

CONSENT CALENDAR

November 3, 2022

To: Honorable Mayor and Members of the City Council

From: Councilmember Terry Taplin, Councilmember Susan Wengraf

Subject: Budget Referral: No Right on Red Signs

RECOMMENDATION

That the City Council refers to the City Manager the implementation of “No Right on Red” signs to all intersections with traffic lights. Refer the necessary appropriations of \$135,000 to the 2022 November Annual Appropriations Ordinance.

FISCAL IMPACTS

An estimated \$250 per sign at a total of 135 intersections with four signs per intersection.

CURRENT SITUATION AND ITS EFFECTS

In living memory, the fundamental character of transportation planning and urban design of the United States has been the prioritization of the ease of travel of personal automobiles. From the way we design our roads to the rules we set for them, cars are given priority in the public right of way at the express detriment to pedestrians and cyclists. One such example is the de facto right given to cars to turn “Right on Red” at signalized intersections. This allows cars to drive through pedestrian crosswalks to make their turn in the same signal phase when pedestrians are directed to cross the street. On a daily basis, most drivers will yield to pedestrians before making their right turn and no harm occurs. This rule, however, puts pedestrians at immense risk nonetheless.

Right on Red was illegal in many parts of the country up until the gas crisis of the 1970’s, when the rule was adopted in part to reduce car idling at intersections and promote fuel efficiency.¹ The repercussions for pedestrians and cyclists occurred almost immediately. In the 1980’s, allowing Right on Red was found to cause an increase in pedestrian crashes by 60% and an increase in bicycle crashes by 100%.² This is a stark jump in injuries, especially when compared to the supposed benefits, which came out to between 1 and 4.6 seconds of saved driving time in a 1981 study.³ Many cities have

¹ <https://www.energy.gov/articles/right-turn-red>

² <https://usa.streetsblog.org/2018/05/15/its-time-for-cities-to-rethink-right-turns-on-red/>

³ <https://www.energy.gov/articles/right-turn-red>

begun the process of limiting Right on Red in the name of their Vision Zero goals. This has taken the form of restricting the turn at specific intersections, such as in Seattle and Washington D.C., as well as an outright ban in New York City.



Berkeley had 133 signalized intersections as of the 2020 Pedestrian Plan, with two more added since.⁴

Berkeley can join these cities in taking a new approach to achieving its Vision Zero goals by eliminating the ability of cars to turn right on red at all signalized intersections. Beyond the construction of new pedestrian and cyclist infrastructure and the slowing down of car traffic, policies like eliminating Right on Red are smart and easy ways to begin the process of deprioritizing car use in Berkeley and placing lives about driver convenience.

BACKGROUND

Section 14.16.20 of the Berkeley Municipal Code states as follows:

- A. The City Traffic Engineer is authorized to determine those intersections at which it shall be unlawful for the operator of any vehicle to make a right, left, or U-turn, and shall

⁴https://www.cityofberkeley.info/uploadedFiles/Public_Works/Level_3_-_Transportation/2020%20Pedestrian%20Plan%20Chapter%202%20adopted.pdf

place appropriate signs at such intersections. The making of such turns may be prohibited between certain hours of any day and permitted at other hours in which event the same shall be plainly indicated on the signs.

B. Whenever authorized signs are erected indicating that no right or left or U-turn is permitted, it is unlawful for the operator of any vehicle to disobey the directions of any such sign. (Ord. 3262-NS § 4.1, 1952)

ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED

The City Council could approach Right on Red injuries by way of an explicit ban on such turns. However, given that Section 21453(b) of the California Vehicle Code allows such turns “except when a sign is in place prohibiting a turn”⁵, the City is likely preempted from implementing a ban of its own. Considering this, a policy of placing signs prohibiting turns at lighted intersections is proposed in this item.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS

Establishing a network of safe streets for pedestrians and bicycles incentivizes nonautomobile travel, reducing greenhouse gas emissions. The City estimates that transportation-related emissions accounts for approximately 60% of our community’s total annual greenhouse gas emissions.⁶ By encouraging alternatives to car transportation by making pedestrian and cyclist infrastructure safer and more accessible, this policy stands to lower the emissions from our community’s dominant source of carbon emissions.

CONTACT

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⁵ https://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/codes_displaySection.xhtml?lawCode=VEH§ionNum=21453.

⁶ https://www.cityofberkeley.info/Clerk/City_Council/2018/12_Dec/Documents/2018-12-06_WS_Item_01_Climate_Action_Plan_Update_pdf.aspx

