



MESQUITE RANCH NEIGHBORHOOD ASSOCIATION

September 11, 2007

Mesquite Ranch Neighborhood Association
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Psomas
Attn: Mr. Alejandro Angel
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Re: Houghton Road Widening Project - Controlled Traffic Signals – Valencia Road to Irvington Road

Dear Psomas Planning Staff,

The purpose of this correspondence is to highlight the planning and placement of traffic control signals on Houghton Road between Valencia Road and Irvington Road.

ISSUE

The Mesquite Ranch Neighborhood Association (MRNA) would like to address controlled traffic signals on Houghton Road from Valencia to Irvington Road. The concern for keeping traffic control signals at one mile intervals on Houghton Road has been voiced by some Citizen Design Review Committee members during the initial planning phase of the Houghton widening project. Regardless of whether a one mile traffic signal progression is to be maintained, MRNA's position remains that traffic control signals at Poorman and Drexel Roads are necessary, and the traffic control signal at Bilby Road should be retained.

BACKGROUND

1. Arterial Roadways

According to the HAMP and proposed City of Tucson Major Street and Routes Plan, the major arterial roadways with a Right of Way (ROW) of 150 feet are Valencia Road, Poorman Road, and Irvington Road (currently 120 ROW).

Bilby Road is built-out and has a ROW of 90 feet. There are no known plans for Bilby Road to be extended west, however, there are plans to extend Bilby Road east to a future Desert Village Parkway arterial roadway.

Poorman Road is designated as a future major arterial roadway and there are plans to extend Poorman Road west to Harrison Road and east to a future Desert Village Parkway arterial roadway in future development.

2. Land Use

The area between Valencia and Poorman is designated as “Town Center” real estate and is planned to be a “Tucson East” of sorts with high commercial business development and high density residential development and numerous city services including bus, fire, and police.

The area around Drexel is earmarked for a future Hospital which will require a controlled traffic signal solution to accommodate priority emergency vehicle movement.

The area around Bilby is currently being developed with approximately 1600 new Pulte homes stretching from Houghton to Melpomene. In addition, a new school complex is currently under construction on Bilby Road just east of the Mesquite Ranch subdivision.

3. Existing Business and Educational Facilities

Bilby Road provides primary access to the Senita Valley Elementary/Middle School Facility (1 mile east of Houghton Road) which is currently under construction and has a planned completion of July 2008. It is expected there will be medium school bus traffic at the Houghton/Bilby intersection during weekdays. In addition, the school will be available for community meetings, primarily on weekday evenings, and throughout the day on weekends. The school size will also increase over the next several years to accommodate a larger middle school.

Poorman Road provides primary access to three sand and gravel businesses at the Pantano Wash (1.5 miles east of Houghton Road) and is the only legal access for one of the three businesses. Commercial vehicle traffic is heavy during weekdays and some weekends. The outbound, heavily laden trucks, pose a significant traffic safety problem at the Houghton/Poorman intersection due to severely reduced vehicle acceleration capacity, especially for those vehicles on Poorman, turning left (south) onto Houghton Road. Combining commercial vehicle and normal resident traffic currently poses an increased motor vehicle safety risk and has resulted in several major accidents at this intersection.

4. Existing Traffic Control Signals

Houghton intersections at Valencia Road, Bilby Road, and Irvington Road all have controlled traffic signals installed.

Prior to HAMP approval, Ward 4 and the City of Tucson opted to pool impact fees and install a controlled traffic signal at the Houghton/Bilby Road intersection. This made sense, at the time, because of increased residential development north and south of Bilby Road and east of Houghton Road, but took away the possibility of a near term public safety solution at the Houghton/Poorman intersection. The Houghton/Bilby signal provides access to Houghton for over a 1000 homes in the Pulte and Mesquite Ranch neighborhoods, as well as access to the new Senita Valley Elementary/Middle school. No other access to Houghton is possible without having to navigate through adjacent, circuitous, narrow neighborhood streets to Drexel or Poorman Roads.

DISCUSSION

Now that HAMP and RTA have been approved, project planners must apply the funds to meet the conditions and intent of the HAMP plan. Although a conceptual plan, it is inevitable that Poorman Road will be a major thoroughfare requiring traffic control and lighting. Funds should be applied to this intersection to prepare it for an increased service role while the funds are available.

Since we are at the 15% planning stage in the Houghton Widening Project, the fact that Poorman Road is designated as a future arterial roadway, and that near term plans exist to build a major hospital at Drexel Road, will require the existence of controlled traffic signals at those respective intersections.

The hospital will require special traffic control to safely accommodate emergency vehicular traffic control.

Poorman Road will require intersection lighting and traffic control in the interest of public safety. Specifically, commercial vehicles from all over the city access sand and gravel businesses using Poorman Road. Loaded vehicles exiting Poorman Road currently turn left and right to make their deliveries. These slow accelerating vehicles require a higher level of traffic control to prevent them from becoming the cause of accidents on Houghton Road, whose speed limit is set at 55 mph. In addition to high commercial vehicle use, the highly commercialized "Town Center" will include mass transit, fire, and police services that will require the existence of an elevated traffic control signal with lighting at Poorman Road.

Leaving or relocating the existing traffic signal at Bilby can be successfully argued either way, but the most compelling arguments in the signal's retention would be school bus traffic, parents dropping off their children (student safety) to and from the Senita Valley Elementary/Middleschool School facilities, and the fact that Bilby provides the only direct access to Houghton for over 1000 existing and new homes. Without a traffic signal at Bilby, school buses and residents would have to navigate through residential streets in Pulte and Mesquite Ranch neighborhoods to gain access to a signal light; this increased traffic through neighborhood areas would increase the risk of accidents to families in these neighborhoods.

MRNA views traffic control signals at Poorman and Bilby Roads as the highest priority and believes there should be no compromise to any lesser traffic control solution.

RECOMMENDATIONS

MRNA requests the following:

1. Plan for and install traffic control signals at Poorman Road and Drexel Road intersections.
2. Retain the traffic control signal at Bilby Road.
3. Install lighting at Houghton/Poorman Road intersection.

Respectfully submitted,

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cc: Ward IV
City of Tucson Department of Transportation
Gordley Design Group, Inc