



AARON PESKIN

MEMORANDUM

DATE: July 20, 2020

TO: SFMTA Board, Commissioners
SFMTA Director Jeffrey Tumlin
SFMTA Board Secretary Roberta Boomer

FROM: Supervisor Aaron Peskin *AP*

RE: MTAB July 21 Mtg - Item 12 – Approving “Slow Streets” Modifications

Thank you to the SFMTA Livable Streets team for the staff work in the days immediately following the Shelter-In-Place Order to analyze emergency response options for communities in need of social distancing and public realm access, including “Slow Streets” experiments in the northeast sector of San Francisco.

SFMTA has taken a necessarily flexible approach to adapting the program to the tailored needs of individual neighborhoods, and I want to acknowledge staff’s openness to working with our office to invite in community stakeholders to help inform the needs of the community.

After surveying stakeholders throughout my District, I would like to make the following recommendations and requests for temporary modifications to the Agency’s criteria for the Slow Streets program, as originally set forth:

- **Explicitly Include Equity Priorities in Slow Streets Criteria** – My office has publicly brought up the lack of equity considerations when prioritizing the roll-out of the “Slow Streets” program, including at last month’s Transportation Recovery Workgroup. This is particularly important given our City’s mandate to prioritize vulnerable communities of concern in its planning decisions and emergency response. San Francisco can and should be leading the nation on equity in our emergency response, particularly as it pertains to supporting low-income communities of color accessing essential services, youth and children who still don’t have access to school and high-touch Rec & Park facilities, and seniors who don’t feel comfortable patronizing the Shared Spaces program in our neighborhood commercial corridors. SFMTA criteria should explicitly reflect these values and staff should publicly include the equity rationale in its planning approvals recommendations.
- **Re-instate Lombard Street** – While I understand that SFMTA ultimately discontinued Stockton Street’s inclusion in the program due to neighborhood

complaints of not being able to utilize the space effectively, Lombard Street was also taken off SFMTA's map. Given its initial inclusion, I would like to request that the SFMTA Board consider amending Item 12 today as it relates to the stretch of Lombard Street between Columbus Avenue and Powell Street. Back in 2018, our office responded to requests from a North Beach parent, Jessica Herzog, who wanted help implementing pedestrian safety improvements on this stretch of Lombard. SFMTA was able to quickly move a package of safety improvements, and this stretch with its existing traffic calming is a natural extension of the public facilities currently being partially used at the North Beach Library and Joe DiMaggio Playground, along with some daycare facilities that are currently open for essential services on this stretch. We have heard from parents the desire for additional outdoor space that is separate from the tennis and basketball courts, which are seeing more utilization by adults.

- **Amend Slow Streets Program to Include Tier of Hybrid Programmed Blocks –** In surveying our constituents, we have routinely heard requests to prioritize improvements based on the needs of those most impacted by the COVID-19 shutdown. While I've personally experienced the success of Lake Street and Great Highway Slow Streets as continuous exercise corridors for the western neighborhoods, there must be more done to program around the needs of dense urban neighborhoods on the east side of San Francisco, including Districts 3 and 6. SFMTA has prioritized Muni recovery for essential workers and transit-dependent communities, in areas like District 3 where ridership numbers are among the highest in the city. The next phase of programming should be tailored to working around transit and commercial areas, and prioritizing spaces for safe community gathering. The Shared Spaces program and the City's pre-existing parklet program have proven that active programming and rotating stewardship can make or break effective and equitable use of the public realm.

Smaller residential blocks or blocks that are adjacent to Rec & Park and SFUSD facilities that are being used part-time for recreational programming are natural choices for "Slow Streets" even if they don't fit entirely into the current program criteria. They generate opportunities to partner with neighborhood groups and youth-serving CBO's. SFMTA has said that it is low on things like barricades, and this approach also invites community to be a part of creating the infrastructure of their mini Slow Streets. This is something we've implemented with initial success on Grant Avenue between California and Clay Streets. While it's not 24/7, it's a pilot of a partial street closure on the weekends to encourage tourism and safe engagement on the main stretch of Chinatown's recovering commercial corridor. This program was initiated after merchant-by-merchant outreach, with community partners including the Chinese Chamber, Chinatown Merchants Association, Community Youth Center and Livable City. If the criteria is flexible and allows for blocks to take ownership on their own schedule and terms, it could and would encourage more active participation.

Additional requests for second-tier slow streets include:

- 1) Jones Street between Lombard St and Greenwich St – *request to consider weekend closure in front of Yick Wo Elementary School*
- 2) Greenwich Street between Columbus Avenue and Powell Street – *request for partial closure adjacent to Joe DiMaggio tennis courts*

- 3) Francisco Street between Powell and Stockton Streets– *request for partial closure adjacent to Francisco Middle School, in conjunction with expanded hours for Shared Schoolyards*
 - 4) “Horseshoe” of Vallejo between Jones Street, steps leading to Taylor, Jones between Vallejo and Green Streets, and Green Street between Jones and the Taylor Street steps – *suggested closure from Russian Hill stakeholders*
 - 5) Fern and Austin Alleys off of Polk Street – *Lower Polk CBD request for activation on behalf of small businesses and Redding Elementary parents*
- **Include Other COVID-19 Public Realm Re-Purposing in Citywide Map** – Since the start of the COVID-19 recovery process, our office has helped to shepherd over 600 Shared Spaces applications through the approval process – the highest number of any district by a large margin. This was in direct response to the call from small business to help prioritize their recovery and create more space for social distancing and access to street frontage that prioritized people over cars. If there is a room for a separate track of public realm repurposing on the map, it would be helpful to differentiate.
 - **Explore Emergency SFMTA Program Amendments to Maximize Resource Sharing** – Programs like Safe Routes to School and the Agency’s crossing guard programs are examples of potential opportunities to share resources in the midst of COVID-19. We must think creatively about how to maximize partnerships with existing SFMTA grantees and CBO partners, including the San Francisco Bicycle Coalition. With schools still closed, crossing guards are being reallocated to Muni buses to serve as community ambassadors – a good example of creative repurposing of roles during this crisis. Those same crossing guards and our CBO partners can also assist in monitoring Slow Streets in the City’s denser eastside neighborhoods to ensure their safety.

Thank you for your consideration of these recommendations. The Board of Supervisors is currently operating full-time, including scheduling of Special Meetings, to meet emergency deadlines during COVID-19. Whether through adoption at a Special SFMTA Board meeting or administrative implementation, I hope that SFMTA will take these recommendations under consideration.