



Report on the Safety Hazards of Proposed Parking Lot at 600 Mass

The primary references used in compiling this report are official publications of the American Association of State Highway Engineers and the Institute of Transportation Engineers.

As illustrated in the attached diagram, the unobstructed line-of-sight distance is 80'. Although it is possible to see father south on New Hampshire Street by peering between the Journal-World building, the tree and the light post: "For sight distance requirements, no object within the area of unobstructed view may protrude more than 3.75 ft. (1.1 m.) above the plane..." Thus, the line of sight must run tangent to the light post on the streetward side.

A vehicle traveling at the posted speed limit of 20 mph is covering 29 1/3 feet per second.

In the accepted time span of 2.5 seconds necessary for a driver to comprehend a danger, react to it and effect braking action, the vehicle will traverse 73 1/3 ft. Braking distance on dry pavement is calculated by the following equation:

$D = \frac{V^2}{30f}$ In which, D is distance, V is velocity and f is the coefficient of friction between tires and pavement.

At 20 mph, the coefficient of friction is .64; thus, the braking distance is 20.83 ft. The total minimum sight stopping distance then is roughly 94 1/2 ft.

On wet pavement, braking distance is calculated by the following equation:

$D = \frac{V^2}{30(f-G)}$ In which all factors are the same and G is the downgrade expressed as a percentile.

(from p. 1, col. 4)

When the proposal to set a bid date came up on the City Commission agenda that evening, a member of the Public Notice staff, Al Wright, read from a prepared report -- the essence of which appears in these pages. The upshot of his statement was that the proposed design provided only 70 to 85 percent of the absolute minimum sight distance dictated by accepted standards of traffic engineering. Wright concluded his statement by asking the commission to postpone setting a bid date until after a safety study could be done by an independent professional consultant.

Richardson followed Wright to the microphone and echoed his warnings. "It's a perfect setup for collisions," he said. "This is a particularly dangerous configuration. John Morris and I made several improvements, but my feeling is that it is still not safe. I think we can say that adherence to good practice in parking design would prevent a lot from being built there."

Noting that Richardson and Morris had worked as paid, professional consultants to Bryan Anderson in September 1980, Commissioner Don Binns questioned Richardson's motives for appearing before the commission. Richardson stated that his professional relationship with Anderson had ended and that he was appearing before them as a taxpayer and a citizen with expertise in the field.

"I see," Binns said derisively. "Before, you were working for Anderson, but now you're just a citizen."

"That's right," Richardson responded. "Just a citizen."

Binns' answer to this forthright response was a snort and a sneer as he settled back in his chair.

Mayor Ed Carter then asked the city staff if they had any comment on the safety questions posed by Richardson and Wright. Public Works Director George Williams admitted there were "some problems

The coefficient of friction on wet pavement is .39 and the grade at site is .03. Thus, the minimum wet sight stopping distance is roughly 110 1/2 ft.

Noting that the above distances reflect the unrealistic traffic speed of 20 mph, it is clear that the line-of-sight distance of barely 80 feet is insufficient to provide safe egress from the parking lot. In addition to the major problem outlined here, the traffic pattern configuration at the exit creates problems, not the least of which is the inability of incoming drivers to see the traffic island and keep right sign if another vehicle is waiting to exit.

with the design," but said that he "questioned Wright's figures."

(Wright's report and diagram later were submitted to Morris and Mulinazzi independently, and each arrived at the same conclusion: Although not of professional quality, the report was a sufficiently accurate representation of the facts and factors pertinent to the question of safety hazards inherent in the design of the parking lot.)

Carter prefaced the call for a vote to invite bids by saying the time had come to decide whether the "stall tactics" were going to work, or whether the city should proceed with the parking lot as planned. One week earlier, Binns had accused the critics of the lot design of trying "to delay this thing until after the (City Commission) election."

Commissioner Bob Schumm said, "I think it's a great plan. Let's vote on it." The outcome of the vote was a predictable 4-to-1 approval, Marci Francisco dissenting.

Outside the City Commission Room, reporters gathered around Anderson, Richardson and Wright. What was their response to the accusations that the whole protest had been engineered to generate a controversy at election time?

Anderson spoke quickly: "It wasn't us who waited until three weeks before the election to submit a plan. If they were in such a hell-fire big hurry to tear my building down, how come they twiddled their thumbs for three months?"

Had they hoped to delay action on the parking lot until after the April 7th election? "Toward what possible end?" Wright counter-questioned. "Last December, Barkley Clark told everybody that the conditions of the bond sales

led the city to building a parking lot on that site exactly to the same degree that the city was tied to tearing down the Anderson Building," he observed. "If that's the case," he continued, "what possible difference could it make who is sitting in the commissioners' chairs? We would be fighting this particular design whether it was proposed in January or July."

City officials disagreed with the contention that the lot is unsafe. Garner Stoll, head of the Lawrence-Douglas County Planning Commission, said the city's plan for parking at 600 Mass met line-of-sight distance regulations. Hoover said his parking lot plan is sound.

"I think you'd have to say there's nothing wrong with the parking lot plan there," Hoover insisted. "I think they're just picking on this one spot because it's controversial," he opined. "It's too bad that these people are suddenly interested in one, just one, project."

"That's almost too funny," Richardson said when told of Hoover's remark. "I think of all the praise that the city and county have handed out to people off the hill, such as John and myself, for helping them out on projects through the years," he recollected. "Now, just because we're saying things they don't want to hear, they say we're being petty and prejudiced."

When asked whether the removal of the light post and tree would provide adequate visibility at the exit point, Mulinazzi said, "It would help; but it would not have a significant impact on the overall safety picture."

Would he recommend that an independent safety consultant be brought in? "Let's just say," he responded, "that the situation deserves further study."

What would be the next move for opponents of the parking lot, Wright was asked. "I think about the only thing we can do now is pray that nobody gets killed there," he said, then added: "I think it's criminal for the city to squander a quarter-million dollars on this parking lot, and not be willing to invest another few hundred to make sure it's safe to use."

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