

Ventura County Grand Jury 2012 - 2013



Final Report

Victoria Avenue Corridor Through the City of Ventura

May 9, 2013

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Victoria Avenue Corridor through the City of Ventura

Summary

The 2012-2013 Ventura County Grand Jury (Grand Jury) received numerous complaints about traffic problems on and around Victoria Avenue (Victoria) in the City of Ventura (Ventura). The Grand Jury chose to investigate the challenges and possible solutions to the ongoing traffic problems.

The Ventura County (County) freeway system was designed and constructed approximately fifty years ago. The planners did not provide a transition from the westbound Highway (Hwy) 126 freeway to the southbound Hwy 101 freeway. As the population grew so did the number of vehicles, thereby, making this oversight more significant. The three mile length of Victoria in Ventura is one of the most heavily traveled streets in the city. At peak travel periods, the problems appear to be congestion and chaos, especially during rush hours.

The Grand Jury recommends a constant, unchanging speed limit in conjunction with synchronized traffic signals along the entire four lane section of the Corridor. Also, increased time for the yellow turn arrows and delayed green lights would help the confusion at the Corridor traffic signals. Further the Grand Jury recommends that traffic planners initiate the process to complete the connection from westbound Hwy 126 to the southbound Hwy 101. If these recommendations are not implemented, red light cameras along the Corridor should be removed.

Background

The Victoria Avenue Corridor (Corridor) through Ventura has a wealth of traffic issues that pose a problem to current traffic planners and users. Congestion, accidents, near-accidents, traffic citations and misuse of side streets adjacent to Victoria can be directly linked to the state planners' errors of the 1950's and 1960's.

When the freeway system was in the planning stage, state planners, for unknown reasons, failed to provide a connector from the westbound Hwy 126 to the southbound Hwy 101. This may have been an economic move to save the cost of a connector or a political decision to encourage business for the fledgling shops and businesses along Victoria, but most likely it was caused by the early plan that the entire Oxnard Plain would be crisscrossed with freeways. Those interconnections were never completed.

Victoria is the main traffic corridor from Oxnard beaches to the Ventura hills. Victoria connects Channel Islands Harbor, Oxnard Airport and Port Hueneme to the commercial corridor in Ventura. The Government Center at Victoria and Telephone Road, Ventura College and residential areas are also along this route. In addition, Victoria is the main connector of Hwy 101 and Hwy 126.

As traffic increased, due to the increase in population and the explosion in the use of privately owned vehicles, so did traffic congestion and traffic problems. These include:

- extremely heavy traffic along Victoria during critical travel periods
- varying speed limits along Victoria
- use of red light cameras at critical and confusing intersections
- heavy and speeding traffic on the side streets adjacent to Victoria
- heavy traffic on the Kimball Ave/Johnson Drive corridor
- heavy traffic on the Wells Road/Los Angeles Avenue/Hwy 118 corridor during rush hours

The Grand Jury found that drivers are often confused by the varying speed limits, traffic changing lanes and unusual traffic light timing. Also confusing are the left turn yellow lights along the approximately three mile stretch of Victoria between the south city limits and Foothill Road. The left turn yellow lights at major intersections are approximately one to two seconds less than the straight-ahead yellow lights. Also, from south to north, speed limits change from 55 MPH to 50 MPH to 35 MPH to 40 MPH to 45 MPH to 40 MPH.

The Grand Jury found that red light camera tickets issued along the Corridor may be questioned as to their validity due to driver confusion. While the red light camera tickets appear to be legal, they may not be ethically or morally justified.

The intersection at Victoria and Telephone Road appears to be the major intersection on this route that highlights the traffic flow problems along the Corridor. The Grand Jury found that the left turn lanes at this intersection have created many red light camera tickets. Interviewed drivers stated that quick braking could result in a rear-end collision. The Grand Jury found that other jurisdictions have alleviated this problem by implementing longer yellow lights and delayed green lights. However, California state law limits yellow light duration due to a formula for the actual speeds of the vehicles. Despite the best efforts of Ventura traffic officials, this may be unchangeable. As commerce and traffic increases along this route, traffic problems will continue.

Methodology

The Grand Jury interviewed members of the Ventura Police Department, Ventura Traffic Department, Ventura County Transportation Commission (VCTC) and members of the public. The Grand Jury timed traffic lights and left turn arrows, drove the Corridor at various times of the day and in different traffic conditions. Other routes were also driven. The Grand Jury reviewed applicable state and local

laws. Also reviewed were other pertinent reports, newspaper articles, and available online sources.

Facts

- FA-01.** The lack of a connector from the westbound Hwy 126 to the southbound Hwy 101 causes traffic problems along the Corridor. [Ref-11, 12]
- FA-02.** The Corridor is a major traffic artery through Ventura. [Ref-11, 12]
- FA-03.** Vehicle use in the County has increased significantly in recent years.
- FA-04.** There is very heavy traffic along the Corridor during peak travel periods.
- FA-05.** There is confusion among drivers along the Corridor because of varying speed limits, timing of traffic signals, and frequent lane changing.
- FA-06.** The Grand Jury was told and observed that there is dense traffic, as well as, apparently speeding traffic along side streets paralleling Victoria.
- FA-07.** There is heavy traffic at rush hours on the Kimball Road/Johnson Drive corridor.
- FA-08.** There is very heavy traffic at rush hours along the Wells Road/Los Angeles Avenue/Hwy 118 corridor.
- FA-09.** The traffic engineers are aware of these issues and are attempting remediation. [Ref-08]
- FA-10.** The red light monitored intersections have confusing left turn arrows with different timing than through traffic.
- FA-11.** Drivers have complained that quick braking may result in a rear-end collision when the yellow arrow appears. [Ref-13, 14]
- FA-12.** Other jurisdictions have alleviated this problem by adjusting to longer left turn yellow arrows, longer yellow lights and delayed green lights. [Ref-02, 03, 15]
- FA-13.** The Grand Jury defined, for the purposes of this report, the Corridor as being the approximate three-mile portion of Victoria Avenue from the southern city limits of Ventura to Foothill Road.

Findings

- FI-01.** A constant speed limit along the four lane section of Victoria may decrease driver confusion and increase safety. (FA-05, 09) [Ref-15]
- FI-02.** There is a need now and a growing need in the future for a westbound Hwy 126 to southbound Hwy 101 connector. (FA-01-04, 07-09)
- FI-03.** The left turn yellow lights, having a shorter time than the through-traffic yellow lights, have created confusion among drivers. There is decreased safety due to the increased risk of rear-end collisions at the major intersections along Victoria. (FA-05-06, 09-12)

FI-04. Red light camera tickets appear to be legal, however, they may not be ethically or morally justified. (FA-05-06, 09-12)

Recommendations

- R-01.** The Grand Jury recommends that Ventura traffic engineers should consider a constant, unchanging speed limit, in conjunction with synchronized signals, along the entire four lane section of the Corridor through Ventura. (FI-01) [Ref-15]
- R-02.** The Grand Jury recommends that traffic planners initiate the process to complete the connection from the westbound Hwy 126 to the southbound Hwy 101. (FI-02)
- R-03.** The Grand Jury recommends that yellow left turn arrows be increased in time and that delayed green lights be adjusted at Corridor traffic signals. (FI-03)
- R-04.** If recommendations 01, 02, 03 are not implemented, the Grand Jury recommends the removal of the red light cameras along the Corridor. (FI-04)

Responses

Responses Required From:

City Council, City of Ventura (FI-01, FI-02, FI-03, FI-04) (R-01, R-02, R-03, R-04)

Chief of Police, City of Ventura
(FI-01, FI-02, FI-03, FI-04) (R-01, R-02, R-03, R-04)

City Transportation Manager, City of Ventura
(FI-01, FI-02, FI-03, FI-04) (R-01, R-02, R-03, R-04)

Responses Requested From:

Executive Director, Ventura County Transportation Commission
(FI-01, FI-02, FI-03, FI-04) (R-01, R-02, R-03, R-04)

Commendations

The Ventura County Grand Jury would like to thank and commend the Ventura Police Department, the City of Ventura Traffic Department and the Ventura County Transportation Commission for their cooperation, information and insight into this issue. They were helpful in assisting the Grand Jury to understand the problems and the challenges of these traffic issues.

References

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- Ref-03.** Fire Redflex, The Dark Side of Photo Enforcement; "Ethics and Fraud". Fire Redflex.com, <http://fireredflex.com/cameras.html> (accessed August 02, 2012).
- Ref-04.** theNewspaper.com; "California: Class Action Lawsuit Hits Federal Court", October 25, 2010, <http://thenewspaper.com/news/26/2655.asp> (accessed August 2, 2012).
- Ref-05.** theNewspaper.com; "California City Owes Red Light Camera Company \$1.7 Million" "Questionable contract arrangement allows Ventura, California to escape \$1.7 million payment to red light camera company", January 13, 2009, <http://thenewspaper.com/news/26/2655> (accessed August 2, 2012).
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- Ref-09.** Gibbs, Douglas V. "California's War Over Red-Light Cameras", Canada Free Press. July 23, 2012. <http://www.canadafreepress.com/index.php/article/48252>. (accessed February 2, 2013).
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- Ref-11.** Freedman, Tung & Bottomley (FTB), "Victoria Avenue Corridor Plan" 2005.
- Ref-12.** City of Ventura, Community Development: "Victoria Avenue Corridor Plan & Development Code", April 20, 2009.

- Ref-13.** Von Quednow, Cindy. "To cities, camera rules are fine" Ventura County Star. January 22, 2013.
- Ref-14.** California Legislative Information "SB-29 Vehicles: automated traffic enforcement systems. (2011-2012)", December 06, 2010.
- Ref-15.** Subbaraman, Nidhi. "Los Angeles syncs all traffic lights to speed up commute", Future Tech. NBC News.com, April 2, 2013.

Glossary

TERM

DEFINITION

Connector	A highway or freeway which connects to another highway or freeway
Corridor	Victoria Avenue Corridor through the City of Ventura from the southern City limits to Foothill Road
County	Ventura County
Grand Jury	2012-2013 Ventura County Grand Jury
Hwy	Highway
Hwy 101	Highway 101 through Ventura County
Hwy 126	Highway 126 in Ventura County
MPH	Miles Per Hour
VCTC	Ventura County Transportation Commission
Ventura	City of Ventura
Victoria	Victoria Avenue
Victoria Corridor	The approximately three miles of Victoria Avenue through the City of Ventura from the southern City limits to Foothill Road