



Making Coalinga's Streets Safer for All

Last year the City began preparing an Active Transportation Plan to address the needs of residents who walk and bicycle. On September 15, 2016, City staff and consultants presented Council with one big idea to come out of the planning process so far. The team identified serious safety concerns for people trying to cross Elm Avenue and developed ideas for inexpensive improvements that would increase safety for all road users - people who choose to drive, walk, or ride a bicycle.

Over the last 10 years, three people who walk have been killed by vehicular collisions and over a dozen additional pedestrians have been injured on State Route 33 in Coalinga. People who bicycle have also been involved in several crashes, including two with serious injuries. Both Caltrans and elected leaders have become increasingly concerned with the number of collisions.

"My business has been located on Elm Avenue for twenty years and I've actually gone out to stop traffic because I was so concerned for kids' safety crossing the street," said Coalinga City Council Member Ron Lander. "I think, this type of improvement is a long time overdue and it's amazing more people have not been injured."

The proposed improvements call for changing the two travel lanes and a parking lane in each direction on Elm to having one travel lane and a parking lane in each direction, plus a shared middle turn lane, and a buffered bike lane in each direction. Safety is the primary objective of these improvements, and there is a safety benefit to all users, not just people walking and people biking. People driving will see improved road conditions as this proposed layout will reduce potential conflicts with other vehicles and keep traffic flowing smoothly at the speed limit. These improvements will not have an impact on street capacity, as both current and projected future road use is well below the maximum that this three lane configuration can smoothly handle. Furthermore, no parking will be removed in the proposal. People needing to cross the street will have fewer lanes to cross and drivers will have a better ability to see and yield to pedestrians, which could save lives.

In addition to having support from the City Council and Planning Commission for this idea, Coalinga Police Chief Michael Salvador voiced his support for the project at the recent City Council meeting. In a letter of support, Caltrans District 6 Deputy Director John Liu said that "benefits of these types of *Complete Streets* decisions often lead to increased transportation choices, economic revitalization, improved return on infrastructure investments, more livable communities, improved safety, increase in active transportation, and a reduction in greenhouse gases, along with improved air quality."



In addition to the improvements along Elm Avenue, Coalinga's Active Transportation Plan also proposes many other improvements including a loop trail around the City and Safe Routes to School improvements. These improvements will help more residents who wish to walk or bicycle within town to do so safely.

To showcase some of these improvements and to encourage more students to walk to school, the City and CHUSD are hosting a **Walk to School Day** on Wednesday, October 26, 2016. During the Walk to School Day, there will be Walking School Buses and "Pop-Up" improvements. Walking Schools Buses are formed when students, parents, and school representatives group up and walk together. Those who participate in Walking School Buses and all who come visit the area will also get to experience temporary "Pop-Up" street improvements. These changes to the streetscape are only temporary (and "Pop-Up" overnight), but will give those who experience them a feel for how some of the proposed permanent solutions change the driving, walking, and bicycling environment.

Pop-Up improvements will take place at select locations along Sunset Street and at the intersection of Van Ness, Birch, 3rd, and Fillmore. There will be representatives available throughout the day at these locations to answer questions on the spot.

To cap off the day, there will be a Community Workshop from 6:30PM to 8:00PM in the Multi-purpose room of Nell Dawson Elementary. Nell Dawson Elementary is located at 1303 Sunset Avenue. This is a great opportunity for community members to learn more about these improvements, have their questions answered, and share any thoughts, concerns, or recommendations they may have.

For additional information about the Elm Avenue Project and Coalinga's Active Transportation Plan please visit: <http://walkbikecoalinga.org/>

Contact:

Sean Brewer, Director of Community Development

sbrewer@coalinga.com