

City, county officials take stock of what went wrong with Mace project

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As city officials grapple with fixing the problems that have arisen from the Mace Boulevard retrofit project, both city and county officials took stock Wednesday of how the situation reached this point and what changes need to be made when undertaking similar projects in the future.

A regularly scheduled meeting at City Hall Wednesday featured two city council members and two Yolo County supervisors discussing shared issues and goals, with Mace Boulevard at the top of the agenda.

Although the stretch of Mace involved in the traffic calming and bicycle safety project is within the city's boundaries, many county residents who live just outside the city — including in El Macero — have been among those most heavily impacted.

Supervisor Jim Provenza, whose district encompasses the area, said he has received more feedback on the Mace Boulevard roadwork than just about any other issue in recent memory. Constituents both within the city limits and outside of them have reported spending hours in traffic just to travel two blocks; being unable to exit their neighborhoods onto Mace because of gridlock; and drivers speeding through neighborhoods in search of another route.

"I appreciate the city has taken steps to address this," Provenza said.

However, he added, the county was not informed of the planned work, adding, "we found out really for the first time this past summer when we saw a notice in the newspaper."

They received a presentation after that, Provenza said, but even then, the information received wasn't clear about everything planned.

"So in a lot of ways, if people had been involved and engaged, a lot of these problems could have been avoided," Provenza said.

None of those at Wednesday's meeting — Provenza, Supervisor Don Saylor of Davis and Davis City Council members Will Arnold and Dan Carson — were on the City Council when the initial Mace Boulevard improvement project was approved, but all acknowledged the need to be a part of the resolution and to prevent anything similar in the future.

Breakdown

Noting the flaws in the design, Arnold said, "it's clearly a breakdown in the process. What do we do to ensure this doesn't happen again? That's something that going forward will continue to be very important to me, that we do some analysis of the process that led us here, including

consultants, commission input, council subcommittee input that led to specific changes in the design — some of which are the things that are problems.

“I think getting to the bottom of that is also critically important to ensure that we have a better process going forward.”

Saylor noted that when local governments submit grant applications for state and federal transportation projects — like the one the city submitted to the Sacramento Area Council of Governments for the Mace Boulevard funding — “a lot of times, the public and the governing bodies are not aware of what is in those proposals because they’re developed in quick time frames and by engineering staff — folks who are trying to address problems they understand are a concern to the community.

“But we haven’t had enough vetting of those projects,” Saylor said.

“The Sacramento Area Council of Governments did provide a substantial amount of money for this project. It was a competitive process so many projects across the region didn’t get that money,” said Saylor.

“So it’s a regional investment in this road segment and how we handle it now is kind of important for how the city’s future applications are viewed. We’ve got to be sure that what we’re doing here... that SACOG staff are involved and learning what is going on and learning lessons not just for the city of Davis but for the region as we look to future projects.”

Davis Police Chief Darren Pytel, who has taken a lead role for the city in the Mace fix process in part because of his 20-year experience in traffic collision reconstruction, told Saylor that the city has been in close contact with SACOG the last few weeks, including sharing preliminary designs for changes that need to be made.

“So they’re already involved in the project,” Pytel said.

“As far as what went wrong here, and who’s to blame and all those things,” Pytel said, “that’s going to take a little more time because we do have to look at how projects go before commissions, and what amount of feedback and input is given to that. The planners that are used from the outside and how they contribute to road designs, we obviously have to look at that.

“We have to look at City Council input,” Pytel said. “Sometimes you have to listen to the experts because what you think works doesn’t necessarily. In real life it looks quite different from how it pencils out.”

[View from the south](#)

A handful of residents spoke during Wednesday's city-county meeting at City Hall, including Elly Fairclough, a South Davis resident who knows a thing or two about government. Fairclough spent 20 years in government service, serving first as an aide to former Yolo County supervisor and state Assemblywoman Helen Thomson, followed by stints working with Rep. Mike Thompson, D-Napa, and Rep. John Garamendi, D-Walnut Grove.

"What distresses me, apart from how this turned out," Fairclough said, "is how we can all think we're doing the right thing and we start out from faulty premises and we move forward on rocky pathways."

She questioned whether at any point in the project development process Yolobus was consulted about the ability to move buses through the redesigned thoroughfare or whether farmers who use Mace to move farm equipment from one side of I-80 to the other were consulted.

"This is an arterial road," she said. "It feeds to an interstate highway. What about an evacuation plan? We all saw what happened in Paradise when the entire community had to exit on two-lane roads... so it concerns me that the city, both the staff and elected officials, over time, seem to be down in the weeds. Everybody needs to stand up when projects like this are on the planning stage. It started out in 2013. Here we are six years later. At what points along the way are these projects re-evaluated? Data changes. Code changes.

"You need to constantly monitor and not just rubber stamp designs that come by because it's all being taken care of," said Fairclough. "One of my bosses once said, 'If a piece of paper goes through your hands, you own everything it on it.'"

Charlene Henwood, who started the petition on NextDoor calling on the city to reverse the changes made to Mace, said, "the community is not looking for someone to blame. We're looking for results. We want it fixed. And if it takes a long time to fix it, you better keep people advised because there are trust issues and people are going to feel they are just being strung along and stalled."

The outreach was inadequate, she said, the city not transparent "and possibly duplicitous" and certainly not responsive until the last two weeks.

Looking ahead

Davis resident Dave Hart noted that he's "one of the lone voices on NextDoor in support of this project" but added that he acknowledges there are some problems with it.

The original proposal, he noted, was about making the Mace corridor more hospitable to pedestrians and bicyclists "and that's what Davis has been trying to do for quite a while on a whole range of fronts."

“I think a big problem we’re trying to wrestle with here is trying to retrofit cities that were built in the 1960s when there was cheap gasoline. We’ve got a whole number of streets in this town — Anderson, Covell — they’re wide, they’re huge and they really do not draw people to cross them or ride along them, so it’s a problem that the community has been wrestling with for a long time.

“But the data was the South Davis kids were not riding their bikes to school, more than any other school,” said Hart. “Why was that? Mace Boulevard is certainly one large factor.”

“I think the primary thing is how do we make South Davis more livable for pedestrians and cyclists?”

Pytel shared Hart’s concerns about bicycle safety.

“Mace Boulevard was really the first time that we put a lot of elements together that were designed to improve bicycle and pedestrian safety,” Pytel said. “The original goal — that we improve bicycle and pedestrian safety — is a very important goal and (I hope) we don’t lose sight of that.”

Davis, he said, is second worst in the state for auto-bicycle collisions among similar size cities.

“That’s not a happy number at all and we need to be making improvements to fix that and to change it. Oftentimes in law enforcement one of the basic components you look for is roadway engineering — are there ways to slow down traffic and make it safer?”

Speed, he said directly correlates with injury and property damage. The faster cars are traveling, the worse the injuries and damages will be when those collisions occur.

“So we shouldn’t lose sight of those elements and I don’t think we will lose sight of them when we come to the community and the council with proposals for the roadway,” said Pytel, who repeated his earlier belief that Mace can be restored to two lanes in each direction while maintaining bicycle safety.