
*City of Merced***MEMORANDUM**

DATE: October 5, 2011
TO: Planning Commission
FROM: Julie Sterling, Associate Planner and Kim Espinosa, Planning Manager
SUBJECT: Overview of the Martin Luther King Jr. Way Revitalization Plan Progress to Date

ACTION REQUIRED: Discussion/Questions

The City of Merced received an Environmental Justice Grant from Caltrans to address transportation and land use challenges and opportunities along Martin Luther King Jr. Way, and the area bounded by State Highway 99 and Childs Avenue, and “M” Street and “G” Street. A comprehensive effort is underway to accomplish four Project objectives. The Ad-Hoc Advisory Committee has had five meetings so far and has reviewed the Background Report (Existing Conditions), given feedback on the objectives, and discussed topics including the review of several scenarios for the future MLK Jr. Way corridor, the process and costs involved with the scenarios, the potential for obstacles, setting priorities for improvements and infrastructure, and possible land uses for the future “Focus Area.” An overview of the Committee’s progress will be presented at the meeting where questions and answers can be addressed. The four objectives for the Martin Luther King Jr. Way Revitalization Plan are listed below:

1. Improve Transportation Options for Travelers (vehicles, bikes, pedestrians, transit)

One of the key action items that will likely result from the study will be the inclusion of multi-modal choices for travelers of the corridor. Presently, the corridor does not have a complete sidewalk system, nor does it contain appropriate bicycle facilities. This is highly unfortunate as the socio-economic realities of the neighborhood necessitate residents to use non-auto sources of transportation. The lack of improvements and the economic conditions of the communities force many residents to walk or ride bicycles on the shoulder of the state highway. In addition, sites will be identified for possible future intra-city bus stops. This study will result in a complete strategy that prioritizes needed improvements and includes a funding plan for the eventual construction of these facilities.

2. Enhance the Safety Performance of the State Highway for all Travelers/ Support Economic Growth Through Enhancing the Movement of Goods and People

The highway is a heavily traversed truck route throughout the year. In addition, Highway 59 currently serves as the primary north-south arterial through this community. Throughout the day, this heavy use causes severe strains on its overall efficiency. The study will identify where projects are needed to enhance the performance of the current state highway. Specifically, many of these improvement projects will allow for safe multimodal use. In addition to identifying where improvements are needed, the study will develop a logical phasing plan for the needed improvements. The misaligned intersections and lack of pedestrian and bicycle features limit the full functionality of the highway. Currently, there is no plan to address these needs. A thorough study will provide clear objectives and priorities, allowing progress to be made in highway system issues.

3. Feasibility Assessment of New Office, Commercial, and Residential Uses

A comprehensive revitalization plan promotes more efficient land uses immediately adjacent to the roadway. These potential projects will immediately be addressed by the Redevelopment Agency. Of particular interest, this study will locate appropriate sites for regional retail and professional centers. This effort is currently compromised by the traffic congestion, parcel assembly, and misalignment of local roads. This study will investigate the most efficient placement of centers and construct a potential financing source for an eventual development. In addition to retail and professional centers, the same analysis will be conducted for affordable housing developments along the corridor.

4. Identify Opportunities to Design and Install Improvements that Provide Safe Crossing Sites

In its present condition, the corridor presents a significant safety hazard for cross-highway automobiles, pedestrians, and bicyclists. It is unfortunately a common sight to see mothers pushing strollers and senior citizens walking along the shoulder of the highway as traffic rushes by at 40+ miles per hour. This dangerous situation is further exacerbated by the lack of controlled pedestrian crossings. Throughout the day, an onlooker can see numerous pedestrians running across four lanes of highway traffic attempting to dodge high speed trucks in an effort to cross the highway. This study will identify these deficiencies and develop a strategy to address these present safety concerns.