April 9, 2012

Ms. Sylvia Fung, Chief
Office of Local Assistance
California Department of Transportation District 4
P.O. Box 23660 MS-10B
Oakland, CA 94623-0660

Dear Ms. Fung:

Reference: Federal Safe Routes to School Grant Cycle 3

Subject: City of Alameda's Grant application for the intersection of Northwood Drive , Gibbons Drive and Southwood Drive; Master Agreement 04-5014R

It is unfortunate that I am contacting you regarding a grant application which has mislead Caltrans and resulted in Caltrans approving a grant for $184,600 for modifications at an intersection which has had NO history of accidents, is not on the published safe nor shortest route to Edison or Lincoln Middle Schools, the intersection operates safely and the majority of the neighborhood community is not in support of.

I have been an advocate for school children safety during my career as a professional civil and traffic engineer, volunteered building school safety projects when these grants were not yet available and it so good to see that funding now exists for removing obstacles and improving school children safety for walking and bicycling. [i]

It is disturbing that we are experiencing a serious misuse of the program's funds. I am writing you so that the infrastructure funds will be diverted to another location where there is a need for modifications for school children safety.

This letter is based on the records that Caltrans and the City of Alameda provided pursuant to public records request of March 8th, 2012 for the Grant Application, its approval and its backup. We also met with the City on Tuesday March 20, 2012 to discuss apparently missing records and again on Thursday March 22 in the afternoon to gather any additional records they could find. They were not able to provide any accident tabulations, STOP warrant analyses, or engineering sight distance studies/plans developed to support the application. (They did provide a crude unchecked sight distance field sketch that had been prepared in the field that morning)

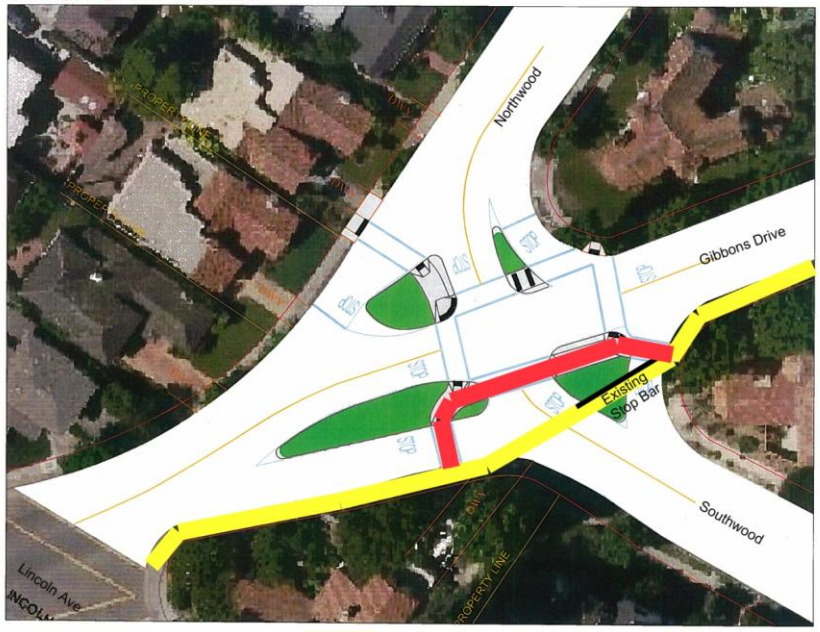
I have driven, walked and bicycled through this intersection since I moved to Alameda in 1980. My children attended both Edison and Lincoln Middle Schools in the 1980's. I have seen how traffic has significantly dropped on Gibbons Drive and diverted to other streets. Gibbons Drive today carries a mere 1700 vehicles per day while a long time ago in 1960, the average daily traffic was 4100 vehicles per day and in 1999 the traffic was 2700 vpd.[ii] The City Police Records indicate there have been Zero accidents between 2002 and

Eugenie P. Thomson P.E.. • 2969 Johnson Ave • Alameda, CA 94501
Telephone (510) 928-6980 ethomson@islandalameda.com

2011.(see attached Exhibit 2) I have observed the intersection recently on multiple afternoons, and have seen no school children cross Gibbons Drive at the project intersection and observed only one family cross Southwood Drive, the currently stop controlled side street. The City of Alameda has conducted no pedestrian surveys at the project intersection. The project intersection is not on the Safe Routes to School maps for either Lincoln Middle School or Edison Elementary school. (see attached exhibit 3 for the City's pedestrian and bicycle counts for the project.)

The proposed project does not eliminate any obstacles as stated in the grant application. The proposed modifications provide for walking paths that are longer than the existing paths as illustrated below. (also see separate exhibit 6 for all the school children paths to and from Edison school)

City's proposal affects only one school children path through the intersection, by making it longer and more circuitous.



Source: Background photo and proposed improvements from City of Alameda Grant Application, Existing path is aprox route used by observed peds in 2012.

The proposed modifications remove the safety zone for pedestrians; in the new configuration school children will immediately step into the path of a vehicle while in the existing configuration the parking strip provides for a safety zone. Unfortunately, most drivers will roll through the unwarranted ALL way stop signs because so little traffic exists on the side streets and on Gibbons Drive. There are no Professional engineering studies, no traffic analyses and there are no STOP sign warrant analyses at the City of Alameda Public Works offices.[iii]

The proposed Northbound Stop sign is extremely close to the Stop sign at Lincoln which is manned by a school crossing guard. This proposed northbound stop sign would violate the City's Stop Guidelines due to its close proximity to another stop sign.[iv] The Lincoln and Gibbons intersection is adjacent to the project intersection.(within 150 feet)The two intersections should be considered as one elongated intersection. In

the City proposal, the space for bicycles would be removed because of the narrow lanes while today there is sufficient room for bicycles to avoid any potential conflict with autos within the intersection.

In my opinion, channelization at these wide intersections in neighborhoods that were so commonly built up to the 1960's, is only beneficial when traffic has increased significantly to justify channelization and the residential area has transformed into an busy urban setting. However, this intersection is extremely calm and quiet, typical of residential neighborhoods. The sight distance of course can be improved via removal of bushes and addition of some red curb (There is always available curb parking in this neighborhood and especially near this intersection, and the homes on the northerly corners have plenty of curb length on both sides of their property). If the traffic increases on Gibbons Drive and the warrants are met, a southbound STOP sign could be installed along with a crosswalk there, across Southwood Drive and across Northwood Drive, to provide definitive walking paths. This solution is a much simpler and less expensive solution than the very expensive modifications proposed by the City of Alameda. And this solution would also be appropriate for this quiet intersection that is crossed only by a handful of school children living within a half block of it on the south side of Gibbons.

Considering these simple options first has been standard practice by civil engineers. And lastly, obstacles such as islands and sign posts when unnecessary add risk and liability, hence why the California Vehicle Code, the CA Manual of Uniform Traffic Control Devices as well as the FHWA guidelines for this grant program require an engineering study and the manuals now clearly state other options must first be considered.

Records indicate that last spring, the project suddenly switched to a school children safety project from the earlier beautification project (i.e a roundabout) that had been requested by a few residents who live at and near the corners of the project intersection. Up to then it was clearly known via the public hearings in May and November of 2010, there were no accidents as per police testimony at the November 4, 2010 Public Hearing; nor were there any speeding problems and the project lacked community support. The purpose and need suddenly became a School Children Safety Project. (Cost estimate for the Grant is dated May 24, 2011)[v]. And the records illustrate on May 24, 2011, the City hosted a public meeting with a few supporters in Room 360 City Hall at 7:00 PM.

What we do know, around the time of the May 24th, 2011 meeting with a few project proponents, the City staff proceeded with the grant application. And in order to be applicable made many misleading and false statements in the grant application. The key false statement on page 30 of the grant application is:

<u>One of City's False Statements in the Application</u>

<u>Question 177 Proposed Project Selection (30pts out of 100 pts).</u>

City answers" *The ALL WAY STOP controls and channelized traffic will reduce vehicular speeds and will encourage more predictable behavior.* ***<u>The reduced speeds will decrease both the frequency and severity of collisions.</u>*** *The channelized traffic, which is possible by the medians /islands recommended as part of the*

intersection improvement, will reduce the space available for reckless driving and will reduce the skewed alignment. The proposed project brings the intersection to more of a right angle, and provides stop controls for the acute angle that still exists on Northwood Drive. "

How is the conclusion that accidents will be reduced even possible? There have been NO accidents at the project intersection? (See attached exhibit 2 from the City of Alameda Police Department for Zero accidents at this intersection between 2002 and 2011).

This may seem unimportant but it is not. Falsifying Federal documents is a very serious matter. And we cannot ignore it because it will happen again and again. Furthermore, the City also prepared another Safe Routes to School Grant for McCartney and Island Drive and submitted this at the same time with the Gibbons Drive application. But how is that the correct accident data was submitted in the grant application for the McCartney and Island Drive intersection modifications and not for the Gibbons Drive grant application?? Same staff and at the same time?? And how is it Gibbons Grant application rated number 1 priority for the City of Alameda??

The many misleading statements in the Gibbons Drive grant application include statements that 100 students would benefit (totally unsubstantiated), that the intersection is on the safe or shortest routes to school (false), that 159 pedestrian and bicycle accidents have occurred within 2 miles (but none anywhere near the intersection), that the intersection does not meet minimum stopping sight distance (undocumented and easily fixed with red curbs), that there are no traffic control devices (there is a stop sign on the Southwood Drive approach and the stop signs at Lincoln are within 200 ft with a school crossing guard) and the excessive uncontrollable speeds (questioned and undocumented). These misleading statements are made over and over again in the application. All this is undocumented while the facts illustrate totally opposite conditions and findings. See ExhibitA for a complete compilation of City key statements to achieve the highest score.

The application twists the facts, provides false statements or uses data like accident records not applicable to obtain the maximum amount of points in the rating for the grant. The application is signed by a professional engineer Matt Naclerio, Alameda's Public Works Director. None of the plans submitted to the public, document the responsible licensed engineer's name as required by the California Professions and Business Codes. That, the many missing engineering documents and knowing this project was initiated for beautification of the neighborhood by a few who wanted a roundabout or islands with a lot of landscaping[vi], indicates this project was not initiated for the safety of school children.

Based on the facts, this infrastructure project does not qualify for receipt of funds from the Federal Safe Routes to School Grant Program. Caltrans unfortunately, was deceived by the City's false and misleading data provided in the application. This serious wrongful action must be corrected and the funds must be de obligated and instead applied where a safety problem exists pertaining to school children access to and from school.

April 9, 2012

Caltrans has been a leader in traffic safety and have in the past has made right, wrongful actions like this. Attached for your use is a compilation of false and misleading statements from the application, a copy of the application and other factual information.

I look forward to seeing that the funds are applied to locations where there is a true need for improving the safety of our school children. Possibly still moving ahead with the non infrastructure portions of this grant would be beneficial for Alameda students. I look forward to hearing from you soon and if necessary am available to answer any questions.

Sincerely,

Eugenie P. Thomson P.E. , T.E.

ept/ept
cc: Alameda City Public Works Director, Matt Naclerio
City Manager, Mr. John Russo
Mayor Marie Gilmore and Councilmembers Doug DeHaan, Beverly Johnson, Rob Bonta, Lena Tam
Fernside Homeowners Association

---

[i] The school children safety project for Amelia Earhart won a Statewide Engineering Excellence Award for cost effectiveness, raising the funds and for partnering with all affected parties: PTA, School Administrators, State Architects, Neighborhood Associations, City of Alameda and building the project within the year. A child had been killed at St. Joseph the Worker a private school in Berkeley (now closed) for the same reasons we were resolving the school children sight distance problems and removing obstacles for safe travel for children walking and bicycling to the school.

[ii] City of Alameda maps for average daily traffic, prepared by the Department of Public Works 1960, 1997, 1999 and City Exhibit with 2009 daily traffic counts collected for the project.

[iii] The March 8th, 2012 Public record request by E. Thomson, two meetings with Public Works to review the records and several emails did not produce any engineering reports, no traffic analysis was found as stated were performed in the support form letters generated by the City, and no stop warrant analysis exists for the ALL way stop control. The latter is typically attached to the Federal Grant application and noted as required in the Federal guidelines.

[iv] See attached City Stop sign guidelines. Oct 13,2010 signed by Matt Naclerio, City of Alameda Public Works Director

[v] The City hosted three public meetings, only the agendas were found in the records. Public Works staff could not tell us who was invited, who the attendees were and stated there were no meeting minutes. These three public meetings occurred May 24, 2011, Dec 12, 2011 and Jan 30, 2011. All meetings were held in the evening and all in Room 360 in City Hall.

[vi] The City's original estimate included $82,740 out of the requested $235,000 for landscaping. And the City definition in the application allows for re introduction of a roundabout, the ultimate goal of a few residents on and near the corner of the project intersection and who initiated this project.