

**eric doyle**

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**From:** eric doyle  
**Sent:** Monday, June 06, 2011 8:03 PM  
**To:** city.council@menlopark.org  
**Subject:** Willows Area-Wide Traffic Study

Mayor Cline and Members of the City Council:

I'm writing to ask you to stop the Willows Traffic Study now and send staff back to the drawing board. The plan is so flawed there is virtually no chance of success. Why put it to a vote of the residents, possibly committing the city to another \$400,000 for a trial, when the likely outcome of the trial is failure? The opposition you see now is just the tip of the iceberg. If this plan is installed you will see the whole iceberg, and it will sink the project.

The fundamental problems as I see them are:

**The goal is impossible**

The goal of the plan, as stated by Ms Huang of the Transportation Commission to her supporters in the neighborhood is a 25% reduction in Willows traffic. A simple engineering rule-of-thumb estimate shows that this reduction is impossible. If one applies Institution of Transportation Engineers standards for trips in residential areas to the number of residences in the Willows, one calculates a normal traffic flow of 22800 vpd (vehicles per day - see my email of 11/5/08). Based on my compilation the City's data, the net measured flow is 26900 vpd. The difference between the two numbers is presumably cut-through traffic. If eliminated completely it would result in a 15% reduction.

By the way: I believe my tally of net measured volume probably errs on the high side. Staff report 03-060 said "Comparison of the total traffic counts taken in 2002/2003 at a cordon drawn around the neighborhood to those taken at the same locations in the 1992 TJKM study shows that the total traffic volume entering and leaving the neighborhood is nearly 11 percent less than it was in 1992 (20,062 now versus 22,444 then).

If all cut through traffic were removed, the 22,800 vpd base traffic, divided evenly over the nine Willows entry points would average to 2500 vpd on each street. The goal of 1500 vpd, which has been dangled before the residents by the city is obviously impossible. Building false expectations is not beneficial.

**The downside is understated. For example, look at the Willow Road turn restrictions.**

We have four major entry points to the neighborhood from Willow Road. Preventing left turns onto two of these streets (Chester and O'Keefe) from Willow will reduce the daily traffic on those streets by 778 vpd, according to TJKM. Are we to believe that traffic on the other two (Gilbert and Durham) will be reduced *also* ... by 313 vpd as claimed? Good luck!

Here's what obviously will happen. Some people unable to turn left onto Chester or O'Keefe will turn on Durham instead and cut over to Chester or O'Keefe at the first opportunity. Others, headed for the western end of the Willows will proceed to Gilbert and turn in there. What the engineers seem to have overlooked is that people throughout the Willows use these entry points for various reasons – to avoid Willow Road traffic for one.

Cut through traffic may be diverted to Durham and Gilbert along with residents. In any case, substantial percentage of the 778 vpd will be diverted to Durham and Gilbert. Traffic on Willow will increase. The two remaining left turn lanes (Durham and Gilbert) will overflow and add to the disruption on Willow.

Incidentally, the NTMP limits diversion of traffic to streets depending on their original volume. Gilbert, at 3500 vpd is above the 3000 vpd limit beyond which *no* diversion is permitted. Is this why TJKM low-balled the increase on Gilbert to an insignificantly 87 vpd?

Also: how do they intend to keep people out of the prohibited left turn lanes during the prohibited hours? Won't some drivers enter the left turn lanes only to discover that turning is prohibited? Then they will have to re-enter the through traffic lane, adding further disruption.

Most of the downside was left to us to discover. For example, the one way conversion of Woodland at Pope and the right turn prohibition onto Central from Pope, will if implemented, divert most traffic, incoming from Palo Alto, to the two remaining streets Laurel and Pope. I asked the city for the impact on Pope and Laurel and was told that the consultant would be asked to perform the analysis. I never received any results. Luckily I have an extensive collection of Willows traffic data, which gave a good idea of the effect: incoming traffic on the 100 & 200 blocks of Pope would increase from 400 to 2000 vpd. A five fold increase in traffic and they didn't bother to tell us! They apparently didn't even bother to ask themselves what the effect will be.

### **Safety**

In this whole process I've heard no serious discussion of safety. We need data, not lip service. Where are the high accident locations in the Willows? The data is readily available.

How can we claim to be addressing safety issues if we don't even know the location and frequency of accidents? Will the plan divert traffic to accident-prone intersections? How can we measure progress without data? What would the plan look like if it addressed specific accident problems?

The safety discussion should be comprehensive, accounting for safety impact on Willow Road, for example, and for the effect on emergency vehicle response.

### **Resident support is lukewarm at best.**

The survey that kicked off this process was responded to by about 25% of eligible residences. Naturally, participation was heavily weighted with people deeply concerned about traffic problems. They have been organizing and agitating for years, so naturally they all responded. Naturally, residents with little concern about traffic were less likely to respond. Therefore, the survey represented a biased sampling of neighborhood opinion. Even so, the second greatest response was "no concern" (with traffic).

The neighborhood meeting at which the final plan was chosen was attended by about 80 residents. Again, these people were mostly true believers. Residents who expect to gain something from this process. The plan was designed for 80 people, not for the neighborhood of 3600 Menlo Park residents.

Considering the limited (albeit noisy) support and the negative effects on the neighborhood at large, this plan is doomed. Keep this in mind when listening to the public testimony: those opposed are the tip of the iceberg. Those in favor are the whole iceberg. They have been planning this for years.

### **Back to the drawing board.**

This project should start with realistic estimates of cut through and neighborhood traffic. They should begin with new data collection: a consistent set of ADTs at all entry points surrounding the Menlo and EPA residential areas of the Willows; a realistic estimate of baseline neighborhood traffic based on ITE standards; a new volunteer-staffed cut-through traffic study correcting the faults of the 2003 study (my 6/7/04 memo to the Transportation Commission); safety statistics should be compiled and examined to see where the real traffic dangers occur. Only with consistent, up-to-date data can such a complex project be successful.

As for determining community involvement, the NTMP handles this very well by requiring proponents of traffic measures to present a petition signed by 60% of the affected neighborhood, before the city invests in engineering the details of the project. This puts the burden on the proponents of the plan to calibrate their goal to the needs of their neighbors. In the current study, the city is catering to the demands of a very small minority, against the interests of the majority. The NTMP protects the majority from domination by special interest groups and protects the tax payers from waste of city funds on traffic projects unwanted by the residents.

This is a project in a state of disintegration – staff removing major features from the supposedly integrated system, tossing them overboard ... and then restoring them a few days later. Or not, depending on whom you believe. Please put an end to this thing now. Don't throw more money down the drain. Revive it only if staff is willing to create the necessary technical foundation on which to build the project. Revive it only with safeguards in place to ensure an outcome which is acceptable to the whole neighborhood.

Thank you,

Eric Doyle  
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