

November 12, 2019

Malcolm Heinicke, Chair
San Francisco Municipal Transportation Agency Board of Directors
1 South Van Ness Avenue, 7th Floor
San Francisco, CA 94103
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RE: Page Street Bikeway Improvement Pilot

Dear Chair Heinicke, Vice Chair Borden, and SFMTA Board of Directors,

The Hayes Valley Neighborhood Association (HVNA) enthusiastically supports the Page Street Bikeway Improvement Pilot (Nov 19, SFMTA Board Hearing). Please approve this without delay. Our neighborhood has absorbed a considerable amount of housing relative to the rest of San Francisco. Accommodating infill housing is the right thing to do especially given the housing crisis. But our neighborhood is completely overrun with traffic, poor air quality, and very unsafe conditions for cyclists and pedestrians. It is extremely inequitable for our neighborhood to accommodate citywide and regional car traffic on every single one of the neighborhood's streets. The Page Street Pilot provides important relief and will align with the city's mode shift, vision zero and climate mitigation goals.

We offer the following observations for your consideration:

Public Process

The public process has been extensive and thorough. There have been several large public meetings at John Muir School, several small "coffee/tea chats," and many focused meetings with neighbors. HVNA has met with SFMTA Livable Streets staff multiple times since Supervisor Brown initiated this process earlier this year. Many non-HVNA stakeholders have also met with SFMTA separately.

Both Supervisor Brown and Supervisor-elect Preston support this proposal. At a crowded September 2019 D5 Candidate Forum in Hayes Valley, both emphasized that not only do they support the proposed pilot, they both urge SFMTA to go further – including getting freeway-bound traffic off Haight Street.

At the many public meetings, there was little to no objection to reconfiguring Page Street so that private cars can no longer access Octavia Boulevard and the freeways. There was objection to parking changes on Haight (in order to protect the Haight buses), and concern about spillover traffic onto Haight. SFMTA staff actually slowed down the planning process by a few months to address these concerns, including returning mid-day parking for businesses and expanding residential permit parking for residents.

Since the Octavia Boulevard opened in 2005, HVNA has worked collaboratively through countless community meetings and workshops to address chronic car congestion on Page. The current proposal builds-off of this. Starting in 2015 SFMTA Livable Streets began proactively working with the community through public discussion, meetings, and various proposals. In 2018 we supported SFMTA's proposals for a raised intersection table at Page and Buchanan, sidewalk bulb-outs, and traffic diverters, but we asked for bolder effort on Page (see our May 31st letter to SFMTA). The current iteration – Page Street Bikeway Improvement Pilot – reflects a bolder approach and shows that SFMTA staff have been very responsive to public concerns.

Historical Precedent

The Page Street Bikeway Improvement Pilot aligns with the Market and Octavia Better Neighborhood Plan. The Market and Octavia Plan (see attached map) never assumed Page or Haight Streets would carry freeway-bound traffic. Instead, the M & O Plan respected historic circulation patterns. When the Central Freeway bifurcated Hayes Valley, there was no access to the freeway from Page, and thus Page was a relatively calm, low volume street. Freeway-bound traffic used the designated crosstown arterial roadway, Oak Street, and used an onramp at Oak and Laguna Streets.

Page Street is designed for a daily volume of no more than 1,500 cars per day. Between Buchanan and Octavia it currently carries over 5,200 cars daily, almost all to access regional freeways.

The proposed pilot nudges freeway-bound traffic back to Oak, keeping traffic where it belongs, on an arterial roadway designed to carry high volume traffic. It reaffirms a pattern of modal hierarchy with Page as a cycling and walking street, Haight as a transit-first street, and Oak – Fell as the crosstown arterials carrying citywide car traffic. This hierarchy was also acknowledged by the SFCTA in their 2012 study of Octavia Boulevard Circulation patterns. That study reminded the city that Page Street was intended to function as a calm cycling route – not a freeway onramp.

Public Safety

The San Francisco Board of Supervisors recently declared a state of emergency regarding pedestrian and cyclist fatalities and injuries. The Page Street Bikeway Improvement Pilot reflects this sentiment of urgency.

The center-running green cycle lane on Page (between Buchanan and Octavia) is extremely unsafe and discourages bicycling. Uphill car traffic squeezes people bicycling against downhill car traffic. Often downhill car traffic drives in the narrow bike lane. Left turning traffic from westbound Page at Octavia adds another level of danger to people bicycling eastbound on Page. We have plenty of photos to help demonstrate a visualization of this issue.

Chronic congestion and aggressive drivers make it very difficult to walk across streets and crosswalks safely. Often intersections, namely crosswalks along Page are blocked. If one stands at any intersection during peak travel times, crosswalks on Page are blocked routinely in every direction at Webster, Buchanan, Laguna, Octavia, Gough, and Franklin.

For bicyclists and pedestrians, westbound Page Street is also a major hazard. At Page and Gough, cars are turning off Gough to jump to Octavia and the freeways. This results in constant blockage of the crosswalks, and crowding of bicyclists on westbound Page.

Equity

There are a number of equity benefits for the Page Street Bicycle Improvement Pilot including modal equity, environmental justice, and geographical justice.

During commute hours, currently bicyclists outnumber cars on Page, and most cars are single occupant. On Haight Street transit passengers on crowded buses outnumber cars as well. Yet in both cases the vast majority of space is dedicated to cars (for either parking or driving). This is *modal inequity* and undermines the city's goals of mode shift and transportation emissions mitigation.

There are significant *environmental justice* benefits. Hayes Valley has a significant air pollution problem. If one looks at air quality monitoring data, the areas adjacent to the Octavia Boulevard and Central Freeway frequently see high levels of fine particulates while much of the city is considered healthy. Soot and particulate matter are rife in the neighborhood, and street trees are sickly. All of this is due to excessive traffic. Long term rent-controlled tenants in Hayes Valley whose financial situation prevents them from relocating away from pollution are adversely impacted by these traffic and pollution issues.

The Page Bikeway Improvement Pilot will make walking to Koshland Park (at Buchanan & Page) safer and provide better air quality. This is particularly important to the children at John Muir Elementary School who frequently visit Koshland Park, and to the residents and their families in the public housing at the Hayes Valley Apartments complex.

Geographical equity is also important. Hayes Valley has done more than its fair share in absorbing new housing and commerce, while being forced to absorb citywide and regional traffic *on every single street* throughout our neighborhood. This is patently unfair. Very few parts of the city carry the burden disproportionately accommodating traffic like this. Ironically, if you were to ask all the drivers coming down Page if they would accept this level of traffic on their neighborhood streets, their response would be no.

The proposal also provides equity to car drivers. Many car drivers do the right thing by staying on Oak as they approach Octavia and freeways. Right now allowing cars to cut into the line at Page and Haight is unfair to those who stay on Oak. Furthermore, the line cutting creates a very dysfunctional situation that leads to aggressive driving, honking, and road rage and causes unsafe conditions for pedestrians and cyclists. Restricting cars from accessing the freeway from Page (and eventually Haight) would bring a level of balance to the traffic flow of cars. It would also make the traffic more manageable and provides an opportunity to implement better management upstream, towards Masonic, Stanyan, and beyond.

Haight Street

Since the opening of Octavia Boulevard in 2005, HVNA's Transportation & Planning Committee has worked closely with the SFMTA to address slowly-growing congestion on Haight and Page Streets. We enthusiastically pushed to shift the Haight buses off of Page and back to Haight Street (as part of Muni Forward). We also supported the red carpet transit lane so that the Haight buses can bypass car traffic. We pushed to make transit even better by supporting the upcoming Haight Muni Forward project [It is discouraging that construction of this project has lagged for so many years].

We urge you to direct SFMTA Livable Streets and Transit staff to immediately begin design of a proposal to shift freeway-bound traffic off of Haight Street and prioritize buses. We urge you to add bus capacity, including returning the 7 (which terminated at Stanyan and was an excellent workhorse trolley bus route).

Long term

The Page Street Bikeway Improvement Pilot is a bold first step towards broader traffic mitigation, but it is just the start of a set of much needed actions for long term improvement. In addition to protecting transit on Haight, we ask that you direct staff to study and propose how to reduce traffic volumes on Buchanan and Laguna Streets. As with Page and Haight, these north-south streets have become regularly congested. Buchanan is carrying traffic northbound from Duboce (and the freeway) and Laguna is carrying traffic north and south as a parallel alternative to Octavia. Both of these streets are also experiencing an increase in Transportation Network Company (TNC) traffic and short car trips circulating within short distances between Cathedral Hill and the Mission. Using a car for these trips, including a TNC, should be a last choice, and making Laguna a cycling street should be a priority for SFMTA.

Adjacent local alleys also need attention. Increasingly spillover car traffic converges on the alleys, speeding and ignoring traffic rules, especially going the wrong way on one-way alleys. These alleys, such as Linden, Lily, and Rose, need traffic calming and can be converted to "woonerfs" or living alleys as outlined in the Market and Octavia Plan.

Finally, we ask that you direct SFMTA staff to speed up the proposed study of traffic management in the Oak-Fell-Haight-Page-Hayes corridor, minimally spanning from Van Ness to Golden Gate Park. Rather than jamming four lanes of Oak Street traffic to two lanes on the Boulevard, traffic can be metered further upstream to smooth the flow through this area.

Geofencing can be used to block navigation apps from recommending neighborhood streets as shortcuts and restrict TNC swarming.

In conclusion the Hayes Valley Neighborhood Association has proudly welcomed thousands of new housing units in our community. The City Family promised this would not bring more congestion, pollution, and traffic violence. Yet we are in a crisis and citywide traffic makes our streets unworkable. By approving the Page Street Improvement Pilot, the City reaffirms the commitment to make urban infill sustainable and fair.

We commend the staff at SFMTA's Livable Streets section for their diligent and persistent work on Page Street. Mark Dreger, Casey Hildreth, and Jenn Chan are to be especially recognized for their creative and innovative approaches to addressing traffic and safety in our community.

There is much more work that needs to be done and many moving pieces, including addressing the chronic congestion and increasingly dangerous conditions on Haight, Buchanan, Laguna, and other local streets. Moving forward, SFMTA needs to be using a green mobility framework (prioritizing cycling, transit, and walking, and managing private car traffic) for the full length of the Fell-Oak-Page-Haight corridor from Stanyan to Van Ness. Ultimately the remaining vestige of the Central Freeway should be removed and new housing can be built in that corridor. For now, the Page Street Bicycle Improvement Pilot is bold and exactly the kind of immediate green mobility policy we need. Please move it forward expeditiously!

Sincerely,



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