

COUNCIL CONFERENCE MINUTES

December 14, 2010

The City Council of the City of Norman, Cleveland County, State of Oklahoma, met in a conference at 5:30 p.m. in the Municipal Building Conference Room on the 14th day of December, 2010, and notice and agenda of the meeting were posted at the Municipal Building at 201 West Gray, and the Norman Public Library at 225 North Webster 48 hours prior to the beginning of the meeting.

PRESENT: Councilmembers Atkins, Butler, Cubberley, Dillingham, Griffith, Kovach, Quinn, Mayor Rosenthal

ABSENT: Councilmember Ezzell

DISCUSSION REGARDING ADOPTION OF AN ORDINANCE AMENDING THE REGULATIONS FOR A FLASHING YELLOW ARROW TRAFFIC SIGNAL INDICATION FOR LEFT TURN DISPLAYS.

Mr. Shawn O'Leary, Director of Public Works, said the City Council Transportation Committee reviewed the regulations for a flashing yellow arrow traffic signal for a left turn on October 28, 2010, and directed Staff to present the information to Council in a study session. He said the latest Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices (MUTCD), the national standards of practice utilized throughout the country, recommends that cities begin using flashing yellow arrows for left turns. He said the system to use flashing yellow arrows has been studied for nearly twenty years and was put into use in various cities around ten years ago. He said there are two traffic signal projects currently under construction where the yellow flashing arrow signalization could be installed at no cost to the City since they are federally funded. He said if Council approves the changes, the City of Norman would be the first city in Oklahoma to implement the national standard change.

Mr. David Riesland, Assistant Traffic Engineer, highlighted the current standards in Norman as follows:

- Permissive only phasing – traffic is permitted to turn only on a green ball – there are no left turn arrows provided
- Protected only phasing – traffic is allowed to turn only when a green arrow is visible – there are no left turns allowed on the green ball
- Protected/Permissive phasing – traffic turning left will be both a green arrow and a green ball at some time during the signal cycle

Mr. Riesland said permissive only phasing is the most common form of left turn treatment and is used in locations where volumes and operating speeds are low. Protected only phasing is used most often at locations that have a higher speed, higher volumes of traffic or where sight distance limitations may create vision problems for left turning vehicles. Protected/Permissive phasing (PPLT) is used when speeds are low enough and when additional capacity is needed to clear the left turn traffic volumes. He said in the protected phase, left turning traffic is protected from oncoming traffic in the protected interval during which the green arrow indication is displayed and the permissive phase displays a circular green indication and left turn movements are made after drivers yield to oncoming traffic and pedestrians. Mr. Riesland said advantages to PPLT phasing advantages are better mobility, improved traffic capacity, and less traffic delay while disadvantages include higher traffic collision rates, reduced signal phasing flexibility, and the yellow trap.

Mr. Riesland said, according to the National Cooperative Highway Research Program (NCHRP) Report findings, flashing yellow arrows (FYA) were found to be the best overall alternative to the circular green light as the permissive signal display for a left turn movement. The FYA was found to have a high level of understanding and correct response by left turn drivers and a lower fail critical rate than the circular green light. The FYA display, in a separate signal face for left turn movement, offers more versatility in field application as it is capable of being operated in any of the various modes of left turn operation by time of day and easily programmed to avoid the "yellow trap" associated with some permissive turns at the end of the circular green display.

Mr. Riesland said Norman currently has 77 signalized intersections utilizing a five section signal head for left and/or right turns and 30 of those 77 intersections are controlled with a controller that is capable of displaying a FYA. He said these controllers can be converted to the FYA display at high traffic collision intersections and corridor treatments for consistency. Future controller orders would target those intersections with incompatible controllers and five section left turn signal heads and future traffic signal projects would include FYA displays.

Mr. Riesland said a standard five section traffic signal head costs \$685 and it would cost approximately \$545 to upgrade a single four head traffic signal and up to \$2,180 to install a new signal head. He said the City has a regular Controller Replacement Program to replace obsolete equipment and Staff would target those intersections with incompatible controllers and five section left turn signal heads or shift some five section heads to other intersections to allow more conversions to save money.

Mr. Riesland said the City Council would need to approve an amendment to Section 20-1106, Traffic Control Signals: Flashing Lights and Staff would be educating the public by placing information in utility bills, news releases, and installing special signs next to the signal heads. He presented a draft ordinance, an example of the informational brochure, and a picture of the FYA sign currently used in Fort Smith, Arkansas.

Councilmember Atkins asked how the large non-resident population, such as university students, would be educated and Mr. O'Leary said Staff would need to work with the university to get educational materials to students. Councilmember Atkins asked if there have been any discussions with the Department of Public Safety (DPS) about adding this information into the driver's license manual and Mr. Riesland said the subject had been raised in a meeting with the Oklahoma Department of Transportation (ODOT) as something that needs to be pursued.

Councilmember Dillingham asked what the timetable was for the first implementation and Mr. O'Leary said the first opportunity to implement the signal would be at 36th Avenue N.W. and Rock Creek Road in late January or early February of 2011 and 24th Avenue N.W. and Rock Creek Road could be installed in June.

Councilmember Kovach said in addition to having benefits in reducing accidents, he felt it would be cost saving to implement the program with current construction projects before the federal government requires it and asked if that was why Staff was pushing the ordinance forward and Mr. O'Leary said yes. He said Staff is also considering submitting the concept as a safety project for ACOG funding in 2011 to upgrade all the traffic signals. Councilmember Quinn said the before and after statistics adds to the potential good of the FYA from a safety standpoint. Councilmember Dillingham asked if the federal government has ever reversed a regulation they have adopted into the MUTCD and Mr. Riesland said no. Mr. O'Leary said the government is very cautious about changing traffic standards in the MUTCD since it is used nationwide.

Mayor Rosenthal asked if the City had reviewed what it would cost if the City paid for the changes as opposed to using grant funds. She said that information would be helpful when looking at the capital budget to weigh the whole program against other capital projects.

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Councilmember Kovach felt that implementing the three projects discussed, gives the City an opportunity to see how the program would work with the public before upgrading traffic signals throughout Norman. Councilmember Atkins asked if there was any training law enforcement would need in dealing with the changes and Mr. O'Leary said Staff has collaborated closely with the Norman Police Department as well as the County Sheriff's Department.

Mayor Rosenthal asked Staff to move forward with the ordinance in order to implement the program at the three selected intersections. She asked that Staff report to Council the status of the ACOG grants and Council will review the full signal program when they work on the capital budget.

Items submitted for the record

1. Memorandum dated December 8, 2010, from David Riesland, P.E., Assistant Traffic Engineer, to Honorable Mayor and City Councilmembers
2. PowerPoint presentation entitled, "Flashing Yellow Arrow for Left Turn Displays," City Council Conference, December 14, 2010
3. Draft Ordinance
4. Draft legislatively notated ordinance

The meeting adjourned at 6:00 p.m.

ATTEST:

City Clerk

Mayor