



Councilmember Lori Droste  
District 8

CONSENT CALENDAR  
May 16, 2017

To: Honorable Mayor and Members of the City Council  
From: Councilmembers Lori Droste, Susan Wengraf, and Ben Bartlett  
Subject: Prioritizing Pedestrians at Intersections

### RECOMMENDATION

Refer to the City Manager and the Transportation Commission the development of policies to improve the pedestrian crossing experience and reduce pedestrian wait times at intersections with “beg buttons,” potentially by activating pedestrian crossing signaling with every cycle (as opposed to the current situation, which only activates crossing signals when a button is pushed). Consider the development of a pedestrian-driven intersection improvement process to address signaling and timing inadequacies.

### BACKGROUND

Historically, pedestrians were the primary user of streets, and received right-of-way priority. However, as vehicular traffic grew and the danger that automobile drivers posed to unprotected humans increased, automobile lobbyists campaigned to segregate public right-of-way and prioritize vehicle users over pedestrians.

Today, this legacy of auto-centric street planning remains embodied in a number of policy decisions around public infrastructure, including the notorious pedestrian “beg button.” Serving different functions in different situations, beg buttons sometimes trigger a traffic signal change to facilitate pedestrian crossing, activate a pedestrian signal at the next signal change (and ensure a signal duration sufficient for pedestrian crossing), or simply have no apparent function.

While these functions are ordinarily commendable, they reflect a street hierarchy of uses that places automobiles as the premier use of public right-of-way, which is incompatible with Berkeley’s environmental and civic values. Intersections which rely upon pedestrian beg buttons diminish the pedestrian experience, disadvantage people with disabilities, and discourage sustainable transportation.

The Transportation Commission and City Manager should review the City’s existing policies around pedestrian beg buttons and develop proposals to prioritize walking as a mode of transportation and use of public streetscape.

ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY

Improves environmental sustainability by supporting active, sustainable transportation and facilitating the substitution of walking for driving, in line with the Berkeley Climate Action Plan's Goal #1, which sets the goal of reducing vehicle miles traveled by making cycling, walking, public transit, and other sustainable modes mainstream.

Some environmental benefits may potentially be reduced due to slight increases in greenhouse gas emissions from increased vehicle idling time at intersections.

FISCAL IMPLICATIONS

Staff time

CONTACT

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