

MUNICIPALITY OF ANCHORAGE

Traffic Engineering Department
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To Whom it May Concern:

Upon review of the O'Malley Elementary School Zone Treatments Memorandum (enclosure) commissioned by the Traffic Engineering Department based on conversations with the Hillside Community Council leadership and delivered in early June 2022, I have prepared this statement to explain my duties and current decision regarding school zone treatments on O'Malley Road at Rockridge Drive in the vicinity of O'Malley Elementary School, with consideration for the current O'Malley Road reconstruction project (Phase II – Livingston Street to Hillside Drive) under construction this summer.

Duties Regarding School Zone Traffic Control Devices

The Municipal Traffic Engineer has specific duties related to the approval, placement, and operation of traffic control devices within the Municipality of Anchorage (MOA), including for school zones. These duties are limited to Municipal jurisdiction transportation facilities unless otherwise granted by the State of Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities (DOT&PF) for facilities under their jurisdiction, such as O'Malley Road. In addition, both the State and Municipality are obligated by State statute (AS 28.01.010) to follow the Alaska Traffic Manual.

Municipal Roadways

As outlined in Title 9 of Municipal Code (see 9.06.090, with **bold** added for emphasis),

- A. It shall be the duty of the traffic engineer or designee to:
 1. **Conduct studies of street and pedestrian traffic**, crashes, congestion, parking **and other conditions affecting the safe and efficient use of the streets and trails**, collect facts regarding the effect and operation of regulations and laws, make recommendations regarding regulations and laws, **and review plans for proposed street improvements for the purpose of making recommendations for safeguarding and facilitating vehicular and pedestrian traffic**;
 2. **Approve, place, maintain and operate all official traffic control devices**, including double fine zones in accordance with 17 AAC 99.010, and keep records of such traffic control devices;
 3. Approve passenger stops for all buses operating over the streets of the municipality;
 4. **Establish crossings, where deemed necessary, to protect pedestrians and schoolchildren**;
 5. **Approve school zones**;
 6. **Approve school flasher zones and flasher operation schedules**;
 7. Approve traffic control plans;
 8. Determine locations where vehicles shall be prohibited from making left turns;
 9. Approve taxicab and for-hire stands;
 10. Study facilitation of traffic along existing routes and make recommendations regarding this subject;
 11. Make traffic surveys;
 12. Collect and maintain crash and traffic flow information;
 13. Approve all applications for building permits and right-of-way permits affecting traffic safety;
 14. Determine when to require traffic studies of impacts and the need for mitigation regarding the facilitating and safeguarding of traffic; and
 15. **Perform such other duties as may fall within the province of safeguarding and facilitating traffic.**

State Roadways for School Zones

The Municipality of Anchorage has a current Transfer of Responsibilities Agreement (TORA) with the State of Alaska that references a 1996 Agreement regarding school zones. The TORA states,

11. The Municipality has responsibility to establish, maintain, and operate all school zones designated within the Municipality per an Agreement dated 6-1-1996. The Municipality will continue to review all school zones in accordance with the Alaska Traffic Manual; establish guidelines for designating and signing school zones; ensure that established school zones are properly marked and maintained; and notify the State of all new school zones and any changes to established zones. The State agrees to convey all requests for school zones or signage to the Municipality. The State agrees to fund the cost of maintaining and operating the existing school zones located in State right-of-way as identified in Appendix A. A description of the equipment and list of locations of school zones in State right-of-way is provided in Appendix A.

Current Decision

To provide the information needed to make an informed decision, the Traffic Engineering Department commissioned the completion of a traffic study by HDL Engineering Consultants, LLC, that evaluated school zone treatments at the intersection of O'Malley Road and Rockridge Drive for O'Malley Elementary School. This study was completed June 3, 2022, and considered traffic volumes, traffic type, posted speed limit, grade level of students, road classification, roadway grades, pedestrian facilities, traffic control, surrounding land use, neighborhood connectivity, and the visual environment. It accounted for the physical alterations planned by the current construction project and included a case study of Huffman Elementary's school zone and student crosswalk on Huffman Road.

The consultant also met with various agency representatives, including staff from the Anchorage School District (ASD) Transportation Department and DOT&PF Central Region, to find out their perspective. I also called and discussed this location with these staff and did my own site visit to view conditions. All of us share the expectation that while the current DOT&PF construction project will improve bicycle and pedestrian facilities along O'Malley Road, it is not anticipated that the nature of O'Malley Road (with its high speed and steeper grades) and the condition of multimodal connections to the school and adjacent neighborhoods will be sufficiently modified to allow for a safe crosswalk and associated school zone. We do not envision a typical school zone being safe enough for very young students to cross unattended, and all agency input to-date indicate that a school crossing would require more than flashers and signs (such as a grade-separated crossing) to increase the safety of students at the age and grade levels served by O'Malley Elementary School. We are concerned that installing a school crosswalk would create a safety issue by communicating to the public that this should be a safe location to cross when, in fact, we feel otherwise. Additionally, it is not recommended practice or the policy of the MOA to install a school zone (with flashing lights and a lower speed) without an associated school crosswalk or being immediately adjacent to a visible school.

However, I do acknowledge the potential to view conditions differently in the future and recognize the value of taking advantage of the current construction project to lay the groundwork for future options. To this end, I have coordinated with DOT&PF staff (the Traffic and Safety Engineer and current O'Malley Road Reconstruction Project Manager) to include underground conduit in the current project to accommodate a potential electrical system in the future (such as a future school zone with flashing lights). In this way, the current project will not preclude future options (such as signs, flashing lights, crosswalk striping, etc.) associated with a school zone and crossing that can be more easily completed by Traffic Engineering Department staff should these features be determined appropriate in the future.

In evaluating the school zone and pedestrian conditions, another topic area that has come to light and that may warrant additional consideration is how to address the changing traffic volumes and site circulation impacts associated with O'Malley Elementary School's growing French immersion program. As the first

language immersion cohort (just finished 2nd Grade) continues to advance through additional grades until all grades have an immersion class, it is likely that a greater number of parent drop-offs will occur in place of bussing and walking, similar to what has been observed at other language immersion programs around Anchorage. Many of the other language immersion schools depend on more than one access point to the school to manage the traffic demand, and O'Malley Elementary may benefit from a new vehicular connection west to Birch Road, along with associated changes to the onsite circulation and drop-off loop. We have shared this perspective with ASD Facilities for their consideration. This would also be valuable time to make more progress towards the additional items identified in the study, including improvements to Rockridge Drive (multiuse pathway, lighting, and signage) and improved neighborhood connections within Valli Vue Estates (such as connecting cul-de-sacs to the facilities on O'Malley Road).

Respectfully,



Brad Coy, P.E., PTOE
Municipal Traffic Engineer

Enclosure:

O'Malley Elementary School Zone Treatments Memorandum – June 3, 2022