

Commission reviews top Salinas intersections needing signals

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(Photo: Provided)

At the June 8 Salinas Traffic and Transportation Commission meeting, the Commissioners considered which intersections in Salinas should be on the top of the list to have a traffic signal installed. This is the first time the intersection signal priority list has been reviewed since 2008, due to the economic downturn.

“A traffic signal is not intended to slow down traffic,” said City Traffic Planner James Serrano, “but to indicate who should yield the right of way. A signal is needed when it is hard to tell whose turn it is.”

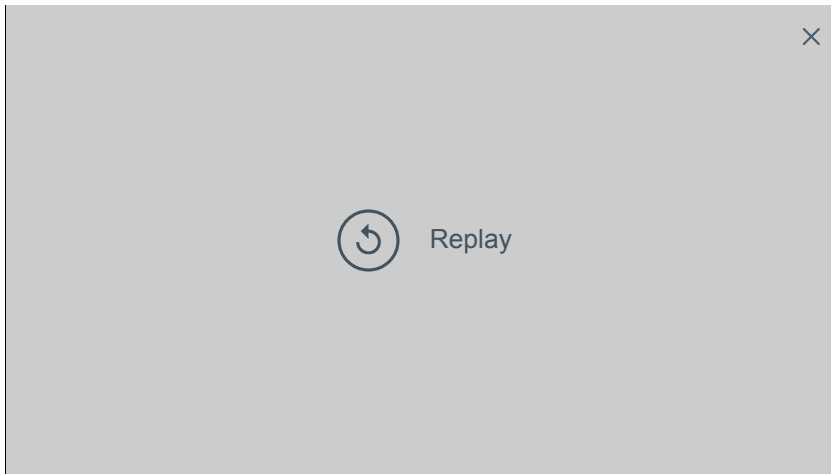
Williams and Garner, Boronda and North Sanborn and Alvin and Linwood were the top three intersections.

Other intersection traffic signals, such as three on North Main, are already funded and do not need city council approval. The North Main signal lights are part of the Harden Ranch Shopping Center expansion and the developers will pay for the new signals, which cost a cool \$400,000 each.

Several other intersection signal lights are part of state grants to improve safety near schools in Salinas, such as East Market Street near El Sausal Middle School and Fremont Elementary School. The Traffic Commission only needs to review, and approve, the ones the city will fund. The city budget only allows one traffic signal every two years, according to Serrano. “...one year to design it and one year for construction.”

The Williams Road and Garner Avenue intersection was supposed to have a traffic signal years ago, said Mary Ann Worden, a former traffic commissioner. “The money was taken, with our {Traffic Commission’s} approval, to finish Laurel, but it was supposed to be paid back. It never was.”

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The Salinas City traffic engineers determine which intersections should receive a traffic signal with a point system that includes the number of collisions, traffic flow and other, sometimes subtle, factors. A new a traffic signal might cause impatient drivers to take shortcuts through residential neighborhoods, thus creating new problems. If two traffic signals are close together, it can impede the flow of traffic and increase rear end collisions.

The Boronda and North Sanborn intersection needs a signal, Serrano said, “ because it is confusing to tell which direction has the right of way.”

During the Commission's discussion of the problems at the designated intersections, the issue of lack of police traffic enforcement was a constant theme. “ The {Salinas Police} traffic unit is zero” said Commissioner Brandon Hill a retired SPD traffic officer “It should be five. We need to tell the city council to fund the traffic unit.”

Worden commented that the statistics that report how many collisions occur at each intersection are not accurate, because “fender-bender”, accidents are not reported at all.

Hill agreed, saying “The police no longer respond to non-injury accidents, so we do not have the numbers.”

"We need to build 21st Century intersections," said former Traffic Commissioner Eric Petersen, "We should put a roundabout at Alvin and Linwood, the 94% drop in deaths is reason enough" Since the City of Salinas is short of police officers to enforce our speed laws, roundabouts would provide enforcement through geometry and the laws of physics.

The motorcycle driver who ran a red light at 90 mph on North Main last fall, killing 17-year-old pedestrian Gabriela Beas, could not have reached that speed on a circular roundabout.

I was impressed by the hard work the Traffic and Transportation Commissioners put into considering all the contributing factors to provide safe traffic environment in Salinas. You can watch the Traffic Commission meetings on the Salinaschannel on YouTube.

Women in Transportation Award to TAMC

Transportation Agency for Monterey County received the Transportation Employer of the Year from the Women in Transportation Seminar last week in Oakland. The honor was given to recognize the number of women in executive and leadership positions.

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