

Weekend Traffic – Questions & Answers

What Is the Issue?

Q: What is the problem?

A: The volume of traffic going over Highway 17 exceeds the capacity of the roadway. Traffic congestion on Highway 17, and other roadways, has historically been an issue for the Town during peak commute periods and during the summer months (“Beach Traffic”). However, population is increasing in the South Bay and surrounding areas and the corresponding increase in vehicular use have exacerbated these historic traffic patterns to the frustrating levels we face today.

Q: Why doesn’t traffic stay on the freeway?

A: In addition to the increases in vehicular use, the creation and mass adoption of mapping applications is directing vehicles to local streets never intended for highway/arterial overflow traffic. To avoid the congestion on the freeway, the mapping applications suggest using local roadways which creates the local congestion. The congestion compounds as the bigger local streets get congested and the mapping applications then further direct drivers to smaller and smaller streets.

Q: Does the Town understand that the traffic impacts the quality of life for local residents?

A: Yes. Town staff fully appreciates, and experiences alongside our community, the challenge of beach and other traffic. Town staff is a collaboration of public sector professionals with deep knowledge of the community who strive to alleviate problems in Town as they arise. As residents provide their concerns and insights, staff evaluates each concern carefully to determine if suggestions are legal, feasible, and do not create unintended consequences elsewhere. Too often, what seems like a viable suggestion simply makes the situation worse somewhere else in Los Gatos.

What Is the Town Doing?

Q: What is the Town doing?

A: The Town has implemented a temporary pilot closure of South Santa Cruz Avenue at Wood Road which effectively eliminates access to the South Santa Cruz Avenue onramp to Highway 17. The temporary closure is 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. on Saturday, Sunday, and holidays through Labor Day. The Town coordinated the closure with the most popular mapping applications to ensure its display to motorists. This has provided some relief in the downtown business district and some residential areas.

Q: Why did the Town chose this option?

A: The temporary closure enables the Town to continue to collect traffic data. This information will be used in the evaluation of a potential permanent traffic circle at Wood Road.

Q: Why can't the Town just ask the mapping applications to not show cut through routes?

A: The Town, similar to many jurisdictions, has asked for this consideration and in some instances has received it. Each mapping application has its own mapping model and algorithm, but the business model for each firm is in gaining customers by providing information on travel routes. If one application did not do it, another may attempt to in order to gain a competitive advantage.

Q: What are the mapping applications that show cut through routes?

A: The major applications are Waze, Google Maps, Tom Tom, Inrix, and Apple Maps.

Q: Can the Town limit traffic to local traffic only?

A: "Local Traffic Only" signage is advisory only and not enforceable by the Los Gatos Monte Sereno Police Department. The Town is researching whether mapping applications will honor advisory signage in their mapping systems. This will likely also create impacts elsewhere as mapping applications direct drivers to different residential streets.

Q: Can the Police Department increase enforcement of traffic laws?

A: The Police Officers that are on duty have specific responsibilities, some of which include enforcing traffic. At times, heavy calls for service impact the ability of Officers to provide traffic enforcement. Much of the time not spent on specific calls for service is committed to traffic enforcement.

Q: What if I see another driver violating the rules of the road?

A: If residents witness what appears to be a vehicle code violation that is not witnessed by a sworn Officer, we encourage our residents to contact Police Dispatch at 408-354-8600 and report the experience. Contacting Dispatch could result in a nearby Officer being deployed to the scene to suppress further poor driver behavior. In addition, it will trigger an incident report which helps build awareness and consideration of future focused traffic enforcement, such as deployment of speed awareness trailers or motor officers.

Q: What can be done in the rest of Town north of Highway 9?

A: The Town continues to evaluate ways to alleviate traffic impacts north of Highway 9. The review of the temporary closure will take into account residual impacts throughout the rest of the Town.

What are the Other Ideas that the Town has Received?

Q: Can the Town close the onramp at Highway 9 or the off-ramp at Lark Ave?

A: No. The Town does not have the authority to close freeway or highway ramps or road segments. Those are under the purview of Caltrans. The Town has asked about the potential for those closures in the past and Caltrans has said they will not consider it.

Q: If the Town could do so, would closing the Highway 17 off-ramp at Lark Ave help?

A: Much of the cut through traffic is entering the Town from smaller streets and not from these freeway exits. This creates a challenge as each time traffic is impacted on those streets, the mapping programs derive an alternate route. Analysis of the traffic patterns in Town demonstrate this as traffic builds. Specifically, as one area gets impacted, the mapping programs incorporate a new route. In the early part of the traffic buildup, this results in some relief on the road that was first impacted. As volumes build, this changes, and ultimately all routes become impacted.

Q: Can the Town close roads and allow only residents access?

A: No. California Vehicle Code Section 21101.6 prohibits this approach.

Q: Can the Town close roads for safety reasons?

A: The Police Chief can close roads for safety only in the most extreme circumstances. Where passage on a roadway is possible, including the use of oncoming travel lanes for emergency vehicles, the roadway may still be safe. Our public safety Officers have deep knowledge of the Town and are constantly adjusting their response deployment models to adapt to any changes in their operational environment.

Q: Why doesn't the Town close more roads?

A: As previously stated road closures can only occur under extreme circumstances. In addition to the need for an evaluation on safety, closing one road most often creates unintended consequences on other adjacent or nearby roads as drivers and the applications guiding them seek alternatives.

Q: Can the Town charge tolls on local roads?

A: No. The State regulates the charging of tolls and tolls are not allowed on local streets and roads.

Can Anything Be Done In The Future?

Q: Wouldn't widening Highway 17 solve the problem?

A: Caltrans looked at widening Highway 17 and determined that the Highway would need to be widened from Lark Avenue to close to Summit Road, which would be hugely expensive. There are no

funds available nor project planned to accomplish this. In addition, the Town's General Plan identifies the widening of Highway 17 as something the Town does not want.

Q: What can the residents do?

A: Residents may wish to consider adjusting vehicular transportation through Town earlier in the morning or later in the evening on weekends. On mild summer days, walking and biking may be a way to enjoy the beautiful trails and bike paths in Town and to accomplish errands, dine in Town, shop, or meet with friends and family.

The Town Council will be discussing summer cut-through traffic at its upcoming Council meeting on September 5th. The item includes a discussion of current traffic alleviation measures and potential future mitigation strategies for the Town Council's consideration. We encourage you to attend the September 5th Council meeting. You are welcome to provide comments at the meeting or by submitting written comments to ppw@losgatosca.gov no later than 11:00 a.m. the day of the Council meeting.
