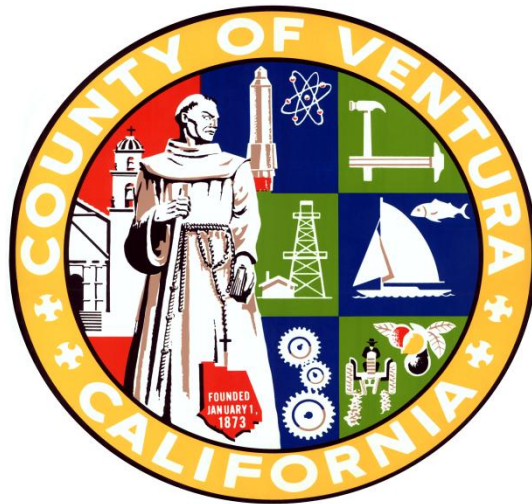


Ventura County Grand Jury 2013 - 2014



Final Report

City of Ventura Crosswalk Alerts

April 30, 2014

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City of Ventura Crosswalk Alerts

Summary

The deterioration of crosswalks and streets in the City of Ventura (City) has not escaped the notice of concerned citizens. Whether driving or walking, they see the faded crosswalks and need for maintenance throughout the City—especially in the downtown area that promotes tourism and experiences high pedestrian and vehicular traffic—particularly on weekends.

The decision to conduct this investigation was driven by a public complaint submitted to the 2013-2014 Ventura County Grand Jury (Grand Jury), triggering a review of the City Public Works Department Transportation Division's street maintenance procedures. The Grand Jury sought to determine why the City's crosswalks had been left in disrepair and what the City planned to do about it.

The Grand Jury conducted this investigation by interviewing City personnel and select downtown business owners. It analyzed a report of accidents involving vehicles and pedestrians obtained from the Ventura Police Department.

The Grand Jury reviewed the California Department of Transportation's Transportation Development Act (TDA), applicable State of California (State) laws, local municipal codes, and material available to the public on the City's website with respect to the Transportation Division in regard to pedestrians and traffic.

The Grand Jury observed pedestrians using downtown City crosswalks and photographed current conditions of those crosswalks.

The Grand Jury found that since the loss of TDA funds in 2008, the Transportation Division has been underfunded and short staffed. It had been operating with a Streets and Maintenance annual budget of \$44,000 in the 2012-2013 Fiscal Year (FY), leaving it unable to maintain or upgrade its crosswalks. In contrast, crosswalks near schools have been maintained and repaired annually as needed. In 2013-2014 FY, the annual budget increased to \$65,000. In February 2014, the Ventura City Council (City Council) approved an increased Streets and Maintenance budget of \$75,000 for the 2014-2015 FY, permitting the City to go forward and select an outside maintenance contractor.

The Grand Jury found that the Transportation Division lacked an inventory of crosswalks needing maintenance. This made it difficult to project and recommend an accurate budget, based on its maintenance requirements, for approval by the City Council.

The Grand Jury found that angled parking on both Main and California streets obscures pedestrians who cross using midblock crosswalks. It is difficult for drivers to see pedestrians as they start to cross the street.



Faded Midblock Crosswalk



Ladder-Effect Crosswalk

The Grand Jury recommends that the City Council direct the Transportation Division to insert "ladder-effect" stripes to all midblock crosswalks in the City's downtown for improved driver visibility. Priority should be given to crosswalks on Main and California streets where there is angled parking.

The Grand Jury recommends that the City Council direct the Transportation Division to establish a pedestrian master plan, similar to the existing *Bicycle Master Plan*, to improve safety for the City's pedestrians.

The Grand Jury recommends that the City Council direct the Transportation Division to inventory City crosswalks, establish a priority list of critical maintenance, and project a budget that supports, and is in line with, the identified number of crosswalks in need of painting/restriping or upgrading in the City. Once these results are achieved, corrections should be made by the end of the 2014-2015 FY and maintained/repainted annually. This process should become part of the pedestrian master plan.

Background

In 2008, the City Public Works Department experienced a loss of funding previously received from TDA funds. The one-fourth cent of the general sales tax, formerly allotted to Streets and Maintenance, has been diverted by the Ventura County Transportation Commission for use by public transportation (system providing transportation services to the general public, for example, buses) for the past six years. In the past, TDA monies went toward supporting the Transportation Division's Streets and Maintenance budget, including personnel. After the loss of funds, staff was reduced and the budget was cut. [Ref-01]

With the inadequate budget causing a reduction in staff, many of the City's crosswalks have been left in a state of disrepair; many crosswalks have faded or have worn-away striping and are in need of repainting. A public complaint, submitted to the Grand Jury, triggered a review of the City's street maintenance procedures.

Pedestrians using crosswalks in the downtown area, on both Main and California streets, are at risk of not being seen by drivers. The use of angled parking in

downtown obscures drivers' view of pedestrians beginning to cross in a midblock crosswalk.

For pedestrian safety, the three most effective types of crosswalks are:

- Crosswalk at a signal – most effective;
- Crosswalk with rapid beacon – push a button to cross; and
- Crosswalk with in-pavement flashing lights.

The above crosswalk types have associated issues, and are costlier than paint and ladder-effect striping; for example, in-pavement flashing lights shift around in soft blacktop and light bulbs are difficult to replace.

The State does not have a policy on how cities determine what type of crosswalk to use in each location. The City selects crosswalk types by volume of traffic and number of pedestrians crossing, in addition to width of street. The higher pedestrian traffic areas generally receive the ladder-effect type crosswalk design for more visibility.

The City adopted its *Bicycle Master Plan* on May 2, 2011, to ensure the safety of bicyclists. It is a goal of the City "...to provide residents with more transportation choices by strengthening and balancing bicycle, pedestrian, and transit opportunities in the City and surrounding region." [Ref-02]

The bicycle was historically an effective utilitarian vehicle. As the automobile's popularity increased, the bicycle became more recreational than a means of transportation. The *Bicycle Master Plan* came about as an instrument "...to encourage improvements to the City's bicycle facilities infrastructure while striving to improve the use and recognition of the bicycle as a viable commuter vehicle." [Ref-02]

The City's goal for the bicycle plan was to establish a policy that would ensure the transportation system was safe and easily accessible to all travelers. One of the action items in the *Bicycle Master Plan* was "to design roadway improvements and facility modifications to minimize the potential for conflict between pedestrians, bicycles, and automobiles." [Ref-02]

As the City promotes tourism in its downtown, pedestrian traffic is steadily increasing. (Att-01) So is the City's need to maintain and upgrade its crosswalks, especially the more difficult-to-see midblock type, for the safety of its community and visitors. Much like the *Bicycle Master Plan* is for the safety of bicyclists, [Ref-02] it is important for the City to establish a pedestrian master plan for the safety of its pedestrians.

Methodology

The Grand Jury interviewed City personnel and select downtown business owners. It analyzed a report of accidents involving vehicles and pedestrians obtained from the Ventura Police Department.

The Grand Jury reviewed the TDA, applicable State laws, local municipal codes, and material available to the public on the City's website with respect to the

Transportation Division in regard to pedestrians and traffic. [Ref-01, Ref-03, Ref-04]

The Grand Jury reviewed the Ventura City Council Meeting Minutes dated February 24, 2014, in regard to its discussion and approval of the City's Public Works Department's Transportation Division, Streets and Maintenance budget. [Ref-05]

The Grand Jury reviewed the City's *Bicycle Master Plan, 2014-2020 Proposed Capital Improvement Plan*, and *Downtown Ventura Partners Improvement District Work Plan 2014*. [Ref-02, Ref-06, Ref-07] (Att-01)

The Grand Jury observed pedestrians using downtown City crosswalks and photographed current conditions of those crosswalks.

Facts

- FA-01.** City street maintenance funds come from State gasoline tax monies, not general fund dollars. [Ref-01]
- FA-02.** The majority of City streets have faded crosswalks, striping, and curb markings. [Ref-04, Ref-05]
- FA-03.** Midblock crosswalks with single stripes are difficult for drivers to see. [Ref-04]
- FA-04.** City pedestrian crosswalks in the downtown area have not been painted for the past six years. [Ref-05]
- FA-05.** The Streets and Maintenance budget of the Public Works Department's Transportation Division has been underfunded since the loss of TDA funds in 2008. This underfunding led to a cutback in Streets and Maintenance staff. [Ref-01, Ref-05]
- FA-06.** The City Transportation Division received an increase in its Traffic Striping Maintenance contract from an annual budget of \$44,000 in the 2012-2013 FY to \$65,000 in the 2013-2014 FY. In February 2014, the Ventura City Council approved an increase to \$75,000 for the 2014-2015 FY. [Ref-05]
- FA-07.** The Transportation Division contracts for all of its striping maintenance.
- FA-08.** The City does not have an existing inventory of crosswalks or colored curbs.
- FA-09.** Public complaints regarding street maintenance can be registered by phone to the City's hotline at 805-652-4590 (days) or 805-339-4399 (emergency after hours), or through its website at MyVenturaAccess. [Ref-08]
- FA-10.** The Transportation Division keeps a log of street maintenance-related public complaints.

- FA-11.** The Transportation Division does not have an online interface with the Ventura Police Department for communication of vehicle and pedestrian accidents.
- FA-12.** The Transportation Division receives required hard-copy reports, sometimes preceded by a phone call, of traffic accidents involving pedestrians and vehicles from the Ventura Police Department. The Transportation Manager may be called to the scene for some accidents and may be called to court to testify.
- FA-13.** Compared to prior years, vehicle traffic volume is down in the City's downtown.
- FA-14.** Compared to prior years, pedestrian and bicycle traffic in the City's downtown is up.
- FA-15.** On weekends there is an increase in tourists to the City's downtown.
- FA-16.** The City's downtown has 30 degree angled parking; the angle has been decreased from 45 degrees, reducing incidents.
- FA-17.** Jaywalking is illegal in the City's downtown. [Ref-04, Ref-09]
- FA-18.** California Street does not have posted speed limit signs. Some people driving from Poli Street, at the top of California Street, exceed the State recognized business district speed limit of 25 mph in an attempt to make it through all the signals. [Ref-10]
- FA-19.** The State established the speed limit in business and residential districts at 25 mph. [Ref-10]
- FA-20.** The Transportation Division ensures that crosswalks near schools are maintained annually.
- FA-21.** Crosswalks near schools are the only type that can be painted yellow. [Ref-11]
- FA-22.** The City's 2005 General Plan laid out goals for transportation choices. As stated in that General Plan, "Our Goal is to provide residents with more transportation choices by strengthening and balancing bicycle, pedestrian, and transit opportunities in the City and surrounding region." On May 2, 2011, the City adopted the *Bicycle Master Plan* to ensure the safety of its bicyclists. [Ref-02]
- FA-23.** The City does not have a pedestrian master plan.

Findings

- FI-01.** Due to a reduction in staff and lack of funding, crosswalks in the City are in need of restriping and/or upgrading. (FA-02, FA-03, FA-04, FA-05)
- FI-02.** Restriping and maintaining crosswalks in the City will lead to improved pedestrian safety. When approaching crosswalks with faded or worn-away striping, drivers find it difficult to notice them. (FA-02, FA-03, FA-14, FA-15, FA-16)

- FI-03.** Lacking an inventory of crosswalks needing maintenance makes it difficult for the Transportation Division to project and recommend an accurate budget, based on its maintenance requirements, for approval by the City Council. This will cause the budget to be underfunded. An inventory of the City's crosswalks will allow the Transportation Division to prioritize repairs and provide the City Council with a precise budget amount more aligned with its maintenance needs. (FA-02, FA-08)
- FI-04.** The City Council approved a new Streets and Maintenance contract of \$75,000 that will allow the Transportation Division to begin working with a contractor to prioritize its maintenance needs. (FA-06, FA-07)
- FI-05.** Angled parking on both Main and California streets obscures pedestrians who cross using midblock crosswalks, making it difficult for drivers to see them as they start to cross the street—especially with increased pedestrian traffic on weekends. (FA-03, FA-14, FA-15, FA-16)
- FI-06.** The use of angled parking in the City's downtown reinforces the need for well-marked crosswalks for the protection of pedestrians. Adding ladder-effect stripes to midblock crosswalks will make them more visible to drivers. (FA-14, FA-15, FA-16)
- FI-07.** Speeding on California Street is problematic. Traffic signals fail to control this situation. (FA-18, FA-19)
- FI-08.** The City promotes tourism in its downtown, bringing additional people to the area. Vehicle traffic is heaviest during weekends and late afternoons. (FA-14, FA-15)
- FI-09.** The interface between the Transportation Division and the Ventura Police Department for the transfer of required information is inefficient. (FA-11, FA-12)
- FI-10.** At this time, a pedestrian master plan similar to the *Bicycle Master Plan* has not been established. (FA-22, FA-23)

Recommendations

- R-01.** The Grand Jury recommends that the City Council direct the Transportation Division to insert ladder-effect stripes to all midblock crosswalks in the City's downtown, for improved driver visibility. Priority should be given to crosswalks on Main and California streets where there is angled parking. (FI-01, FI-02, FI-05, FI-06)
- R-02.** The Grand Jury recommends that the City Council direct the Transportation Division to adjust the traffic signals on California Street in an effort to slow down drivers, especially during the late afternoon hours when traffic is heaviest. (FI-07)
- R-03.** The Grand Jury recommends that the City Council direct the Transportation Division to establish a pedestrian master plan, similar to the existing *Bicycle Master Plan*, to improve safety for the City's pedestrians. (FI-10)

- R-04.** The Grand Jury recommends that the City Council direct the Transportation Division to inventory City crosswalks, establish a priority list of critical maintenance, and project a budget that supports and is in line with the identified number of crosswalks in need of painting/restriping and/or upgrading in the City. Once these results are achieved, corrections should be made by the end of the 2014-2015 FY and maintained/repainted annually. This process should become part of the pedestrian master plan. (FI-01, FI-02, FI-03, FI-04, FI-10)
- R-05.** The Grand Jury recommends that the City Council direct the Transportation Division to schedule regular maintenance/painting of crosswalks to provide pedestrian safety. (FI-01, FI-02, FI-04)
- R-06.** The Grand Jury recommends that the City Council direct the Transportation Division to implement an online interface with the Ventura Police Department. This will facilitate a more efficient, timely response in obtaining accident reports. (FI-09)

Responses

Responses required from:

Ventura City Council (FI-01, FI-02, FI-03, FI-04, FI-05, FI-06, FI-07, FI-09, FI-10) (R-01, R-02, R-03, R-04, R-05, R-06)

Responses requested from:

City of Ventura Public Works, Transportation Division (FI-01, FI-02, FI-03, FI-04, FI-05, FI-06, FI-07, FI-09, FI-10) (R-01, R-02, R-03, R-04, R-05, R-06)

References

- Ref-01.** California Department of Transportation, Transportation Development Act, website <http://www.dot.ca.gov/hq/MassTrans/State-TDA.html> (accessed March 12, 2014)
- Ref-02.** City of Ventura *Bicycle Master Plan*, May 2011, website: <http://www.cityofventura.net/files/file/SAadopted%202011%20Bicycle%20Master%20Plan.pdf> (accessed March 3, 2014)
- Ref-03.** Municipal Code, City of San Buenaventura <http://library.municode.com/index.aspx?clientId=10135> (accessed January 16, 2014)
- Ref-04.** California Vehicle Code Section 21950 (a) website <http://www.leginfo.ca.gov/cgi-bin/displaycode?section=veh&group=21001-22000&file=21949-21971> (accessed January 24, 2014)
- Ref-05.** Ventura City Council, Regular City Council Meeting, Agenda Items 7, 8, and 12, February 24, 2014, <http://www.cityofventura.net/meeting/city-council-meeting-244> (accessed February 24, 2014)

- Ref-06.** Downtown Ventura Partners Improvement District website
<http://www.downtownventura.org/assets/WorkPlan2014-final.pdf>
(accessed January 16, 2014)
- Ref-07.** City of Ventura *2014-2020 Proposed Capital Improvement Plan*
www.cityofventura.net/pw/construction/capital (accessed February 24, 2014)
- Ref-08.** City of Ventura website, MyVenturaAccess
<http://www.cityofventura.net/> (accessed February 26, 2014)
- Ref-09.** Municipal Code, City of San Buenaventura, Division 16, Sec 16.150.020
<http://library.municode.com/index.aspx?clientId=10135&stateId=5&stateName=California> (accessed February 28, 2014)
- Ref-10.** City of Ventura, MyVenturaAccess, Maintenance and Traffic signals
<http://www.cityofventura.net/> (accessed February 26, 2014)
- Ref-11.** California Department of Motor Vehicles
<https://www.dmv.ca.gov/pubs/vctop/d11/vc21368.htm> (accessed February 28, 2014)

Attachments

- Att-01.** Downtown Ventura Partners Improvement District Work Plan 2014
District Boundaries Map (Excerpted)

Glossary

<u>TERM</u>	<u>DEFINITION</u>
City	City of Ventura/San Buenaventura
City Council	Ventura City Council
Crosswalk	A place marked on a street where pedestrians can cross the street
Downtown Ventura	A 22-block area of Ventura bordered by Ventura Avenue, Poli Street, Ash Street, and Thompson Boulevard
FY	Fiscal year; the City of Ventura's FY begins July 1 and ends June 30
Grand Jury	2013-2014 Ventura County Grand Jury
Ladder-effect	Wide perpendicular stripes that run between lines of a crosswalk
Midblock crosswalk	A crosswalk not located at an intersection
Pedestrian	A person who travels on foot
Public Transportation	Any system of an operator which provides transportation services to the general public by any vehicle which operates on land or water, for example, bus, train, or boat
State	State of California
TDA	California Department of Transportation, Transportation Development Act of 1971 (updated April 2013); formerly known as the "Mills-Alquist Deddeh Act"
Transportation Division	City of Ventura Public Works Department, Transportation Division

Attachment 01

Downtown Ventura Partners Improvement District Work Plan 2014
District Boundaries Map (Excerpted)



Downtown Ventura Business Improvement District