

Birgitt Evans

2829 San Jose Ave.
Alameda, CA 94501

(510) 872-2270 reachbirgitt@gmail.com

October 27, 2021

(By electronic transmission)
Transportation Commission
City of Alameda
2263 Santa Clara Ave.
Alameda, CA 94501

Subject: Item 6B Transportation Commission 10-27-21 Special Meeting Agenda

Commission Members,

In May, 2020, the Alameda City Council, with little notice to a populace coping with a pandemic and whose lives had been turned upside down, voted to block off 4.7 miles of Alameda's roadways and making them essentially private roadways and forcing essential workers, caretakers, volunteers and people who worked on those streets (gardeners, housekeepers, plumbers etc.) to find alternative routes to where they needed to go.

This was especially egregious with Versailles Ave. since it is an artery, the only road you can turn onto from the Miller-Sweeney Bridge - used extensively by people in the neighborhoods between Broadway and High Street - to get on and off of the island. In addition, the only partial alternative, Pearl Ave., is unsafe where it crosses Encinal Ave. At that point on Encinal Ave., eastbound cars are merging from two lanes to one and cars are coming at regular intervals from the four-way stop sign at Versailles Ave. - placed there for safety - and there is poor visibility. I have nearly been hit on five separate occasions at that intersection, no matter how slowly I inched out and peered around parked SUVs. Traffic on Pearl Street is very heavy with the loss of Versailles Ave. with cars dodging around parked delivery vans, garbage trucks and (for nearly a year) construction vehicles on Pearl St. at Encinal where a major renovation was taking place.

On October 21st, City Staff issued a report in which they recommend that the entire network of "Slow Streets" be continued for another year.

There are two main problems with the "Slow Streets" project, the first being that it preferences certain residents over other residents. Streets to be blocked of were selected because they "are lower-traffic, two lane residential streets" which means that all of the traffic on these streets was

pushed onto streets already having more traffic and more residents. Alameda is approximately 45% non-white and a lot of our residents of color live in units created in larger houses on streets like Clinton and Lincoln Avenues and in rental units on Pearl St. In addition, the Pacific Ave. “Slow Street” pushed still more traffic on to Buena Vista Ave. where residents have long complained about taking more than their fair share of traffic already.

The second main problem with the “Slow Streets” is one of safety. In 1904, my great-grandmother was walking down a street in London and was struck by a trolley and lost her leg. We have subsequently created wide sidewalks in our cities, including Alameda to *separate* vehicular and pedestrian traffic and minimize accidents of this nature. While, during the first scary months of the pandemic, when we did not yet know how SARS-CoV-2 was transmitted or have vaccines available, people were walking in the streets, pedestrians have almost entirely returned to using the sidewalks, even on closed streets. I spent three hours in a front yard on the closed section of San Jose Ave. yesterday and I did not see a single person walking in the street, including when St. Joseph’s High School let out. I see very few people walking in the street on Versailles Ave. near my house and everyone on the open part of San Jose Ave. in front of my house, including an entire middle school has seemed to do quite well through the pandemic without any street closures.

The main beneficiaries of the “Slow Street” project seem to have been bicyclists. I have been conducting my own - very unscientific - study of bicyclists for the past 18 months, both on closed streets, on my open street, on Clinton Ave. - yes, they ride down Clinton, eschewing the closed street one block away - and on Santa Clara Ave. and the vast majority of them (at least 70% of those I have seen) are white males under age 65 apparently on recreational rides (i.e. not carrying tools, briefcases etc). We have already created separated bike lanes on Shore Line Dr. and Clement Ave. plus bike lanes on other streets to accommodate these riders. We do not need to shut down entire streets and inconvenience residents on both closed and adjacent streets, delivery drivers, trash collectors, domestic workers and gardeners so that they have more places to ride.

As of today, the main reason for shutting down streets has gone away as people have been vaccinated and returned to work and school and no longer need to be able to social distance by walking down the middle of the street. And yet, City Staff is still recommending a one year extension of *all 4.7 miles* of the blocked off streets.

To reach their conclusion that the “Slow Street” project should continue for another year, City Staff conducted a survey this past August. All of the residents of the blocked off streets received notification of the survey as well as recipients of the Bike Walk Alameda newsletter, two groups that benefit from the continuance of the program. None of the people living on Clinton Ave, Oak St, Haight Ave., Pearl St. or any of the other roadways taking additional traffic due to this program were notified of the survey. So the people who benefitted from the program were notified and asked to weigh in on it. Even with this skewed data set, 35% of the respondents said it was time to end the project and another 4% said to keep some, but not all of the street closures. Fifty percent of the people who lived within one block of Versailles Ave. said they wanted that street opened to traffic and yet that street was not decoupled from the program until more data could be gathered.

Please vote to end the “Slow Streets” project effective 10-31-21. Any initial benefits of the project have already been realized and the project is now a major inconvenience to residents living both on and off of the streets. In addition, the project is creating unsafe conditions with bikes and a few pedestrians intermingling with traffic and not feeling that they still need to be mindful of vehicles and their own safety.

If you think that you would like to continue the project, please go back and notify *everyone* on the island of the survey and solicit comments from a wide variety of residents and not just those who benefit from the project. That way, if you do continue with it, you can proceed with broad support and not anger and resentment.

Finally, please remove Versailles Ave. from the “Slow Streets” project. It is a vital artery that opens up the Miller-Sweeney Bridge to residents, taking pressure off of the High and Park. Street bridges. There is no safe alternative route to use and Broadway residents will tell you that their street is already becoming impassible. If you absolutely must block off a street in this neighborhood, Lincoln Ave. from Broadway to High St. is a lovely walk.

Very truly yours,

Birgitt Evans