

NEWS > LOCAL NEWS

San Rafael intersection safety upgrade hits snag



A pedestrian crosses the intersection of Third and Hetherton Streets in San Rafael. (Robert Tong/Marin Independent Journal file)

By **ADRIAN RODRIGUEZ** | arodriguez@marinij.com |

Marin Independent Journal

PUBLISHED: July 20, 2019 at 1:39 pm | UPDATED: July 20, 2019 at 7:11 pm

A plan to improve a dangerous intersection in downtown San Rafael has been delayed by the state, which is requiring an archaeological resources study before the project can proceed.

“It’s a minor speed bump, about a 30-day speed bump,” said Bill Guerin, the city’s director of public works. “It’s really a belt-and-suspenders approach as far as we’re concerned.”

The project at Third and Hetherton streets has to be approved by the California Office of Historic Preservation because of the possibility of sensitive archaeological resources in the area. The City Council authorized the city manager to spend up to \$13,096 on an archaeological report needed to clear the hurdle. The total project cost is estimated at \$900,000.

Guerin said this is a common requirement for projects near creeks because of possible Native American remains and artifacts. But the area is largely developed already and the city doesn’t plan to do any major digging, so it’s unlikely there will be a problem, he said.

City officials began studying possible improvements for the intersection after two pedestrian fatalities in 2014 and 2016. Both pedestrians were struck by vehicles making a left turn from westbound Third Street to southbound Hetherton Street from the second turning lane.

After some revisions, a plan to eliminate one of the left-turn lanes was nixed over concerns it would cause gridlock in an already busy area. During peak hours, the intersection near Highway 101 handles more than 3,500 vehicles and 200 pedestrians per hour, according to a traffic study.

The plan now calls for the removal of a crosswalk at the south end of the intersection and the addition of a north-south crosswalk to the eastern leg. The project would keep both left-turn pockets from westbound Third Street onto Hetherton Street.

There will be other additions, including improved signal light timing and sidewalk bulb-outs, Guerin said.

Already, the city has been able to add curb ramps, high-visibility crosswalk restriping and technology that gives pedestrians lead time through crosswalks, among other changes.

The city expects to produce the archaeological report and obtain an encroachment permit within 60 days. Kimley-Horn and Associates Inc., a planning and design engineering firm, has been hired to prepare the document.

City staffers expect to receive Caltrans approval this fall to bid the construction contract in time to get the job going in spring 2020.

Daniel Allison, chairman of the city's Bicycle and Pedestrian Advocacy Committee, said after two deaths at the intersection, something has to be done.

"It's a busy intersection and the city can't have any more fatalities there," he said.

However, Allison said that removing one of the crosswalks is not necessarily the ideal fix.

"I'm sort of pleased with anything being done for safety," he said. "It would be really nice if we had more meaningful safety improvements, and not just the elimination of a pedestrian facility."

Tags:

[Downtown San Rafael,](#)
[newsletter,](#) [traffic](#)



SPONSORED CONTENT

Mom Make Grave Mistake When She Takes Selfie In Her Daughter's Dorm Room [↗](#)

By Upbeat News

upbeat

Mom surprises her daughter at college with a selfie, but soon realizes there is something terribly wrong....



Adrian

Rodriguez

Adrian Rodriguez covers transportation, San Rafael and the Ross Valley for the Marin IJ. He also writes the weekly business column Movers & Shakers, which appears in Friday's paper. Reach the author at arodriguez@marinij.com or

[Follow Adrian Rodriguez:](#)
[@adrianrodr](#)

[@adrianrodri](#)