

OVERWIDENING FOOTHILL AND MISSION WON'T SOLVE THE CONGESTION PROBLEM

...but it will lead to more traffic.

Problem: Congestion on Foothill and Mission.

City's Solution: Widen Foothill to ten lanes and Mission to eight lanes.

Help us oppose the overwidening. It is not too late to seek a common sense solution.

Will overwidening solve the congestion problem? Yes – temporarily – until more traffic fills up the road again – and Mission gets eight lanes of congestion instead of four.

Why overwidening will not work well: INDUCED DEMAND IN A NUTSHELL

<p>Route</p> <p>Drivers who changed routes to avoid Foothill Mission come back because it is faster.</p>	<p>Time of day</p> <p>Drivers who changed their travel times to avoid Foothill Mission come back because it is faster.</p>	<p>Destination</p> <p>Drivers who drove to closer destinations to avoid congestion drive to one further away because it is faster.</p>
<p>Trip chaining</p> <p>Drivers who combined errands into one trip take separate trips because it is faster.</p>	<p>Optional trips</p> <p>Drivers who avoided a trip because it was too congested make the trip because it is faster.</p>	<p>Mode change</p> <p>Walkers, bicyclists, and transit riders start driving because it is faster.</p>
<p>Locational choice</p> <p>Drivers move to better housing further away because faster speed makes the commute duration acceptable.</p>	<p>Job location</p> <p>Employers locate jobs further away from workers because workers can still get to work fast enough.</p>	<p>Land development</p> <p>Responding to locational choice and job location, developers build sprawl far from jobs.</p>

What causes traffic?

1. People need to get from A to B and when too many try to do it on the same road at the same time, congestion occurs.
2. The roads are too small, so more roads reduce congestion.
3. As the economy heats up more people have to get to work, and they can afford the trip.
4. Other modes of transportation – work at home, walk, bike, taxi, bus, rail, ferry, horseback – are usually less efficient than driving a car.
5. Drivers do not pay directly the real cost of driving. Drivers pay indirectly, or other people pay, for pollution, “free” parking, “free” freeways, local streets, accidents caused by uninsured motorists, local police and fire services for road users, health and safety problems, the cost of military defense of oil supplies, and other costs.

All these sound true, and three and half are true. Number 4 is sometime true, sometimes not, depending on land use, transit, and the cost of driving. Number 2 is false; more roads can provide a temporary reprieve from congestion, but it returns due to induced demand.

Of the 3.5 that are true, the most important is number 5. For example, consider a congested freeway. It looks like it needs to be widened, but that is because people are not paying directly a “market price” or an “economic cost” to use the freeway. A **market price** is the toll that would be necessary to stop the congestion, or at least to minimize it. As the price goes up, the demand goes down. If the market price to minimize congestion is lower than the cost of expanding the freeway, it is a sign that demand is not strong enough to expand the road. However, if the market price is high enough to pay for the road and other indirect costs, drivers are paying an **economic cost**. There would be no need for taxes to expand the road – it would pay for itself, like mot goods in the market economy..

If we build more roads without tolls, as we have for over 50 years, then we get traffic growth faster than population growth and economic growth. Why? Because one of the prices we pay that reduces trips on the highways is time wasted in congestion. Thus, if you provide more road capacity “for free,” that is, free to the user, it induces more use than when the drivers had to pay a higher “price,” which was wasting their time in congestion. Drivers increase their travel – “induced demand” – to reach a new equilibrium among the critical forces: the need to get from A to B, land use, economic growth, competing modes, direct costs, and time delay.

It’s not rocket science. It’s economics. Build it and they will come.

We need to do something about Foothill and Mission – maybe we should do something that will improve our city – like Smart Growth and bus rapid transit.