

Fresno City Council to debate adding signals at high-profile intersection next to Fresno State

By George Hostetter



The intersection at Cedar Avenue and Bulldog Lane may get new left turn signals for traffic to benefit the large student and sports fan pedestrian traffic. ERIC PAUL ZAMORA — THE FRESNO BEE | [Buy Photo](#)

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Fresno City Hall hopes new traffic lights can help bring peace among pedestrians, bicyclists and motorists at a notorious intersection next to Fresno State.



The intersection: Bulldog Lane and Cedar Avenue.

The neighborhood: Student housing, sororities, fraternities, athletic facilities, El Dorado Park, the campus of California State University, Fresno.



The challenge: Thousands of people on foot, skateboard, wheelchair or bicycle and hundreds of cars in a hurry just about every day to move safely through an awkward intersection.

The solution (for now): Add some left-turn signals to the street lights already there, giving everyone at the point of convergence a better sense of each person's responsibility.

The City Council on Thursday is slated to debate whether to award a \$283,200 contract to A-C Electric Co. of Fresno for the new signals. The project includes new crosswalks, signs and pavement striping. Curb ramps for the disabled have already been installed.

The project's estimated total cost, including reserve and preliminary engineering work, is \$433,100. Most of the money comes from state and federal sources.

Decisions on upgrades to intersection infrastructure are routine at City Hall. But Bulldog Lane/Cedar Avenue has a unique profile.

Capt. Andy Hall, head of the Fresno Police Department's traffic safety unit, said the intersection gets a high volume of students and non-students heading to things like classes, athletic events and home. All this puts added pressure on what otherwise would be a relatively nondescript T-shaped intersection.

Hall said police in the last four years investigated 17 collisions of various types at the intersection. Ten of the collisions involved at least one injury, he said. Last May, a motorcycle rider heading south on Cedar suffered a severed foot when he collided with a Dodge Avenger attempting to make a U-turn. Police determined the Avenger driver didn't see the motorcyclist.

Fresno State student activists have long wanted left-turn signals at Bulldog Lane/Cedar, saying it's a safety issue for students and the general public.

Student government leaders in spring 2014 passed a resolution asking City Hall to act. Several leaders went to a council meeting last summer to make the same pitch. They stayed in touch with Council Member Paul Caprioglio, who represents the area.

"There is such a heavy flow of students at this intersection," Fresno State student body president Moses Menchaca said. "We are grateful to Council Member Caprioglio for his commitment to District 4 and Fresno State students."

University officials like the project, too.

"A protected turn lane will make the intersection safer for motorists, bicyclists and pedestrians," interim Vice President for Administration Deborah Adishian-Astone said.

Caprioglio said his view of the project is simple: "Yea!" He said teamwork — his office, city staff, Fresno State students — turned an idea into reality.

"I'm absolutely thrilled we can finally address this issue," Caprioglio said.

Traffic-signal policy in any big city involves politics and science. The former usually means money. The latter involves things like traffic volume and number of accidents.

Public Works Director Scott Mozier said a key in analyzing the accident history is preventable collisions. For example, a left-turn light most likely would have no effect on a drunken driver. On the other hand, he said, studies show that a left-turn light reduces accidents of misjudgment caused by a driver turning in front of oncoming traffic.

Bulldog Lane/Cedar "has been a priority," Mozier said.

In a bureaucrat's lingo, the intersection is getting "protected left-turn phasing." In other words, Mozier said, "the green arrow."

What's there now is "permissive phasing" — the standard signal of red-yellow-green lights that puts a premium on driver and pedestrian judgment.

In many ways, the Bulldog Lane/Cedar intersection over the past 35 years has turned into a hub of activity unequalled

anywhere else in Fresno.

This is especially true when Fresno State's football team has a big game at Bulldog Stadium. There was the memorable day in September 2008 when the Big Ten Conference's Wisconsin Badgers came to town for the first time. Hundreds of Badger fans gathered for a pre-game party next to the North Gym, where they had a great time. Everyone then made their way as a small army across Cedar and along Bulldog Lane to the stadium entrance.

Movement at the intersection generally isn't that dramatic, but it's certainly steady. Several large apartment complexes popular with students occupy the south side of Bulldog Lane. The university's Greek life centers on the stretch of Millbrook Avenue between Bulldog Lane and Barstow Avenue. El Dorado Park, a historic neighborhood west of Greek row that is enjoying a slow but steady rebirth, has a close relationship with the university.

Bulldog Lane/Cedar gets much of this life from sunup to well past sundown.

The intersection someday may see a pedestrian overpass or underpass. But City Hall and Fresno State officials say that's only in the talking stage.

For now, it's sufficient to note the tone in student body president Menchaca's voice. He and some of his fellow students went downtown with an idea. City Hall listened. He's happy.

"It's great to see the city taking action," Menchaca said.

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