



Kate Harrison
Vice Mayor, District 4

CONSENT CALENDAR
October 11, 2022

To: Honorable Mayor and Members of the City Council
From: Vice Mayor Harrison
Subject: Referral to the November 2022 AAO #1 Budget Process for \$50,000 in Additional Traffic Calming at MLK and Addison

RECOMMENDATION

Referral to the November 2022 AAO1 Budget Process for \$50,000 in additional traffic calming at MLK and Addison.

CURRENT SITUATION, EFFECTS, AND RATIONALE FOR RECOMMENDATION

In 2022, the City of Berkeley installed a median and RRFB at the intersection of Martin Luther King Jr. Way (MLK) and Addison Street as a key feature of converting Addison Street into a Bike Boulevard. A few weeks after installation was completed, a driver tragically collided with a senior couple while they were crossing MLK on Addison.¹

The City of Berkeley is committed to an equity-focused, data-driven effort to eliminate traffic deaths and severe injury collisions by 2028² and has described how it is going to achieve this in the 2017 Bicycle, 2019 Vision Zero Action, and 2020 Pedestrian Plans. Despite these documents and recent efforts to enhance pedestrian and bike infrastructure in the City, traffic violence remains a serious issue. According to the Berkeley Police Department, 2021 was deadliest year for road users in Berkeley since at least 1984. In 2021 alone, 433 collisions resulted in injuries—a 37% increase from 2020.³

The MLK and Addison intersection is of critical citywide importance for thousands of Berkeley residents. This intersection serves as an important corridor for seniors, elementary, middle, high school and college students, shoppers, those accessing government services, and inhabitants of existing and new housing. This referral

¹ Emilie Raguso, “Major injuries after driver strikes older married couple in Berkeley crosswalk,” Bekeleyside, July 10, 2022, <https://www.berkeleyside.org/2022/07/10/driver-strikes-older-married-couple-berkeley-crosswalk-major-injuries>.

² Berkeley Vision Zero Plan, <https://berkeleyca.gov/your-government/our-work/adopted-plans/vision-zero-action-plan>.

³ Emilie Raguso, “8 people died in Berkeley crashes in 2021, overall collisions were up 34%,” Bekeleyside, February 25, 2022, <https://www.berkeleyside.org/2022/02/25/berkeley-traffic-collisions-fatalities-up-2021-police-data>.

recommends that \$50,000 in additional traffic calming at MLK and Addison be added to the November 2022 AAO #1 budget process.

BACKGROUND

The United States, including Berkeley, has relied almost exclusively on driver “education” for decades to make streets safer, while peer countries in Europe and Asia have invested in physical infrastructure to boost safety. Traffic fatalities in the United States rose to just under 43,000 in 2021,⁴ while fatalities in Europe have dramatically decreased.⁵ Likewise, deaths on Berkeley’s roads are at a 37 year high.⁶ Americans are not more prone to making mistakes than their counterparts. The City of Berkeley understands this well and has been undertaking serious efforts to improve the safety of roadways through infrastructure improvements.

At the same time, the climate crisis continues to worsen. Drought, wildfire, extreme weather and heat, and sea-level rise are occurring.⁷ Given an estimated 60% of Berkeley’s emissions come from transportation, the City has committed to decreasing reliance on polluting private motor vehicle by improving bike and pedestrian infrastructure.

According to the 2017 Bicycle Plan, a four beacon RRFB, like the one installed at MLK and Addison, can raise vehicle yielding compliance to 88%.⁸ Yet, this requires pedestrians and cyclists to always remember to hit the button. At MLK and Addison, despite being a designated bike boulevard, cyclists must dismount, walk onto the sidewalk, hit the button, move off the sidewalk, and resume biking and could choose to remain on the bike and cross without activating the flashing beacons. For pedestrians, we were reminded from the horrible collision on July 9, 2022, that the median and flashing beacons can be insufficient at protecting vulnerable road users from bodily harm.

There are many additional intersection treatments detailed in the 2017 Bicycle Plan that can improve safety for all road users. For instance, to ensure RRFB activation, the city could install pedestrian and cyclist detection systems, the latter of which is commonly used throughout the city already. Witnesses report that the RRFB was not activated by the pedestrians who were hit when crossing this intersection. A speed table or raised crosswalks could also further slow cars—these have been shown to reduce vehicle/pedestrian crashes by 45%, however staff note that Council policy discourages

⁴ National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, “Newly Released Estimates Show Traffic Fatalities Reached a 16-Year High in 2021,” <https://www.nhtsa.gov/press-releases/early-estimate-2021-traffic-fatalities>.

⁵ Frank Jacobs, “U.S. road deaths far outnumber those in Europe. Why?,” Big Think, June 1, 2022, <https://bigthink.com/strange-maps/road-deaths-us-eu/>.

⁶ Emilie Raguso, February 25, 2022.

⁷ City of Berkeley, Climate Action Plan, <https://berkeleyca.gov/sites/default/files/2022-01/Berkeley-Climate-Action-Plan.pdf>

⁸ Berkeley Bicycle Facility Design Toolbox, https://berkeleyca.gov/sites/default/files/2022-01/Berkeley-Bicycle-Plan-2017_AppendixF_Facility%20Design%20Toolbox.pdf.

speed tables on arterials, emergency response routes, and bus routes.⁹ In addition, the RRFB could be converted into a pedestrian hybrid beacon requiring motorists to make a complete stop. This item does not specific treatments but defers to staff's expertise to determine the highest impact treatments. It is vital and in the public interest that the City finds the right policy solutions so future tragic collisions at the MLK and Addison intersection can be avoided.

FISCAL IMPACTS OF RECOMMENDATION

\$50,000 for traffic safety improvements at the intersection of Martin Luther King Jr. Way and Addison Street.

ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY

Transportation accounts for a substantial portion of Berkeley's total emissions. The City is committed to increasing the modal share of walking and biking to reduce vehicle miles traveled.

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⁹ Ibid.

