



Councilmember David Alvarez
City of San Diego
Eighth District
MEMORANDUM

DATE: January 24, 2013

TO: Mayor Bob Filner

CC: Andrea Tevlin, Independent Budget Analyst
Mark Kersey, Chair, Infrastructure Committee

FROM: Councilmember David Alvarez

SUBJECT: Old Otay Mesa Road – Sidewalk Project #S-00870

Old Otay Mesa Road is a project that includes adding a sidewalk on the road leading to San Ysidro High School. The students at San Ysidro High School have been waiting for several years to have a sidewalk that safely allows them to walk to school. Currently, students who use the path must walk on the road creating unsafe pedestrian conditions.

The school was built in 2002 and at that time the City spoke to the school district about funding the sidewalk; however the school district stated that they did not have the funds available. Currently, \$2.5 million in FBA funds has been allocated to the project; however a \$5 million funding deficit remains. The estimated date of design completion is April 2013. If full funding became available the project would be ready to begin construction in January 2014. For the past two years I have advocated for funding and have made this project one of my top priorities.

It is vital this project is completed as soon as possible. For your information – attached is a recent article appearing in the Voice of San Diego, concerning this project.

Thank you for your attention to this issue.

Typically, developers pay to put in sidewalks as part of their deal with the city. In San Ysidro, sidewalks surround the high school and middle school, both near new homes. The trouble comes along the stretch of road that cuts through hillside and canyon. No one could build homes there.

The city installs sidewalks, too. It will do the job as part of drainage projects, when putting in curb ramps or when the Water Department fixes pipes.

"It's wildly complex depending on the circumstances," said Bill Harris, a spokesman for the Transportation and Storm Water Department.

The city's rules can leave out neighborhoods that developed over time. In Paradise Hills, a southeastern community bordering National City, an intersection with a bus stop, apartment complex, convenience store and car wash has sidewalks leading up to a couple corners, but they end abruptly at another.

Piecemeal sidewalks mark the neighborhood, which the city annexed more than 80 years ago. The community's character has changed from rural to urban, but sidewalks haven't kept pace.

Recently, the city asked neighborhood planning groups to identify the most-needed projects in their communities. Guy Preuss, who heads the Paradise Hills Village Council, tried to fire up his old Intel 386 computer. The city had asked for a similar list in 1995, Preuss said, and hadn't done much with it. He planned to resubmit the same projects.

"I couldn't get the damn thing out," Preuss said. "It was on a floppy disk."

Preuss eventually accessed the list. The village council requested the same 48 new sidewalks it had wanted the first time.

For years, Preuss has seen the city fixing cracked sidewalks in Paradise Hills. He thinks it should take the money and build new ones. He'd rather have a broken sidewalk than none at all.

Less than a tenth of a mile from Kate Sessions Elementary in Pacific Beach, Michael Anderson has a similar problem. He owns a home on Academy Street, which has no sidewalks for a two-block stretch approaching the school.

An island breaks up the road and signs direct pedestrians around to the school. But the route is circuitous and doesn't slow cars barreling down a hill on nearby Beryl Street.

"You're smoking something if you think they're going to stop for you," Anderson said. "Some real funny stuff."

Anderson grew up in the Academy Street house, but his daughter lives there now. If she decides to have a child who will go to the elementary school, Anderson plans to pay to put in a sidewalk himself.



Photo by Sam Hodgson

Alternative routes present problems of their own. Wild dogs roam a second path, students and teachers said.

The solution to all this — a sidewalk — is obvious. The money to pay for it is what's unclear.

The sidewalk will cost \$6.8 million, the city says, a price tag that demonstrates the perilousness of the situation. The road is so narrow that road crews will have to cut into the hillside to make room for a sidewalk. The dirt path by the canyon where students walk today isn't wide enough.

The city hopes to start building the sidewalk next year, but folks in San Ysidro have heard that before. A 5-year-old newspaper column said the project would be finished by 2011. The city still doesn't know where it will find more than half the money it needs to build it.

San Ysidro's missing sidewalk reveals more opacity in the city's sidewalk policies. It's rarely clear whose job it is to build sidewalks, and evolving responsibilities and neighborhood characters have created illogical and dangerous conditions.