

FOLLOW UP REPORT TO GRAND JURY 2020-2021  
PEDESTRIAN SAFETY IN KETTLEMAN CITY  
A COMMUNITY'S LONG-STANDING PLEA FOR IMPROVEMENTS

June 7, 2022

## SUMMARY

The current 2021-2022 Kings County Grand Jury is following up on the prior year's Grand Jury report regarding pedestrian safety within the Kettleman City Community Services District (KCCSD). The current Kings County Grand Jury wanted to see what the status is of the recommendations that were made by the previous Grand Jury.

## BACKGROUND

The Kings County Board of Supervisors is the governing body for the unincorporated community of Kettleman City. The Kings County Association of Governments (KCAG) is an independent local government agency operating within the County and oversees the organization and transportation planning for the Kings County region. The Kings County Community Development Agency (KCCDA) is a County Department responsible to the Kings County Board of Supervisors and has the responsibility for managing zoning permits, land divisions, and Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) programs. Federal CDBG programs are an important source of funds for developing communities. They have actively participated in securing grant funds for studies and plans for the Kettleman City community. The California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) is the owner and operator of State Route 41 (SR41) thru Kettleman City so they must give approval of any changes or improvements to the roadway.

Working documents that were generated by these agencies over the last 16 years (2005 to 2021), were reviewed by last year's Grand Jury. During this time, there was much discussion about the safety of Pedestrians crossing SR41. Specifically, the children, walking to and from school.

## METHODOLOGY

The 2021-2022 Grand Jury conducted interviews to see whether the Grand Jury's recommendations were being followed.

The recommendations from the 2020-2021 Grand Jury were as follows:

- 1) The Kings County Board of Supervisors should direct the Kings County Department of Public Works and Kings County Community Development Agency to submit their recommendations for the next step to be taken by Kings County toward making a tangible improvement in the danger faced daily by pedestrians, particularly school children, in Kettleman City.

- 2) The Kings County Department of Public Works should strongly advocate for any and all pedestrian warning signage, including solar-powered flashing beacons, used by Caltrans on the state highway system to be installed along the northbound and southbound approaches to the residential area and crosswalk on SR 41 at General Petroleum Avenue.
- 3) The Kings County Board of Supervisors should direct relevant County departments and agencies to actively seek funding from all potential funding sources identified in the noted studies and plans to support the construction of a pedestrian bridge in Kettleman City.

## DISCUSSION

The 2021-2022 Kings County Grand Jury Local Government Committee interviewed a member of the Kings County Board of Supervisors, the Superintendent of Reef Sunset School District, the Director of Public Works for Kings County, a member of the Assembly Ethics Committee and Caltrans (District 6).

When the current Grand Jury interviewed a member of the Kings County Board of Supervisors on February 25, 2022, he was extremely interested in seeing a pedestrian crossing bridge located at SR 41 and General Petroleum Avenue become a reality. He was not, however, interested in short term measures such as flashing lights or a HAWK (High Intensity Activated Crosswalk) system as it might lessen the pressure to build a pedestrian crossing bridge. A HAWK signal system is a special type of beacon used to warn and control motorists at marked, un-signalized crosswalks to assist pedestrians crossing a street or highway.

The Grand Jury interviewed the Superintendent of Reef Sunset Unified School District on February 18, 2022. He is still genuinely concerned about his students having to cross SR41. The school district is willing to help in any way possible to make their students safe while walking to and from school. Crossing guards were mentioned by the Superintendent, as well as the need for flashing lights. He felt that a pedestrian bridge would be a promising idea if the students would use it.

The County Public Works Director for Kings County was interviewed on March 11, 2022, and again on April 22, 2022. He shared that there are other short-term measures that could be taken until a pedestrian bridge could be built or that could be put in place instead of a bridge such as a HAWK system or a version of a roundabout. The building of a bridge could take many years and is not always used as frequently as one would think.

Kings County has secured and earmarked two million dollars to the bridge project. This money would be used for the planning and design of the bridge. Further moneys would need to be secured for the actual construction costs. The County's Director of Public Works guesstimated that the total cost of the bridge might cost about 10 to 12 million dollars. If funding is secured, it would likely take another five plus years to be built.

The Grand Jury reached out to interview the Kings County Assemblyman who is responsible for the Kettleman City area multiple times during the months of February 2022 through April 2022 to see if he could confirm that funding for the project was available or if it had been denied. The first person the Grand Jury spoke with in his office did not seem to know about the project and would not connect us to

the Assemblyman. Eventually, the Grand Jury was passed on to another person in his office and this person could not get the Grand Jury connected with our Assemblyman either. The Grand Jury then received a call from the Assembly Ethics Committee. After several attempts the Grand Jury connected with the Assembly Ethics Committee. He was willing to see if he could get answers for us regarding whether the funding had been approved in the Governor's budget. He stated that yes, our Assemblyman submitted Senate Bill 119 which was signed off by the governor, thus funding of two million dollars was earmarked for the planning and design of the Kettleman City Bridge.

The Grand Jury interviewed the California Department of Transportation District 6 Maintenance and Operations Deputy District Director on April 8, 2022. Projects such as this bridge are brought to Caltrans by the individual County, which is then responsible to obtain funding and permits, etc. Caltrans may decide on an individual basis to help secure funds or leave it to the County.

Current secured seed money of two million dollars would be used for planning, engineering, and design. Construction costs have not been determined or secured at this time.

In the Caltrans Deputy District 6 Director's opinion and experience, a pedestrian bridge going over a two-way highway may not be used. Pedestrians tend not to go out of their way when they can go in a straight line and cross a street. He explained other alternatives to a pedestrian bridge such as many diverse types of flashing lights, roundabouts, etc. Roundabouts slow traffic down and prevent fatalities while keeping the traffic flow going. Signals are not used as they impede the flow of traffic on a highway. Flashing lighted crosswalks are expensive and have high maintenance costs because they are imbedded in the pavement. The other options mentioned such as a variety of flashing lights or roundabout, are also less expensive compared to a bridge that may or may not be used.

## FINDINGS

### Finding #1

The Kings County Department of Public Works has made recommendations to the Board of Supervisors.

### Finding #2

Caltrans and Kings County have agreed to install a rectangular flashing beacon at General Petroleum Avenue.

### Finding #3

Two million dollars has been designated and is being held by Caltrans for planning, engineering, and design of a pedestrian bridge at General Petroleum Avenue over SR 41 in Kettleman City. The total cost for the pedestrian bridge is estimated to be 10 to 12 million dollars.

#### Finding #4

The Kings County Department of Public Works and Caltrans has advocated for solutions such as a rectangular flashing beacon, the HAWK signal system, or a roundabout instead of a Pedestrian Bridge.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

#### Recommendation #1

The Kings County Board of Supervisors should consider the use of less expensive solutions that could be quickly implemented.

#### Recommendation #2

The Kings County Public Works Department should install a rectangular flashing beacon as soon as possible. The Kings County Public Works Department should also continue working with Caltrans to install more cost-effective solutions far enough down SR41 to slow down traffic as they approach the crosswalk at General Petroleum Avenue.

#### Recommendation #3

The Kings County Board of Supervisors should revisit the probable non usage of a Pedestrian Bridge, the astronomical cost of 10 to 12 million dollars for such a project, while keeping in mind that there are many other worthy projects in Kings County that could use funding.

#### Recommendation #4

Considering the maintenance that a pedestrian bridge would require, and the probable non usage of such a bridge, the Board of Supervisors should not go forward with the Kettleman City Pedestrian Bridge. Other options should be installed such as the HAWK signal system, lighted crosswalk, roundabouts, or extra flashing lights.

#### Required Responses

Kings County Board of Supervisors  
Kings County Department of Public Works  
Caltrans  
Reef Sunset Unified School District

