

January 30, 2009

Dear Chair Olson, GVPAC Members, County Staff, and Neighbors;

Due to a work-related scheduling conflict I am unable to attend the 8th meeting of the GVPAC. This is especially unfortunate from my point of view because circulation, level of service (LOS), traffic laws, traffic calming, and safe routes to schools are the areas that I am most passionate about when it comes to community planning. In fact, I will go on record in stating that I believe that one can judge the level of civilization by the way people drive their cars and obey traffic laws.

Making sure that our community plan promotes a safe and secure environment for residents and motorists alike should be one of the GVPACs major goals.

I strongly believe it is important for residents to feel safe and secure within their own neighborhoods: people should feel comfortable walking, jogging, biking and spending quality time with their family, friends and neighbors without having to worry about the noise and safety hazards that come hand-to-hand with increased traffic. On the other hand our roads and transportation grid should allow cars to flow easily and safely from any one location to another. *A balance must be found between these two conflicting requirements.*

The Fire Department indicated that it desires multiple emergency ingress and egress routes for every development. One extreme version of this requirement would eliminate cul-de-sacs altogether so that every home would have at least two routes to chose from *starting at their own driveway*. However, in addition to considering safety requirements related to emergency access and evacuation, we also need to consider everyday safety needs, as well as the *peace of mind* that results when there are fewer cars driving in front of our homes while traveling at lower speeds. *Once again these two conflicting requirements need to be carefully balanced using good and reasonable land-use planning policies.*

Some concerns that I have with existing development policies related to traffic and circulation are listed below. I hope County Staff will have an opportunity to address some of these issues either at this meeting or at a future meeting.

1. Incremental cumulative impacts on the LOS due to new developments are effectively ignored. As the number of cars on our roads increases, the incremental impact of adding *just one more car* is considered insignificant. However, *each new additional car compounds this problem*. In fact, even relatively large developments may not “significantly” impact the LOS as measured by a percentage increase in the total number of vehicles on our roads. This policy is flawed and needs to be revisited.

What are reasonable *mandatory* thresholds that can we use to trigger required mitigation efforts before a development is allowed? Please provide a list of possible mitigation measures (tools) that we can consider for maintaining or improving the LOS for our roads?

2. The safety of our neighborhoods is compromised with unenforceable speed limits. Drivers ignore unenforceable limits without consequence and are thereby trained to ignore enforceable limits.

How many streets in Eastern Goleta Valley have unenforceable limits? How many of those are in *residence districts* where the posted limit can be *legally* enforced if the County/SBCAG *appropriately* changes the functional classification of the road?

Can the GVPAC create policies that discourage the posting of unenforceable limits?

When I received my driver's license I was taught that the speed limit in a residential neighborhood is 25 mph. I have since discovered that this is not always true, sometimes for good reasons. However, in some cases the only reason posted speed limits are unenforceable is because of *administrative reasons*. Otherwise, the posted limits abide by the letter of the law.

It is not unreasonable to limit the flow of traffic for the "last mile" in *residence districts*. What policies can the GVPAC construct that would encourage the posting of appropriately lower, *legal*, and *enforceable* speed limits in *residence districts*?

What policies and standards can the GVPAC adopt related to traffic and circulation that will make our neighborhoods safer?

3. Enforcing speed limits is only one way to slow traffic down in our neighborhoods. Which traffic calming methods have been approved by the County? Have you considered (split) speed cushions and speed tables? Many cities are moving towards these devices because they help slow regular traffic while still permitting easy access to emergency vehicles.

What is the County traffic calming policy? How can it be improved? What development policies and standards would help calm traffic?

4. It is also not unreasonable for motorists to expect free flowing traffic on *arterial roads* and *major collectors*. Unfortunately, the large number of cars on our streets makes this a difficult task to accomplish without widening the roads or decreasing the number of vehicle miles traveled. If no funds are available to widen roads, or provide alternative routes, what policies would encourage the reduction of traffic on stressed intersections and roadways? What can be done by the GVPAC?

Thank you!

Sincerely,

Kenan Ezal

P.S. I have attached my understanding of the relevant law related to speed limits in residence districts with some added discussion. Please let me know if my understanding is incorrect.

Speed Limits in Residence Districts:

The law defines a *residence district* based on the density of homes per quarter mile of roadway. The threshold is 16 homes (on both sides) per quarter mile. A slightly different threshold is used for roads with homes only on one side. Only homes within a certain distance of the road can be counted.

“No building shall be regarded unless its entrance faces the highway and the front of the building is within 75 feet of the roadway.”

The law permits the posting of 25 mph speed limits on streets that can be classified as a residence district so long as it does not meet the definition of a speed trap. A speed trap is defined by the width of the road and the length of uninterrupted roadway. A road can't be considered a speed trap if its width is less than 40 feet and if there are stop signs/lights at least every half mile.

The official classification of a road also determines the enforceability of posted speed limits. A *local road* is defined as one having a width of less than 40 feet and a single lane in both directions. A posted speed limit that is less than the speed traveled by 85% of all drivers on a road designated as a *collector* is unenforceable, with a 5 mph exception in some cases. However, the 85% rule does not apply to a road that is designated as a local road.

State law allows the local government (SBCAG) to change the functional classification of a road. For example, a road can be currently classified as a collector even though it is in a residence district and it meets the definition of a local road. The local government does have the authority to change this designation. In fact, they can dictate the enforceable speed limit. However, the problem is that the amount of funding received by the local government depends on the road classification. So, local governments are unwilling to lower the classification of street because it will result in less funding. This is a conflict-of-interest!

Hence, shouldn't the Community Plan dictate the standards for selecting the classification of roads *in resident districts that also meet all other legal requirements for local roads?*

Moreover, there is a significant amount of uncertainty in defining the difference between a collector and a local road. The following figure, which was taken from the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) website, demonstrates this fact:

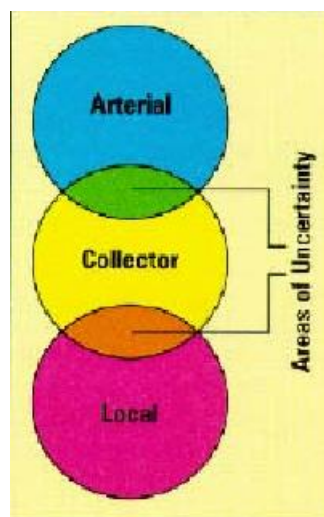


Figure 3.3

This uncertainty is reflected in the fact that there are several different types of collectors, including a *local collector* and a *rural collector*. The next figure, also taken from the FHWA website, illustrates the functional difference between collectors and local roads.

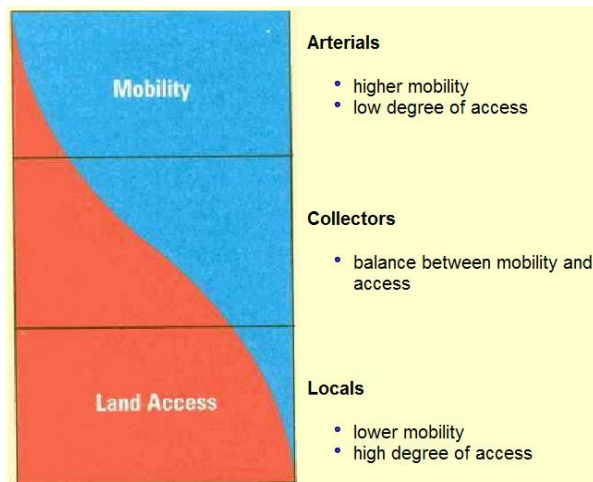


Figure 3.1

Relationship of functionally classified highway systems in serving traffic mobility and land access.

Source: *Safety Effectiveness of Highway Design Features*, Volume I, Access Control, FHWA, 1992

Once again, however, it is difficult to draw a hard line separating the two types of classifications. The last figure also supports the premise that mobility should be restricted in residential neighborhoods. Moreover, this “last mile” restriction on the flow of traffic does not significantly affect motorists: for example, the difference in time to travel one mile at 25 mph vs. 35 mph is only 41 seconds. This does not appear to be an unreasonable restriction on mobility, especially given the fact that the probability of a fatality involving a pedestrian is significantly higher at 35 mph.

Finally, looking around Goleta Valley one sees many different speed limits that seem inconsistent with each other. For example, speed limits in commercial districts, such as the Calle Real shopping center are 25 mph. Yet, in some residential neighborhoods the speed limit is 35 mph. In some cases these posted speed limits are not too far from schools. This contrast defies logic.

Useful References:

Flexibility in Highway Design:

<http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/environment/flex/>

Institute of Transportation Engineers:

<http://www.ite.org/traffic/>

Traffic Calming Seminar:

<http://www.ite.org/traffic/tcseminar.asp>

Traffic Calming: State of the Practice:

<http://www.ite.org/traffic/tcstate.asp#tcsop>

Traffic Calming Practice Revisited:

http://www.smartgrowth.umd.edu/research/pdf/EwingBrownHoyt_ReTrafficCalming_111505.pdf

Design and Safety of Pedestrian Facilities (I have an electronic copy that is 40MB):

<http://www.ite.org/emodules/scriptcontent/Orders/ProductDetail.cfm?pc=RP-026A>

Save Streets, Livable Streets by Eric Dumbaugh:

http://www.cfr.washington.edu/research.envmind/Roadside/TransSafety_JAPA.pdf

TrafficCalming.org:

<http://www.trafficcalming.org/effectiveness.html>