

Street safety kicks up on East Market

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(Photo: Provided)

On Thursday morning many students were crossing East Market Street where it intersects with Towt Street in Salinas. They were on their way to one of three schools – Fremont Elementary, El Sausal Middle or Alisal High. There to help them cross the busy street in front of Fremont was crossing guard Sara Villanueva.

As she stepped into the street to escort her young charges, Villanueva said, “The drivers are supposed to stop back at the yield sign (50 feet before the crosswalk). They are not supposed to stop right at the crosswalk.”

Villanueva says some people stop at the yield sign, but others do not.

"When I try to tell them, sometimes they get angry and curse at me."

This month the city will begin a project to reduce the number of traffic lanes from four to three (one lane each way with a turn lane in the middle) on East Market Street between Eucalyptus Drive and Midway Avenue. The new design will have a five-foot-wide bicycle lane with a 2½-foot buffer zone, according to James Serrano, Salinas public works director.

New traffic signals

"Traffic signals will replace the four-way stop signs at two intersections: Towt and East Market, and Eucalyptus and East Market," said Serrano. "The stop lights and fewer lanes are intended to slow the vehicle traffic."

Teresa Castro is a Fremont School child supervisor. Her job in the morning is to keep the drop-off area in front of the school safe.

"The traffic goes too fast," Castro said. "Slower would be better."

The changes to East Market are funded in part by the Via Salinas Valley project, a grant received by the Monterey County Health Department and the Transportation Agency for Monterey County (TAMC). The grant is for improving safety for bicycling or walking to school in Salinas and south Monterey County. Under the California Active Transportation program, the purpose of such a project is to make it safer for children to walk or bicycle to school while also improving fitness and health.

The Salinas city general plan, written in 2002, set the goal of increasing bicycle and pedestrian safety. This is consistent with the nationwide Complete Street movement.

A complete street is for everyone, not just cars and trucks.

Complete streets

On Nov. 15, I attended the first national conference of the Complete Streets Coalition, held in Sacramento. Many cities have adopted Complete Streets policies, but having a policy and implementing that policy is a big step. The conference was organized by Smart Growth America, (see smartgrowthamerica.org) and it featured consultants, engineers, public officials and activists sharing their experiences in making streets safe for pedestrians, bicyclists, bus riders as well as motor vehicle drivers.

What I learned is that it takes a lot of different participants to make streets safer for everyone. Interagency cooperation, public support and a transparent public process are all essential to success.

Cancellations hurt: It is unfortunate that the Salinas Traffic and Transportation Commission (which usually meets on the second Thursday of the month) will not meet in December for the second month in a row. The commission is meant to be a link between Salinas City Council members, city staff and the people of Salinas. Canceling public meetings does not provide a transparent public process for city traffic policies.

For example, the Monterey County Health Department was just awarded a \$192,521 grant from the state Office of Traffic Safety to reduce pedestrian deaths in Salinas. The Salinas Police Department has received an OTS grant of \$105,000 to reduce vehicle crashes.

Learning about these grants and planning how the city can participate could have filled a Traffic Commission meeting agenda. Let me know what you think.

Board meets: The Transportation Agency for Monterey County (TAMC) Board of Directors will meet at 9 a.m., Wednesday, Dec. 6 at 1428 Abbott St., Salinas. Online: See the agenda at www.tamcmonterey.org/

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