

Traffic Commission

The City of La Mesa recently established a Traffic Commission, made up of citizens from the community, appointed by the City Council, to serve as a decision-making body on everyday traffic issues and as an advisory panel to the City Council on major issues. The Commission consists of five members serving four year terms. All of the five members must be La Mesa residents.

Meetings take place monthly on the first Wednesday of the month at 9:00 am in the City Council Chambers located at City Hall. These meetings are open to the public. The Commission will make decisions on citizen requests for stop sign or traffic signal installation and other issues, as well as provide recommendations to the City Council on citizen requests that require Council action.

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Traffic Signals and Stop Signs

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Intersection Traffic Control

The Traffic Engineering Division frequently receives requests from citizens to install traffic signals or all-way stop signs at City intersections. There are certain situations where a traffic signal or all-way stop sign is warranted, based on the volume of traffic, the number of crashes, and/or the delays experienced by drivers. However, care must be taken when introducing new intersection controls because unwarranted intersection controls can do more harm than good.

When Is Intersection Control Warranted?

The State of California recently adopted the Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices (MUTCD), developed by the Federal Highway Administration, the most recent version of which was released in 2000. The MUTCD contains guidelines for the appearances, locations, and proper application of all signs, markings, signals, and physical barriers used on roadways. It includes a set of conditions, or warrants, where installation of traffic signals or stop signs is reasonable from an engineering perspective.

There are eight warrants for traffic signal installation that are related to traffic volumes over various periods, pedestrian volumes, intersection crash history, and the position of the intersection on the local network of roadways. Meeting one or more warrants is not by itself reason for installation of a signal, but is an indication that a signal might be appropriate. If one or more warrants are met, a more detailed engineering analysis is necessary to verify that a signal will indeed improve safety and traffic flow enough to justify the cost of installation and maintenance.

Similar warrants exist for all-way stop sign installation. The MUTCD details four conditions plus four other optional warrants. The four main warrants are related to: temporary control pending traffic signal installation, crash history, volumes of vehicles and pedestrians, and a combination of the other three warrants. The optional warrants that if met can justify a more detailed engineering analysis include: left-turn conflicts, vehicle-pedestrian conflicts, sight distance problems, and traffic operation on two similar intersecting roadways.

In any case, research has shown that intersection traffic control should not be used as a method to reduce speeding. Areas experiencing problems with speeding are candidates for the City's Neighborhood Traffic Management Program where traffic calming measures are considered.

What Are Some Other Options?

Sometimes problems that result in citizen requests for stop signs or traffic signals can be solved by simply removing parking or some other obstruction to provide better driver sight distance. In requests involving problems with speeding, traffic calming measures including increased police enforcement might be a more effective solution. A detailed engineering analysis can determine whether or not intersection control methods will have the desired impact or if better approaches exist.

What Happens to Requests for Intersection Control?

City staff review all requests for intersection control on a preliminary level to determine if the control is warranted according to the MUTCD guidelines. If so, an engineering analysis is performed to determine if the control requested will have the desired results and a recommendation is made to the Traffic Commission. Citizens have an opportunity to present their case at the Commission's hearing. The Traffic Commission makes a recommendation to the City Council where citizen's will again have an opportunity to present their case.