

Case Analysis

Casa Grande Pedestrian Safety on Florence Blvd. Near I-10

Situation:

Casa Grande has a traffic situation that is hazardous to pedestrians crossing Florence Blvd. between Camino Mercado and Henness Road.

The City recently acquired responsibility for State Highway 287 as it passes through the city as Florence Blvd. Previously, the Arizona Dept. of Highways had been responsible for that road and had classified it as a rural highway. Part of that thoroughfare is very hazardous, as evidenced by the four pedestrian deaths from vehicle impacts that have occurred in the past several years.

Casa Grande inherited much of the problem but is now responsible for insuring a safe environment for residents and visitors.

Recommendation:

The Casa Grande Planning and Zoning Commission should consider and pass a Resolution to:

1. Recommend to Mayor Jackson and the City Council, and to the Director of Public Works, that the

City develop and implement a plan for building an appropriate pedestrian crossing and other pedestrian guidance measures at the intersection of Florence Blvd. and Cacheris Court as soon as possible.

2. Advise the Director of Planning and Development that the Planning and Zoning Commission discourages approval of new developments in that area that are likely to contribute to the danger to pedestrians of the traffic in that area until corrective measures are implemented.

Rationale:

There is the clear problem of a hazard to pedestrians. Some of the origins of the problem lie in the rapid growth of the area. Some lie with the previous division of responsibility between the City and the State. Corrections to the problem have been difficult to implement because of the budget woes of the two governments. It is a planning issue because the problem has its origin in past planning decisions.

The recent fatal accident is a reminder that the hazard is real. Increasing traffic is making the problem more urgent. The division of responsibility issue has been settled. More affordable pedestrian

safety systems have become accepted in the market. Casa Grande has the tools and the opportunity now, if priorities are adjusted.

Background, Factor Analysis:

1. History. During the time that the State managed the highway and the City managed the development of the properties adjacent to the highway, there does not seem to have been a coordinated planning process. Highway traffic, and commercial and residential development were apparently allowed to happen on their own. The limited amount of development activity over most of that time did not call for elaborate measures.

2. Growth. In the past decade or so however, there has been significant and rapid local development oriented to travelers as well as local residents in the area of Florence Blvd west of I-10 and east of Henness Road. For whatever reason, the unplanned result has been development of hotels on the south side of Florence Blvd., and travel amenities such as restaurants, convenience stores, a large health club, a

bank, and other commercial establishments on the north side of the road. This means people staying in the several hundred hotel rooms on the south side have reason to cross the road to buy groceries, snacks, meals, drinks, etc., or even to go work out, especially in the evening.

3. Traffic. Truck and auto traffic on Florence Blvd has increased dramatically during this period. The population of Casa Grande has increased significantly and the city has expanded to the east across I-10. Developments to the east of I-10 include the Promenade Mall, Sam's Club, the strip mall, growth at Central Arizona College (CAC) and housing subdivisions, all of which increase traffic along Florence. Developments such as Phoenix Mart will soon contribute more traffic growth. The speed limit on that section of roadway has not changed in years.

4. Pedestrian Safety. There are no designated opportunities for pedestrians to cross Florence for approximately three quarters of a mile between Camino Mercado and Henness Road. There are no crosswalks. There are no barriers between the sidewalk and the traffic lanes. There are no center medians. Night

time lighting is minimal. Crossing the highway on foot, especially at night, is a hazardous venture. It is a wide road and traffic moves at close to highway speeds. Yet, a walk from the Siegel Suites Hotel to Little Caesars Pizza, via the nearest traffic signal, and return, is approximately a mile. It seems unlikely that most people will consider taking that long a walk when the alternative is to cross the street where there are no barriers.

5. Results. Four pedestrians have been killed by vehicles in the time this situation has existed. One young boy will grow up without a Mom because of the accident last December.

6. Accidents Have Consequences. Having a pedestrian killed by accident on the city streets is horrible. A unique life has been lost forever, and cannot gotten back or made up for. But the impact does not stop there. The victim almost certainly had family - wives, husbands, children, parents - and friends, co-workers and others who depended on him or her in some fashion. He or she will be missed and others lives will be less rich. The person driving the vehicle that struck the pedestrian will have his or her

life changed too. They will wonder if they should have gone more slowly; if they should have been watching more closely; if they should not have looked at their phone, or adjusted the radio, or checked GPS at just that moment; most will wonder and worry about the life that was lost. It could happen to any one of us.

7. The Community Cares. An editorial in the Casa Grande Dispatch of January 8, 2016 listed the "Top Read Stories of December", according to their analytics. The headline of the top story on the list was, "Woman struck crossing Casa Grande street with young son dies." Shortly after that a woman attempted to address a City Council meeting on the subject, but was ruled out of order because the agenda item for Public Comment has been closed earlier in the meeting.

8. Adjusting Priorities. Casa Grande is a community that was hit hard by the economic downturn. Our political leaders have done a very good job of getting us through the tough times and keeping our credit rating intact. The professional management and the rest of the City staff have supported the leadership, no doubt giving up many expenditures that would otherwise have been good for the Community.

They are no doubt now faced with many more legitimate needs than resources to fill them. Somehow this traffic situation needs to be made urgent enough to get to the top of the list, before another pedestrian is injured or killed.

9. Options. Traffic systems are expensive. Our Traffic Engineer has previously advised us that a full traffic control system costs approximately \$900,000. Other, less expensive options are available however. One such option, for example, is the High-intensity Activated Cross Walk system. Frequently referred to as HAWK signals, these are effective, approved by the Federal Highway Administration, and can be implemented for as little as 10% of the cost of a full traffic signal system. They are used in cities across the country, including Tucson. HAWK signals only impede vehicle traffic when activated by pedestrians, so traffic is minimal. When activated, the system maintains a "Don't Walk" sign until vehicles have been given a sequence of yellow and red lights indicating they should stop. Then the pedestrian is given the signal to walk. In wide road situations, signals can be staged; pedestrians can cross half way to a raised

median, and then activate the system for crossing the other half of the street. Other options are available.

10. We Can Do Something. There are things we as a Commission can do. And there are things that we probably should not do.

- We can pass the proposed Resolution that urges the Mayor and City Council to adjust the priorities of our City to address this situation. We can urge the Director of Public Works to join in expediting corrections for the problem.
- We can also take it on ourselves to decline any further development proposals that make the currently awful situation even worse, until appropriate pedestrian traffic steps are taken.