

UNION VALLEY PARKWAY

Progress with Problems

SUMMARY

The Union Valley Parkway, providing a major new east-west artery for the Santa Maria Valley, is now open to the public. The 2013-14 Santa Barbara County Grand Jury received a complaint concerning impaired visibility at the intersection of Union Valley Parkway and California Boulevard. Due to a setback for the crosswalk and stop sign, motorists traveling northbound on California Boulevard must “creep” into the intersection with the Parkway in order to observe cross traffic. This subjects northbound drivers, particularly those turning left, to the increased risk of an accident. In addition, east and westbound drivers on the Parkway cannot see, nor are they warned of, the approaching intersection, also creating a dangerous condition. The original plans for this intersection specified a four-way stop, which was eliminated during the subsequent planning process. The Jury recommends the installation of a four-way stop and intersection warning signs on Union Valley Parkway.

BACKGROUND

The Union Valley Parkway (UVP) arterial project has been in the planning stages since the 1960’s¹. There have been several public hearings, removal of numerous trees, and a lawsuit culminating in the construction of a sound wall, resulting in the roadway’s current configuration. This project was the joint effort of the City of Santa Maria, Caltrans, the County of Santa Barbara, and the Santa Barbara County Association of Governments. Construction began in 2009 and continued in four phases until its opening in November 2013.

METHODOLOGY

Members of the Jury visited the site, interviewed traffic engineers, reviewed Santa Maria Public Works Department traffic statistics, Santa Maria Police Department incident reports (2009-2014) and Santa Barbara County Association of Government documents. The Jury also reviewed the *California Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices* and the *Caltrans Highway Design Manual*. The City of Santa Maria originally planned to conduct additional traffic studies in late December 2013 but has not yet done so.

¹ Santa Barbara County Association of Governments report, *Measure A 2013 Annual Report*

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OBSERVATIONS AND CONCLUSION

The Jury in its investigation of the intersection of California Boulevard with Union Valley Parkway found there are other problems, such as insufficient left turn lanes, confronting motorists using the Parkway. Motorists traveling north on California Boulevard encounter unsafe conditions at the intersection with UVP (see Figure 1). Due to the setback of the crosswalk and stop sign, motorists must slowly proceed into the intersection to observe cross traffic. To the west (the drivers' left), an eight-foot sound wall, as well as roadside landscaping, and a natural dip of the Parkway, hinders visibility. In addition, vehicles making left turns on to California Boulevard are at risk of a collision. The Jury concluded that the posted Parkway speed limit of 45 miles per hour² might not be appropriate for this intersection, in its current configuration.

The traffic planning professionals employed by the City of Santa Maria and interviewed by the Jury stated that the *California Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices* specifications do not indicate the need for a stop light, stop sign or warning signage at the intersection. However, it is clear to the Jury that there is some discretion allowed when solving a specific traffic issue. The

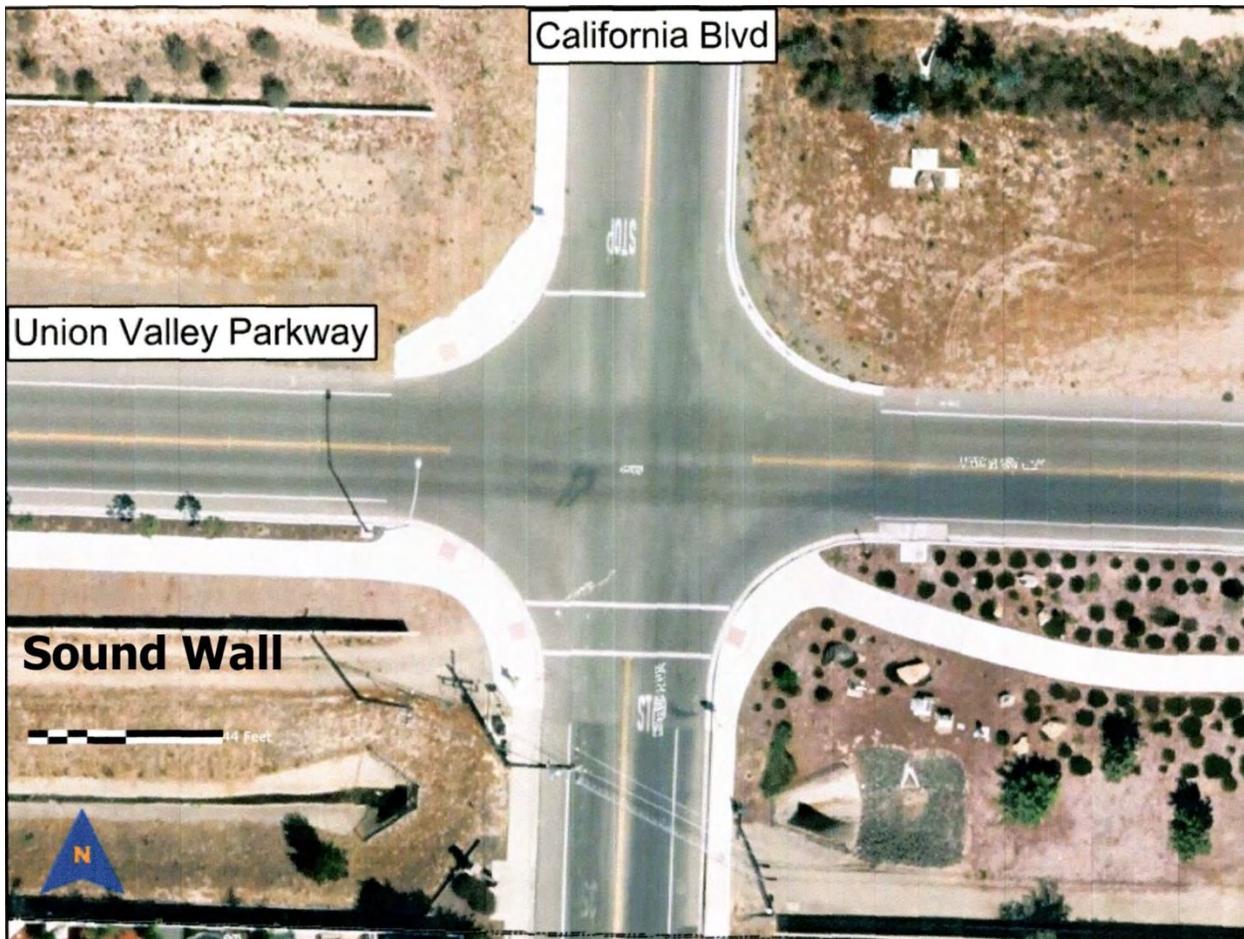


Figure 1- Union Valley Parkway and California Blvd.

² Ordinance No. 2011-01, established the 45 mph speed limit on Union Valley Parkway, March 15, 2011

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Jury believes that the City of Santa Maria has the authority to resolve the traffic issues identified by this report.

The traffic issues at the intersection of Union Valley Parkway and California Boulevard are solvable. The installed signs of “Cross Traffic Does Not Stop” on the stop sign posts at California Boulevard and UVP have warned drivers of a dangerous intersection. The Jury concludes that this is an inadequate solution. An acceptable alternative would be to return to the original design incorporating a four-way stop. Although a four-way stop would impede east-west traffic on UVP, the safety benefits to motorists on California Boulevard, and pedestrians crossing UVP, outweigh this minor inconvenience. In addition, an intersection-warning sign on east and westbound UVP may help alleviate the problem of poor visibility of an upcoming intersection. Without the installation of the appropriate signage, the City of Santa Maria may be missing an opportunity to reduce its substantial risk of liability in the event of an accident at that intersection.

FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Finding 1

Union Valley Parkway at California Boulevard intersection is not a four-way stop.

Finding 2

Drivers on Union Valley Parkway traveling east or west may not be aware, nor are they warned, that there is an upcoming intersection at California Boulevard.

Finding 3

There are “Cross Traffic Does Not Stop” signs on the north and south stop sign posts on California Boulevard as it intersects Union Valley Parkway.

Recommendation 1

Install a four-way stop at the intersection of Union Valley Parkway and California Boulevard.

Recommendation 2

Install appropriate warning signs on east and westbound Union Valley Parkway as it approaches California Boulevard.

Recommendation 3

If Recommendation 1 is accepted, replace the “Cross Traffic Does Not Stop” plaques on the north and south stop signs on California Boulevard as it intersects Union Valley Parkway with “ALL-WAY” (four-way) stop plaques.

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REQUEST FOR RESPONSE

Pursuant to California Penal Code Section 933 and 933.05, the Jury requests each entity or individual named below to respond to the enumerated findings and recommendations within the specified statutory time limit:

City of Santa Maria – 90 days

Findings 1, 2, and 3

Recommendations 1, 2, and 3

Santa Barbara County Board of Supervisors – 90 days

Finding 3

Recommendation 3