

Speech to VTA/County BPAC given just before slide presentation, 10/10/07
by Akos Szoboszlay, President, Modern Transit Society

As a result of this committee's vote, my presentation was placed on the agenda last May. Unfortunately, someone changed it from an action item to a discussion item. So I asked staff to postpone it to the next meeting. Due to other delays, that was supposed to be today. Unfortunately, it again was labeled as a discussion item, and the agenda title was changed.

Then, the description was changed to "history of pedestrian accommodation along expressway." I am not here to give a history. There is no time for that here. I led the effort to repeal both bicycle and pedestrian prohibitions since 1987. For history, please see our web page:

moderntransit.org/expressway

The bottom has a history with links to more history.

The description states "the remaining issues". The only remaining issue is non-compliance with existing policy and law by the County Roads Department. Compliance would automatically solve safety issues, such as forcing people to walk in the traffic when adding more lanes.

My handouts were not included in the agenda packet. It's important to have this information in advance, so Committee members can think about it, and verify anything they like.

So, I am requesting that this be agendized for your December meeting, correcting it to be an action item, and correcting the title. [Update: The Committee asked me to make the presentation then, and referred the matter to a subcommittee which they formed.]

The quotes in my handout directly contradict a memo that County Roads sent to the County Board of Supervisors in June of this year. The memo tries to obtain support for prohibiting pedestrians from expressways. I emailed Committee members a link to that memo, and to a link to our rebuttal. For new members, the links are at:

moderntransit.org/expressway

In November 2005, County Roads requested this Committee to support changing the Expressway Master Plan of 2003, which supports pedestrians on virtually the entire expressway system. County Roads tried to oppose pedestrians on most expressway miles, by banning shoulder use and banning pedestrian path use. This Committee rejected that by a unanimous vote.

At that meeting, County Roads quoted a paragraph from 1991 policy that you see in the old typewriter handout. This one paragraph, which opposes shoulder use, was superceded by the 2003 policy, the Expressway Master Plan, that supports shoulder use, stating

“shoulders can serve for occasional pedestrian use.” County Roads had quoted obsolete policy to this Committee.

County Roads has also quoted out of context, including this same Capitalized paragraph. Quoting that paragraph by itself is out of context because the exact same agenda item from 1991 also ordered County Roads to create pedestrian paths along the *entire* expressway system. The staff report for that it would be completed in “several years.” Compliance would have made the issue moot, because where a path exists, no pedestrian walks on a shoulder. County Roads never complied with the order. Yet, when County road opposed pedestrians to this Committee in 2005, and also to the City Council of Santa Clara last year, this paragraph was quoted, despite it being both obsolete and out of context.

Statements in this capitolized paragraph were also used just a few months earlier, in 1991, to fight against allowing bicyclists to use Lawrence and San Tomas Expressways, statements such as:

- Close proximity to *high speed* traffic,
- Bicyclists of *all* ages [children on the expressway],
- Without *any* type of separation,
- Lead to *serious* accidents, and
- Significant exposure to *liability* claims.

All the while County Roads and City traffic staff ignored that North First Street here had and has exactly the same speed limit as San Tomas, but no bike lane at the time, and Montague Expressway here, has always allowed both pedestrians and bicyclists on shoulders. They also ignored that vast majority of accident risk comes from intersections, driveways, and parked cars, and that their prohibitions force unnecessary detours that force *many* more intersection crossings.

The page of photos is from County Roads request last year for funding to create sidewalks. Almost all was to pave over existing paths.

Less than 100 miles of paths are needed from the 62 miles expressway system, because some paths already exist. For the cost of 1 mile of paved sidewalk, you would obtain about 300 miles of paths, using figures from 1991. That’s what the Request is all about, to complete paths first.

In conclusion, be careful of obsolete policy quotes, out of context quotes, and scare tactics. Would you re-agendize this as an action item, correcting the title, and containing the Request as stated, for the December meeting? [Update: The Committee asked me to make the presentation then, and referred the matter to a subcommittee which they formed.]