

DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

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*Serious drought.
Help save water!*

August 26, 2014

Ms. Lisa Ketcham, Chair
Midcoast Community Council
P.O. Box 248
Moss Beach, CA 94038-0248

Dear Ms. Ketcham:

Thank you for your letter regarding traffic safety issues related to the two-way left-turn lane in front of Sam's Chowder House restaurant on State Route 1 near the northern city limit of the City of Half Moon Bay in San Mateo County.

You may have noticed that the restaurant on the west side of State Route 1, has three driveway openings fronting State Route 1 that are very closely spaced. At times vehicles are blocking the thru traffic in the northbound direction of State Route 1 attempting to enter these driveways. Vehicles making left-turns out of these driveways also face long delay waiting for a gap in both directions of State Route 1.

A search into the accident record for the latest ten-year period from July 1, 2002 to June 30, 2012 revealed only two accidents on State Route 1 within the approximately 500 feet stretch of the two-way left-turn lane fronting the restaurant. One accident involved a pedestrian in the southbound direction being hit by a southbound motorcycle. The other was a rear-end accident in the northbound direction involving a speeding vehicle hitting a vehicle waiting to make a left-turn into the driveway at the restaurant. None of the accidents involved improper turns or making evasive moves.

According to the California Department of Transportation's (Caltrans) Highway Design Manual, a left turn lane requires a minimum storage length of 50 feet plus an appropriate length of bay taper. The speed limit at the vicinity of the restaurant is 50 MPH. Therefore, a 120-foot length of bay taper is considered appropriate. However, due to the approximately 50 feet or less spacing between the driveways, a required minimum 50 feet long left-turn pocket plus a 120-foot bay taper at each of the driveways will not be possible. If a continuous channelizing line is striped through all the driveway openings with a break in the double yellow centerline at each of the three driveways, a vehicle stopping in the left-turn lane at a preceding driveway entrance will block the following left turning vehicles to the successive driveways. In addition, the left turning vehicles exiting the driveways will not be able to make the left turns due to the violation of crossing the exclusive marking for a mandatory turning lane.

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Based on this constraint, the two-way left-turn lane installed in front of Sam's Chowder House is to provide full movement access while minimizing impacts of left turning vehicles on thru traffic. The two-way left-turn lane also allows for a two-stage left turn maneuver for the driveway traffic turning left onto the roadway during peak traffic hours when adequate gaps are infrequent.

The two-way left-turn lane is designated by distinctive roadway markings consisting of parallel double yellow lines in the center of the roadway, with interior line dashed and exterior line solid, on each side of the lane. Although two-way left-turn arrows are optional, it is a standard practice to install the arrows to emphasize that this center lane is not a passing lane or a reversible lane.

The California Vehicle Code states that a vehicle shall not be driven in a designated two-way left-turn lane except when preparing for or making a left turn from, or onto, a highway; or when preparing for, or making a U-turn when otherwise permitted by law. A vehicle shall not be driven in that lane for more than 200 feet while preparing for and making the turn or while preparing to merge into the adjacent lanes of travel. Also, the California Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices specifically states that single-direction left-turn arrows shall not be used in lanes bordered on both sides by two-way left-turn lane markings.

Although there is no development on the east side of State Route 1 across from the entire length of the restaurant, we doubt that the two-way left-turn arrows installed in the area less than 500 feet of two-way left-turn lane fronting the restaurant will invite the southbound vehicles within the visible distance to make the special move into this two-way left-turn lane to make a southbound left turn. Please note that regardless of whether the two-way left-turn arrows are placed within the two-way left-turn lane or not, U-turns from this center lane are legally allowed. However, drivers should not make the U-turns when there is not sufficient room to make such maneuvers. Caltrans has not received any complaints regarding U-turns from the two-way left-turn lane since opening to the public.

We value your interest in enhancing safety and mobility of the Bay Area highways. Please be ensured that we always strive for the safety and mobility of the motoring public. Should you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me at (510) 286-5900, or Mr. Roland Au-Yeung, District Traffic Engineer at (510) 286-4560.

Sincerely,


BIJAN SARTIPI
District Director

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c: Supervisor Don Horsley, San Mateo County
Captain Mike Maskarich, California Highway Patrol
S. Rosen, San Mateo County Project Planner