

THE LONG WALK DOWN VIRGINIA

with Wayne Murray

After 90 days of testing, the temporary traffic mitigation devices on the half mile of Virginia Avenue between 7th and 12th streets are due to be removed on June 27th. These plastic temporaries were the result of the Coronado Fight Back West program, and may possibly move on to a permanent installation of mitigation devices.

City engineers completed “after” studies in May and will publish the results along with their analysis of the effects of the devices sometime in June. Having been involved in this project from its beginning in November 2003, I would like to give “my analysis” of the results of a year and a half of neighborhood efforts from a non-engineer, resident perspective.

This will be wordy because, well—I am wordy. But also because there is a lot to say about this complex and multifaceted project. Much e-mail, many conversations, and many shared tasks with fellow Coronadoans have gone into this traffic mitigation project. Much of “my analysis” comes from this input. My hope is to answer questions but also to provide points about the various aspects of the project that neighbors can voice opinion on.

My ultimate hope is that the final outcome of Virginia will be a calm street that can handle the “neighborhood volume” at a respectful speed while discouraging the cut-through traffic that would otherwise only increase as the city continues to grow. At the same time, I hope it will provide a safe loading area for North High School, an attractive “point of pride” for Coronado and the city at large, and—as you will see—a pleasant walking experience to new businesses on 7th Street.

Lead into:

OUR WALK BEGINS ON VIRGINIA AT 12TH STREET

This portion between 12th and Dayton streets is the loading zone for North High. All of the options of a loading zone “within” the school campus have been explored. Due to security and the “closed campus” it is not feasible to place it on campus. And due to the need for limited entrance gates, it is safest to have the loading zone on Virginia and not busy 12th Street. (12th is a collector street carrying much higher volume of vehicles, plus buses and bicycles. There is now limited loading on the west side of 12th from Windsor south to Virginia. A pedestrian island crosswalk is planned on 12th Street near Edgemont to provide safe crossing for students who use the city bus. That is currently being tested with striping.)

The center median barrier stretching from 12th to Dayton on Virginia serves several purposes. It has:

- organized the students on the north side of the street and



- discouraged them from crossing Virginia, in the middle of the traffic, mid-block
- eliminated mid-block u-turns which cause traffic congestion
- eliminated left turns mid-block in the loading zone, reducing congestion and back-up.
- allowed drivers to concentrate their attention in one direction and on students rather than on chaotic traffic situations.
- directed the students and u-turns to the ends of the barrier, safely away from the congested area
- significantly reduced the number of students loitering on Mitchell and 11th Streets as well as on the south side of Virginia
- reduced littering on these same properties



As one neighbor at the median barrier explains: it is an inconvenience not being able to make left turns, but the benefits far outweigh that one small inconvenience. The students stopped parking in front of his house and the amount of trash he had to pick up each afternoon diminished significantly. "A victory unto itself."

Flash back to North High at 2:30pm before the temporary devices went in, when student pedestrians and u-turning vehicles served as traffic-slowing devices.



"After" traffic studies show that the number of cars using Mitchell and 11th Streets has been reduced by almost one in three. Since residents still use these streets, I think it is safe to assume that one third of the "before" vehicles were not neighbors. The reduced speeds indicate that those non-resident vehicles were probably also the speeders. (Fight Back West also assisted the residents of 11th and Mitchell in obtaining resident permit parking restrictions, helping North High to get students back into the school parking lot. Parking restrictions went in after the "after studies" were conducted, but have probably reduced the number of vehicles on these streets even further.)

Now visualize this: North High School will be using some of its existing school bond funding to renovate the south edge of campus—adding a comfortable waiting area for students and landscaping the southern edge to better bridge the school into the neighborhood. When this is complete (sometime in 2006) it should offer an attractive incentive for students to congregate *on* campus while they wait for their rides to arrive at the Virginia loading zone. This will move much of the remaining traffic congestion off of 12th Street and into the organized loading area.



And while we're visualizing, try to turn the orange plastic "yodaks" and chain link fence into a permanent median barrier with what...? Landscaping and an artful fence? A piece of art alone? Or art with some landscaping? What do you see there? The Public Arts Commission will be working with us in the fall to help us visualize, but it couldn't hurt to start thinking about it while we're walking.

Pan to:

BUMPOUTS FROM DAYTON TO 8TH STREET

The bumpouts (or bulbouts) are designed to visually narrow the street and promote reduced speed. The reduction of speed from 36MPH in the "before" studies to 30MPH "after" indicate success. We could expect the same percentage in speed reduction if we had gone with annoying and unattractive speed humps along the same section.



The bumpout solution also:

- allows a better emergency vehicle response than with speed humps.
- provides protection for cars that park along Virginia.
- makes it easier for drivers crossing Virginia to get a good look at what is coming, unimpeded by the parked cars and easement plantings.
- eliminates the possibility for speeding drivers to pass slower ones or cars waiting to turn, increasing safety as well as slowing the flow of traffic.
- doesn't shift traffic to other local streets, as speed humps can tend to do.

Okay. Time to visualize with me again. Remember the wide-open version of Virginia, lined with a massive row of power poles? If those bumpouts become permanent, with landscape or lighting or art...did those poles disappear from view? And are you taking your time to enjoy the view, more focused on the road and what is ahead?



Now compare this imagined environment to the road not chosen—a series of warning signs and white-striped asphalt speed humps stretching across the wide road as far as you can see, jarring your back and your sensibilities each time you drive down Virginia and sending the message: "People speed in this neighborhood." That's not what I want to visualize for my neighborhood. It's not my idea of a "welcome home" when I drive into Coronado.

Return to vision. Focus in on what's ahead in the road:

TRAFFIC CIRCLE AT 8TH STREET

The circle is intentionally placed as close to the 7th Street entrance to Coronado as possible for two reasons: to provide a welcome sense of a gateway to the neighborhood and to make Virginia less tempting to cut-through traffic.

Study results show that speed has been significantly reduced from 7th to the circle. As we noticed earlier, the calming effect seems to carry the rest of the way down the street as drivers head east. Traffic volume dropped a little. I will assume that the vehicles that have “left” Virginia were non-resident vehicles, leaving the more respectful residents on the street.

Traffic circles are new to the US and take some getting used to. All directions approach the intersection in a slowing manner, with their foot on the brake and attention focused on one direction. For this to be effective, the circle must be clearly visible—day and night—and attract drivers’ attention to the intersection.

Fade back to the “gateway” idea.

Think about how you respond when someone asks you where you live. Do you describe Coronado as “north of Good Sam” or “near 7th Street and Thomas”? Now visualize a different conversation, one in which you only need to say, “I live in Coronado,” and the other person immediately knows where Coronado is. “Coronado is that great neighborhood with the artistic traffic circles,” they’ll say. You’ve just imagined a new “point of pride” for Phoenix and created a “sense of community” for our neighborhood.

Cut to 12th and Oak intersection.

Though we didn’t walk past it earlier, another traffic circle is in planning for 12th Street and Oak. If the two circle designs are coordinated, along with the median barrier and bumpouts, we will have the beginning of a new and positive identity for Coronado. Neighbors have already been sharing some interesting ideas and are excited to begin working with the City engineers and the Phoenix Arts Commission to redesign these two very visible, high-volume streets to create the next point of pride.

Cut back to the new Coronado traffic circle at 8th Street.

THAT WALK MADE ME HUNGRY... DINNER ANYONE?

Now that we have walked to 7th Street, shall we stop in at the Virginia Market, say hi to Mark, and get a bottle of wine to bring to the new Café LaBella? Or should we skip dinner and just go sit in the dirt lot south of Virginia and wait for them to build the new Mecca?

Zoom in... waiting for Mecca.



WHAT'S UP AHEAD IN THE ROAD?

- More meetings. Please attend and share ideas at the GCNA general meetings (always the first Thursday of every month, 7-8pm, at the community center, NE corner of Virginia and 12th Street) and future traffic meetings and events. They are announced in the Dispatch newsletter and in the online discussion group. Our streets are the most public reflection of who we are as a community. It is important that all of the Greater Coronado Neighborhood be involved in that identity.
- 90-day test ends and temporary devices removed June 27th
- Final design (after discussion in July about things like the bike path and safety)
- A final round of petitioning once we have an accurate description of what the permanent design will look like. (Expected this fall.)
- Arts discussion starting soon
- Then, if the plan receives neighborhood support, 12-18 months until installation.

Roll informational credits and request for volunteers:

More information on the Fight Back West process that got us this far is available at: http://www.gcna.info/fight_back/.

The traffic progress in particular is available at: http://www.gcna.info/fight_back/traffic.htm

All input and comments are listed and turned in periodically to our elected officials and City personnel working on the project.

Suggestions, solutions and volunteers are always welcome.

Contact me, Wayne, at: gcnafightbacktraffic@cox.net or 602.258.2605.

Pan out to earth's orbit, then zoom in to McDowell & 12th Street, looking north on 12th. Three years in the future, traffic moves calmly...