

Council favors restoring lane to Mace; adding signal at Montgomery

By **Anne Ternus-Bellamy**



The fix to the fix gets underway in August at Cowell and Mace boulevards. Owen Yancher/Enterprise file photo

Davis City Council members favor a fix to the Mace mess that includes restoring a second lane on northbound Mace Boulevard as well as installing a traffic signal at Montgomery Avenue to deter drivers currently using the Mace corridor to avoid heavy freeway traffic.

Also of interest to council members Tuesday evening: constructing a northbound right-turn lane from Mace to Cowell Boulevard.

The options favored by the council were among the many alternatives put forward by a traffic consulting firm aimed at improving traffic flow on Mace Boulevard from Montgomery north to I-80.

City staff will now coordinate a design period for the council's recommendations and when 30 percent of the changes are drawn up, will bring them to the public at a community meeting as well as back to the council for further input.

Mayor Brett Lee said having a check in at the 30-percent design phase will allow everyone to see more clearly what the changes would look like and likely impacts. At that point, he noted, additional changes could be made.

Tuesday's council meeting featured about two dozen members of the public weighing in on the Mace mess, with some urging the council to keep the bicycle safety infrastructure currently in place and others criticizing the current situation and urging the council to return the corridor to the way it was.

Improving cycling safety, particularly for children who attend Pioneer Elementary school, was one of the primary goals of the infrastructure project that got under way over a year ago and quickly became dubbed the "Mace mess" thanks to ensuing traffic congestion.

The project, funded by a grant from the Sacramento Area Council of Governments, eliminated channelized right-turn lanes at the Mace intersection with Cowell Boulevard and reduced Mace itself from two lanes in each direction to one in order to make room for buffered bicycle lanes.

The heavy traffic congestion that ensued prompted an outcry. In addition to slow-moving, bumper-to-bumper traffic in the single travel lanes, there also has been gridlock in the intersections along Mace that prevented people from exiting their neighborhoods onto Mace, concerns about the ability of emergency vehicles to travel through the corridor, and a belief by some that a project aimed at improving travel safety may have done the opposite.

Waze and means

But while many in South Davis believe it was the infrastructure project itself that has caused the delays, other factors have been noted as contributors to the problem as well. Chief among them: Travel apps like Waze that are directing drivers off of eastbound I-80 in Dixon and sending them to Mace Boulevard in order to get back on the freeway at the eastern edge of Davis; and Cal Trans increasing the ramp-metering wait time at eastbound I-80 ramps just days after completion of the infrastructure project.

Meanwhile, a number of parents who have young children attending Pioneer have praised the project which they say has made them more comfortable having their children bicycle to school.

Council members heard from both groups Tuesday night, but Lee said such "a tug-of-war between bikes and cars" misses the point.

"This corridor is so wide that there is no reason why it cannot have protected bike lanes and good through-put for cars," the mayor said.

A design favored by the council would do exactly that on the northbound side of Mace.

Still, the council once again heard from a handful of angry South Davis residents who remain frustrated that the original project ever happened in the first place.

Among them was Elly Fairclough, a former aide to Reps. John Garamendi, D-Walnut Grove, and Mike Thompson, D-Napa.

“This has been a failure of governance,” Fairclough told the council, adding that city leaders failed to consult with county as well as farmers who use Mace to transport vehicles across the freeway.

Crop hauling

One of those farmers urged the council Tuesday to restore Mace to two lanes in each direction to ensure large farm equipment can get through.

Supervisor Jim Provenza, meanwhile, who represents South Davis on the Yolo County Board of Supervisors, said, “the ability to transport agricultural vehicles from one side of the freeway to the other is important to our county’s agriculture and our agriculture economy.”

He also cited concerns by former Davis Fire Chief Bill Weisgerber about the ability of emergency vehicles to travel on Mace.

Weisgerber told the council Tuesday the current Mace configuration is “not really conducive for good arterial through-put... with a huge potential for accidents.”

“And I know we can do better than what we have on Mace right now,” he added.

Several parents of young children, meanwhile, urged the council to keep in place protected bike lanes on Mace.

Among them was Pioneer parent Kati Rose who read a petition signed by 27 families that said while modifications may be needed along the corridor, they would like the concrete barrier separating cyclists from cars kept in place.

“We finally feel safe sending our kids to school on bikes,” she said.

Now staff and consultants will begin drawing up designs with the changes favored by council and return for further input from both the council and the community when those designs are 30 percent complete.

— Reach Anne Ternus-Bellamy at aternus@davisenterprise.net. Follow her on Twitter at [@ATernusBellamy](https://twitter.com/ATernusBellamy).