



Transportation Advisory Board Report

Date: October 21, 2014

To: Transportation Advisory Board

From: Alan Sanderson, Deputy Transportation Director-Traffic Engineer

Subject: Authority to Implement Certain Speed Limits, and Establish Truck Weight Limits on Certain Streets

Purpose and Recommendations

It is recommended that City Code be modified to authorize the City Traffic Engineer to establish emergency, construction or contingent speed limits and to establish reduced speed limits adjacent to schools. It is also recommended City Code be modified to explicitly provide for establishing maximum allowable vehicle weights on certain streets.

Background

The City Council approved changes to City Code in 2008 and 2011 that greatly simplified the process of implementing traffic control regulations in the City, thus improving efficiency and speed of service for customers. Prior to these revisions, the process for establishing traffic regulations varied greatly depending on the specific regulation. Some regulations required ordinances, some required approval of the Development Services Manager (a position that no longer exists), and others required City Traffic Engineer approval. There was no discernable rationale for these different procedures.

The 2008 revision eliminated the requirement for a specific ordinance for each parking prohibition, authorizing the City Traffic Engineer to approve parking restrictions. In 2011, Council extended this concept to all other traffic regulations except for speed limits and experimental traffic control devices. It has come to staff's attention that two provisions in Title 10 were inadvertently omitted from the 2011 revision and still require the Development Services Manager's approval: emergency or construction speed limits and 35 mph speed limits adjacent to schools. In addition, there has been a question about the ability to prohibit vehicles above a specified weight on City streets.

Discussion

The Development Services Manager position evolved from the preceding Public Works Manager position, but was eliminated when the present City structure, with department directors reporting directly to a deputy city manager, was established. For clarity and consistency, authority to implement these traffic regulations should rest with the City Traffic Engineer rather

than the defunct Development Services Manager position.

City Code 10-4-9, Emergency or Construction Speed Limits, allows speed limits less than those established in City Code to be posted “when construction, congested traffic, or other conditions require such reduced speed limits for public safety.” These speed limits are only in effect when signs are posted, and are temporary until the unusual condition is cleared up, or a permanent speed limit reduction is implemented by Council action. Also for clarity, it is recommended this section title be changed to “Emergency, Construction or Contingent Speed Limits.”

City Code 10-4-11 provides for the speed limit to be reduced “to 35 mph on streets immediately adjacent to any elementary, junior high, or high school property for portions of the day when children are on their way to or from school.”

Finally, City Code 10-3-18(O) authorizes the City Traffic Engineer to prohibit commercial vehicle traffic (trucks) “at specific locations where deemed necessary to preserve the public peace and welfare.” This provision is typically used to prevent drivers of large trucks from using a local residential street as a cut-through to access nearby commercial properties. It has also been used to limit the weight of commercial vehicles allowed on a given roadway section to prevent damage to temporary or old pavement that cannot support frequent heavy loads. Some have questioned if a vehicle weight restriction is authorized under this Code provision since it only specifically mentions prohibiting all commercial traffic. To eliminate any uncertainty, a subsection should be added to specifically provide for vehicle weight limits.

Alternatives

DOING NOTHING is one alternative that is not recommended. Making no changes would maintain references in City Code to an outdated position that no longer exists and leave the ability to establish vehicle weight limits on specific roadways ambiguous.

DELEGATING AUTHORITY TO ANOTHER POSITION is a second alternative. The determination of appropriate traffic controls and regulations is an endeavor that requires the application of Traffic Engineering principles and judgment. The City Traffic Engineer is the highest position in the Transportation Department for which registration as a professional engineer is required, and since determining appropriate traffic control involves the practice of engineering in applying specialized knowledge, it is appropriate for the City Traffic Engineer to be responsible for this function. All other regulations and controls that previously required approval of the defunct Development Services Manager have been changed to City Traffic Engineer approval.

There is no fiscal impact to these changes.