

Public Safety and Transportation Committee Minutes for March 11, 2004

The meeting was called to order at 6:32PM March 11, 2004, in the City Hall Council Chambers with the following in attendance:

Councilmembers

Scott Thomasson, Chairman
Gary Petersen
Dan Sherman (arrived 6:38PM)

Public Works Staff

Tim Heydon
Maiya Andrews
Mike Holmes

Other Staff

Tony Piasecki
Chief Roger Baker
Cmdr. John O'Leary
Cmdr. Kevin Tucker
Officer Barry Sellers

The purpose of the meeting was to discuss:

1. Changes to speed limits
2. Speed Limits signs in school zones
3. Operation of signals during power outages

Additional items which were discussed include:

4. Use of Police Officers on construction projects
5. South 252nd Street and 22nd Avenue South striping
6. Safety Concerns

1. Changes to speed limits

Mikes Holmes reported to the committee that he evaluated the sight distances on South 216th Street between 11th Avenue South and Marine View Drive and that the geometrics alone did not warrant a 25 mph speed limit, however, staff has not yet conducted a speed study through this segment. Councilmember Thomasson indicated that he did not feel that the speed limit through this segment should be increased anyway due to its short length and proximity to the horizontal curves at Marine View Drive. The other committee members agreed. Staff will prepare changes only to the segment between 11th Avenue South and 14th Avenue South.

Staff reported that they will be conducting a speed study on the segment of 16th Avenue South between Pacific Highway South and South 272nd Street. This segment is currently posted at 40 mph, however, the code does not reflect this change. The second is 272nd between Pacific Highway South and 16th. Once these speed studies are completed, staff will prepare an ordinance for recommendation to Council that addresses speed limit changes on South 216th Street between 11th Avenue South and 14th Avenue South, the two segments above, and Marine View Drive South from SR 516 to South 252nd Street will be moved from DMMC 10.20.020 to 10.20.010.

Recommendation/Action:

Staff will prepare a recommendation and ordinance to bring back to full council as soon as possible.

2. Speed Limits in School Zones:

Councilmember Thomasson had previously asked the question about what "When Children are Present" plaques means on the school zone speed limit signs. Mike Holmes presented WAC 468-95-350 which defines the situations in which this speed limit would be enforceable. This limit is in force under any of the following conditions: 1) School children are occupying or walking within the marked crosswalk, 2) School children are awaiting at the curb or on the shoulder of the roadway and are about to cross the roadway by way of the marked crosswalk, or 3) School children are present or walking along the roadway, either on the adjacent sidewalk or, in the absence of sidewalks, on the shoulder within the posted school speed limit zone extending 300 feet, or other distance established by regulation, in either direction from the marked crosswalk.

Officer Barry Sellers presented a memorandum (attached) which confirms this enforcement.

Councilmember Thomasson indicated that the City should either adopt the “when Children are Present” sign, and its enforcement under the WAC, as policy or by resolution or ordinance. He asked whether the WAC allowing cities to use the sign required that the cities formally adopt its use. Maiya Andrews said she would confirm whether this was required. Councilmember Thomasson indicated that if it is required, it may be appropriate to adopt it with the speed limit changes. If it is not required, staff will proceed to adopt the use of the sign as a policy and will proceed to ensure that the signs are installed properly. The police will confirm that their staff understands when this sign is enforced. They will also follow up with the Des Moines Traffic School.

Councilmember Thomasson also asked if staff had evaluated crosswalks and school zones to ensure signs were properly placed. Mike Holmes indicated that he had partnered with the police in several schools non-compliant with the regulation.

Recommendation/Action:

Staff will confirm whether Council action is necessary, and if not, will proceed to ensure that the “When Children are Present” signs are in place and being properly enforced.

3. Operation of Signals During Power Outages:

Commander Tucker presented the state law that states that controlled intersections when not functioning are to be treated as four-way stops. He also presented a Risk Management bulletin from WCIA (attached). This bulletin not only states that having officers control the intersection is not legally required, but that it may not be advisable due to the risks to the officers. WCIA also recommends that to further protect the City from liability that the City adopt this policy by resolution. Commander Tucker noted that during the last large power outages, although there was frustration expressed by citizens, there were no accidents at nonfunctioning controlled intersections.

Councilmember Petersen indicated that he felt that drivers are extremely courteous and familiar with this operation during a power outage, and that he did not feel there was a problem.

Councilmember Thomasson agreed and asked if a resolution should be done. City Manager Piasecki recommended that a resolution be passed which adopts this as policy and states that this policy be incorporated into the Standard Operation Procedures of the City Departments. Councilmember Sherman was concerned that any resolution adopted needs to give the staff the flexibility to make human decisions and control intersections if and when needed based on the situation.

Recommendation/Action:

The Committee directed staff to bring a resolution to council which states that City has a policy to not employ City resources to provide additional traffic control at failed traffic signals during routine power outages. However, the proposed resolution will give the staff the flexibility to make the decision to provide additional traffic control when appropriate.

4. Use of Police Officers on construction projects:

Councilmember Thomasson asked what staff’s policy was on the use of police officers on construction projects. Councilmember Sherman indicated that the presence of officers seemed to have a positive effect on the driver’s response to the traffic control operations.

Maiya Andrews indicated that staff analyzes each project on a case-by-case basis to determine if police assistance is necessary. Staff requires the use of officers when construction workers are flagging a signalized intersection. The officers are used to monitor the operation and ensure that

flagger direction is being followed. Other situations are analyzed with respect to the volume of traffic, the complexity of the work zone set-up, and the geometrics of the roadway to determine when an officer will be required.

Recommendation/Action:

No action was taken at this time. Staff will continue to analyze projects on a case-by-case basis.

5. South 252nd Street and 22nd Ave South Striping:

Councilmember Thomasson expressed concern over how the street in front of a recently developed site was striped. Mike Holmes confirmed that the road was widened per the requirements of the City's Comprehensive Transportation Plan and the Street Standards to 36 feet of pavement and an on-street bike lane. Councilmember Thomasson expressed concern about the interim condition since the bike lane is separated from the through traffic lane by a "sea of asphalt". Councilmember Thomasson recommended that no bike lane be striped in this situation to eliminate any confusion by drivers and/or bicyclists, and to allow the use of the any available space for interim parking.

Recommendation/Action:

Staff will evaluate interim striping conditions on this project and future projects to ensure that the interim striping condition makes sense and works with the adjacent sections of roadway.

6. Safety Concerns:

Councilmember Petersen expressed concern over a situation he witnessed recently in which a police officer conducted a high-speed change of direction while driving on SR 99. He stressed the importance of officers driving safely when responding to emergencies.

Recommendation/Action:

Chief Baker and the Commanders will follow-up with their staff to ensure that safe driving practices are being adhered to.

Other Action Items:

Staff is currently working on preparing the graffiti ordinance and would like to have it to full Council in May. City Manager Piasecki indicated it should be presented to the PS&T Committee in mid-April.

The meeting was adjourned at 7:25PM.

Submitted by:

Maiya I. Andrews
Asst. City Engineer

w/attachments:

School speed limits handout (engineering)
School zone definitions memo (police)
Risk Management Analysis: Y2K and Malfunctioning Traffic Signals
Rules of the road (yielding at four-way stops)
S 252nd St / 22nd Ave S Sketch w/ street standards and comprehensive transportation plan