration of where the project is to be located -- a project that is ordinarily insignificant in its impact on the environment may in a particularly sensitive environment be significant. Therefore, these classes are considered to apply all instances, except where the project may impact on an environmental resource of hazardous or critical concern where designated, precisely mapped, and officially adopted pursuant to law by federal, state, or local agencies.
- b. Cumulative Impact. All exemptions for these classes are inapplicable when the cumulative impact of successive projects of the same type in the same place, over time is significant.
- c. Significant Effect. A categorical exemption shall not be used for an activity where there is a reasonable possibility that the activity will have a significant effect on the environment due to unusual circumstances.

Why, specifically, does the City believe no EIR is required when significant impact and cumulative impacts are so clearly not only possible but likely? Why has the City not provided its rationale for not conducting a full study of such a wide-ranging plan?

Business Impacts – Poor Access Means Reduced Patronage, Lower Tax Revenue

Businesses along Olympic and Pico will be facing an uncertain future as parking is restricted, traffic increases, average speeds increase and traffic patterns shift. Customers will have a difficult time reaching their favorite establishments at key hours. The impact on small businesses has not been studied in any meaningful way. It is unfair that businesses that have been in existence for years suddenly find that their customers can no longer reach them. This occurred on Santa Monica Boulevard during construction and several businesses were forced to close.

The impact will not be limited to those businesses on Pico and Olympic. The impact on north/south streets that will see increased use has not been studied. Commercial corridors such as Westwood Boulevard will see increased delays as north/south routes receive “crossover” traffic and thus become less attractive to customers.

Even if parking restrictions are dropped to fool business owners into accepting the plan, the massive shift in traffic patterns will turn Pico, Olympic and the crossover streets into highly undesirable mini-freeways during peak hours. This will discourage customers from visiting those establishments.

School/Religious Institution Impact

Several schools depend on street parking for safe drop-offs for their students. The elimination of parking during drop-off and pick-up times will force parents to illegally park in restricted neighborhood areas OR have their children walk across Pico or Olympic – which would be virtual freeways. In addition, there has been no study of the impact on Safe Routes to School for impacted schools.

Regional Traffic Impacts

While commuters passing through impacted areas MAY see a benefit while travelling east/west, an unknown number of drivers will see delays while travelling north/south. The reason is not a loss of “green time” in the north/south direction. The reason is the PLANNED and EXPECTED increase on north/south crossover streets between Pico and Olympic.

Further, the impact on local freeways is unknown as is the impact on a possible \$800,000,000 light rail system. There has been no evaluation of the ability of potential commuters to reach that light rail.

Common Routes Unaddressed

Simple questions such as how drivers are expected to get from point A to Point B have not been answered believably. DOT has publicly stated that this has never been tried before in any city. Their assessments on harm to overall local trip length is not backed-up by ANY study or ANY data at all.

A specific West L.A. example:

Century City drivers currently take Pico west to Overland to get to the 10 freeway (green path). However, the plan calls for Pico to be oriented for eastbound traffic. The plan therefore calls for Century City drivers to take Olympic to CENTINELA to go west on the 10 and take Pico to LA BREA or even CRENSHAW to go east on the 10.

Of course, drivers will still try to get to the nearest on/off ramp for the 10 at Overland (red paths). How will they get there? The plan calls for metering of left turns from westbound Olympic to southbound Overland to two cars per green. Drivers will, as they already do, turn left onto the streets just before or after Overland – Selby and Pelham. DOT has promised to respond by restricting access to those left turns during peak hours. If they do, residents of those streets will likewise be prohibited from making those turns. If all streets are metered or restricted, how will residents get home? What will the impacts be on Prosser, Manning, and Westwood Boulevard below Pico?



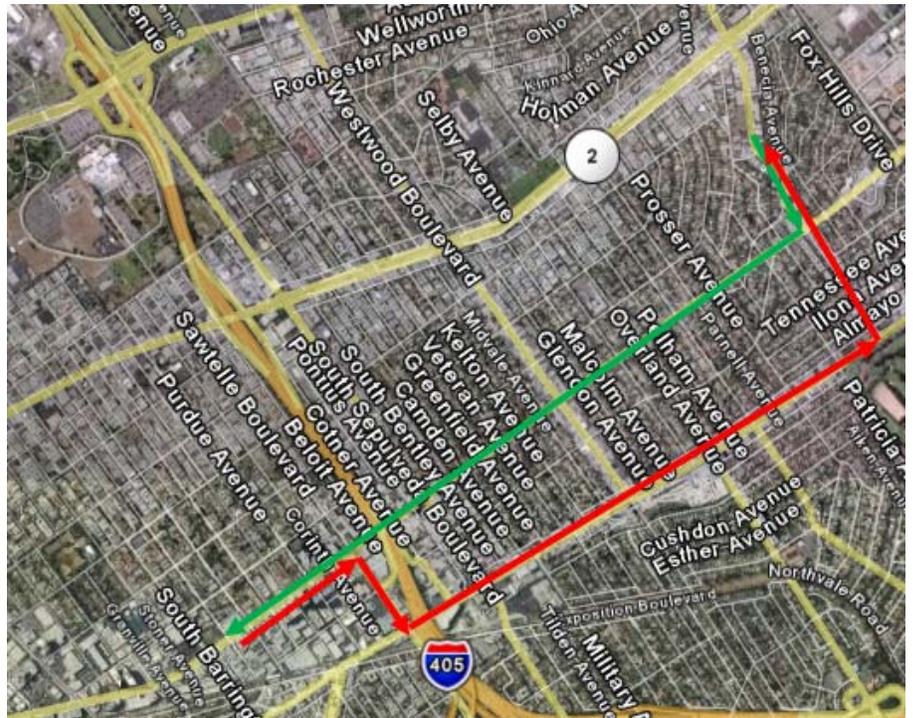
With a history of slow reaction times to install promised neighborhood mitigations and no funds dedicated to those mitigations, neighborhoods are likely to see cut-through traffic near their homes increased.

Community Access/Local Trip Lengths

Local travel times and trip lengths will likely increase as no leg will be shorter than it currently is, but everyone will have to increase the distance driven to do the return leg via the new required route. Drivers will have to pass through congested north/south streets to make return trips.

Anyone who wants to shop or do business at a location on Pico or Olympic will be forced to travel north or south on one leg of their trip since they won't be able to return along the road they came on, thus substantially increasing traffic between Pico and Olympic on streets that are already very crowded at rush hour.

The sample shown here represents the logical flaw with the plan. A trip to a business using the current system (green path) can be made with one right turn and one left turn. Under the Pico/Olympic plan, the trip would be over 10% longer and involve two right turns and two left turns.



The plan may further erode the local character of the neighborhoods as some streets will be turned into thoroughfares or freeways, and residents will be discouraged from visiting their local stores and businesses. In addition, the reduced ability to reach one's home as a result of removed left turn capability may impact property values and add to congestion on once-quiet residential streets.

Rapid Reaction to Neighborhood Intrusions is Unlikely

Neighborhoods have been promised rapid reaction and immediate attention for unexpected intrusions as a result of the plan. DOT's track record does not support this assertion. Promised studies for the Santa Monica project were never performed. Before/after studies for the ATCS system were never performed and were actually jury-rigged and highly limited after/before studies. Cheviot Hills is still waiting for implementation of neighborhood protections which were promised in connection with the ALREADY OCCUPIED 2000 Avenue of the Stars project. They have also been told that due to the delay and resulting increase in material costs, there is no longer enough money to make the promised changes and that money from other sources will have to be siphoned off. That was for a FUNDED mitigation. The current plan does NOT have a funded mitigation plan.

First Responder Impacts

A dramatic change in West L.A. traffic patterns will have an unknown impact on first-responder response times. Crowded north/south streets that are given a lower priority may impact fire and police response.

Impacts on Past Development Agreements/ATCS

Several communities have existing development agreements which may be violated by the plan's impacts. In addition, the installation of ATCS was a condition of approval for several projects. The impact of the removal of ATCS from intersections along Pico and Olympic must be analyzed. The analysis must include not only impacts at those intersections, but impacts along the north/south routes and parallel east/west routes that use ATCS. Note that ATCS was a specific mitigation for several projects.

Interactions with Existing EIRs

All EIRs in the “pipeline” must be revisited to reflect the changed traffic patterns and the loss of the ATCS capacity increase percentage. Developers must also not be allowed to take credit for theoretical capacity increases that MAY be generated by the plan. Note that the plan states in several places that the benefits and possible unexpected consequences are unknown.

LADOT had previously granted capacity increases of 4% for ATSAC use and an additional 3% for ATCS use. There is no data to allow for those capacity increases to be continued, especially as north/south crossover routes will necessarily be LESS efficient if the east/west routes are forced into being MORE efficient.

Queue Space on Crossover Streets Is Insufficient.

The plan relies on drivers using “crossover” streets to access either Pico to go east or Olympic to go west. DOT has admitted at several community meetings that it has not studied the ability of those crossover streets to handle that increased load.

As this picture shows, there simply is NO storage space for cars going from Olympic west to Westwood Blvd. south.

What this will cause is an overflow of the left turn queue from Olympic west to Westwood Boulevard south. This will (as it ALREADY currently does) block a through lane on Olympic west, reducing through capacity by 25%. DOT has ADMITTED it has not studied the north/south routes.



Conflict with Representations Made to the Community

On June 13, 2007, Jack Weiss held a “task force” meeting on the Pico/Olympic concept. The constituents present were promised further input before the plan would move forward. The business and residential communities have submitted questions and have not received thorough written answers to those questions. These are important questions. They involve people’s homes, businesses, safety and their children. A few quotes from Councilman Weiss

“ All I’ve heard tonight... are really good questions and we just don’t have answers to those questions. Is this thing fully baked? No way. Its not even close. So what DOT needs to do is to analyze the questions that have been provided and to do a good job of it.”

“ The report that you (DOT) will be providing will be more of a conversation starter than a conversation ender. Just answering the question “How will I get home” Answer: “Unknown” says that there is an awfully long way to go. There is an awful lot more to be written than has been the case.”

“This proposal can’t move until those questions are actually answered. I’m going to work with all of you to figure out what would be the most productive way to have the next meeting. We want to wait for a written work product from DOT...”

When asked about representative democracy... “I think its proper and appropriate to give DOT a chance to put it on paper. And then let’s get responses[from the community] on paper. That’s the most appropriate way to do it.”

Downstream Unintended Consequences Likely and Not Studied

When north/south crossover street traffic increases as a result of the plan, the ATCS system will react, as it is designed to do, by increasing green time for those routes. This concern is not referring to Pico or Olympic, but rather the intersections to the north and south of Pico or Olympic. The wide-ranging likely impacts of the major traffic pattern shift have not been studied in any meaningful way, if at all.

Beverly Hills Has Not Committed to the Plan

The City of Beverly Hills has not approved the plan. While DOT has indicated that Beverly Hills staff is “supportive” of the plan, the City Council has not indicated its support. Implementation of any plan and expenditure of any money should be conditioned on Beverly Hills implementing the plan. If they do not, residents and businesses in Century City will face being on the abrupt end of unknowable traffic patterns. This will materially impact Century City AND Beverly Hills traffic patterns.

Peeling Away Parts of a Bad Plan to Get Something Through Is Bad Planning

In response to valid residential and business community concerns and logical flaws in the plan, DOT has found itself stripping away parts of the plan. As they do so, there has been no study of what theoretical benefit is also being stripped away. Further, there are no assurances for the residential and business communities that those plan elements that are now being dropped will stay dropped once portions of the plan are implemented.

The Real Problem: Development without Infrastructure to Support It

The real problem the City is facing is the continued acceptance of traffic-generating development with no plan for handling traffic and no source of revenue for that eventual plan. Instead, the City finds itself in the position to hungrily accept more development projects just to pay for the impacts of the last one. This pyramid scheme is starting to crumble. Allowing more development as a solution to ever-increasing development-created traffic is pure insanity.

It's Time for Real Plan

We have been given conflicting information on what works, what is needed and what should be done. We have been told:

- We are told that ATCS is the answer
(see <http://abclocal.go.com/kabc/story?section=resources/traffic&id=5780875>)
(SEE http://www.lacity.org/council/cd11/transissues/cd11press12847206_08162007.pdf)
- We are told special timing and light synchronization is the answer and not ATCS
(see <http://www.latimes.com/news/local/la-me-hymon11feb11,1,4291988.story>)
- We are told that allowing left turns is the answer
(see http://www.lacity.org/mayor/myrpress/mayormyrpress27449682_12052007.pdf)
(See http://www.lacity.org/council/cd11/transissues/cd11press12847206_08162007.pdf)
- We are told that adding left turn arrows decreases intersection capacity
(see http://zev.lacounty.gov/images/OLYMPIC_PICO_REPORT_EXHIBITS_APPENDIX.pdf)
Page 7: “As one can see from the table, removal of multiple left turn arrow signalization has a significant benefit for corridor capacity.”

What is the public to believe? Nothing, until a real study and truly comprehensive plan is created. That plan must understand that residential neighborhoods are just that. It must understand that people want to be able to get to their local merchants and then be able to park when they do get there. It must understand that development and growth have a place, once adequate infrastructure is in place.