

## An Interview with Jeff Hereford Principal Civil Engineer for Transportation, City of Ventura

### 1. Tell our readers about your background. How did you decide to go into the field of Transportation Engineering?

I originally went to college to become an accountant but found out it was a subject matter that I just didn't enjoy. I knew that I wanted to get a degree that I could get a good job with after graduation and since, I was always a pretty decent math student, I decided I would try out Engineering. To make a long story short I went into Civil Engineering and found that I liked the subject matter and in particular I really enjoyed the wastewater classes. However, when there was a student intern opportunity that opened up, it was in transportation. Specifically, it was working for the Texas Department of Transportation.

Once at TxDOT I knew that I wanted to work in the field of transportation. My first project I worked on in 1992 at TxDOT was evaluating a four lane arterial for the potential of doing a "road diet" and converting it to a three lane roadway. I used CORSIM (CORridor SIMulation) software to do my evaluation and I found it very interesting. From TxDOT I graduated and worked on the private side of things for five years before getting my job at the City of Ventura as a Transportation Engineer. I have been at the City now for 18 years and have really enjoyed my work at the City.

### 2. Do you have a favorite local street? What makes it great?

My favorite street in the City is Pierpont Boulevard. Pierpont Boulevard parallels the beach with access to a beautiful park to the south, a wonderful bike path to the north, residential and commercial space to the east and west, and of course access to the beach along the entire stretch.

When I first got to the City, Pierpont Boulevard was a four lane roadway with a shared parking and bike lane. One of my first projects that I worked on was converting this roadway to a three lane cross section with a dedicated center turn lane and bike lane. Having grown up in the area and knowing the community, I thought this would be a perfect stretch of roadway to do one of the City's first roadway re-purposing projects. We went to the community council meeting and received support from the community to make the change.

Since that change was made about 15 years ago, it is hard to believe that it was ever a four lane roadway! I really enjoy taking the family for bike rides along this stretch of roadway and continue north along the Omer Rains coastal bike trail. I also really love how the community has embraced their area and has done their own work in beautifying the median with planting different varieties of plants. It is a great roadway to both walk, bike, and drive along!



### 3. What current projects are you working on in your city that are most exciting to you?

We are working on such a variety of transportation projects that it is really hard to say which one excites me the most. With that being said, however, I am really enjoying the projects related to Active Transportation (walking, biking, and other non-motorized modes). There is so much grant funding available right now that will pay for a wide range of Active transportation. We are just finishing the construction of a project in the City's Westside that constructed a series of pedestrian improvements along Ventura Avenue and a brand new sidewalk along Cedar Street. This was funded by an Active Transportation Program grant for \$1.5 Million.

I am also very excited about a project we are working on completing along Telegraph Road between Mills and Ashwood. This project will widen the road at three properties to match the ultimate curb lines so that we can provide full bike lines along this entire stretch of Telegraph Road. The project also includes improved pedestrian crossings and a new traffic signal. It has been a very involved project due to right of way acquisition, utility relocation, and dealing with federal grant funds!

With the passage of the City's local sales tax (Measure O) and Senate Bill 1 there is funding for several street overlays throughout the City. For a Transportation Engineer overlays mean an opportunity to look at a stretch of roadway and see if it can be striped in a way that will work better for current and future conditions. In the next five years there are several roadways that will be overlayed and restriped to better accommodate all users of the roadways.



#### **4. How does transportation engineering contribute to making more livable communities?**

There are so many ways in which transportation engineering contributes to making a community more livable. Transportation Engineers can incorporate several different bicycle/pedestrian design features into different projects. This could include:

- relooking at roadway striping to improve bike lanes in a repaving project
- utilizing different types of crosswalk treatments during a new traffic signal installation
- improving pedestrian crossings at uncontrolled locations during a development plan review
- providing space for art/public seating areas during an intersection improvement project that installs curb extensions.

Now more than ever, Active Transportation has become common practice, and there are so many design guidelines being published that demonstrate best practices when designing. In addition, the State of California has dedicated funding for the design and construction of active transportation projects that improve the ability to get out of your vehicle and get somewhere safely and in a timely manner. It is a very exciting time to be in the field of Transportation Engineering.

#### **5. As our population ages, how will that impact mobility needs in your community?**

As our community ages, it will be important to continue our efforts in diversifying transportation options throughout the City. This can be accomplished through the implementation of improving pedestrian facilities and making the City a more "walkable" environment, continuing to improve the safety of the city's roadway network, and providing a robust transit system that can meet the needs of all users.

One thing we just finished doing to improve the "walkability" of our roadways is we increased the pedestrian crossing times at all of our signalized intersections. We changed the crossing times so that they are based upon a 3.5 feet per second walking speed rather than the previous walking speed of 4.0 feet per second. This will significantly improve the time people have in crossing the street at a signalized intersection.



**6. What are some challenges you face in designing “streets for all ages/abilities” and “complete streets”?**

The City of Ventura has not adopted a complete streets policy so sometimes it is difficult to get designs through the political process before it even has a chance to hit the streets. We are considering applying for a non-infrastructure grant through the Active Transportation Program to assist us with funding a Mobility Plan which would include a complete streets policy. With that being said, we do design components of a complete street on many of our transportation projects especially related to our repaving projects. One of the biggest challenges we have during those projects is balancing vehicle lane/bicycle lane/parking lane widths and, in some cases, the potential of removing on street parking. One of the challenges is also in making more significant changes where we would like to reduce the number of travel lanes. In those cases it is very important that we involve the community directly impacted by the changes and gain their support.

**7. What is the biggest traffic related myth or misunderstanding you’d like to dispel?**

That's a very good question. Probably the biggest myth to dispel is in regards to the installation of stop signs. Here at the City we receive lots of requests to install stop signs and these are usually associated with trying to slow cars down in a neighborhood. The reality is we can't just install stop signs since there are guidelines that we must adhere to and studies have shown that stop signs normally do not slow traffic down and in some cases actually increases speeds. So I guess the myth to dispel is that the installation of a stop sign will solve your neighborhood speeding issues.



**8. What transportation technologies will have the greatest impact in your city the next 2-3 years? How about in the next 10 years?**

The City of Ventura is getting started on an Advanced Traffic Management System (ATMS) which will completely upgrade the City's current traffic signal system. This includes new traffic signal system software, a new communication system that will utilize fiber optic technologies, and a complete change out of all the City's 137 traffic signal controllers. Some of the City's controllers are upwards of 30 years old. This project is a long time coming and is very exciting. Funding for this project is from the local sales tax (Measure O) that was recently approved by the residents of Ventura. From a technological standpoint this project will have the greatest impact on the City's transportation system in the near and distant future.

**9. What are some great projects from other cities (either in Ventura County or around the world) that inspire your work in Ventura?**

When I am out traveling around in other cities or I read about project success stories, I really enjoy seeing innovative Active Transportation projects. I love seeing successful protected bike lane projects being implemented or simple things like on street bike parking, or I just saw a pedestrian scramble that was installed in the city of Carlsbad (on a Caltrans facility!). I think I like seeing these smaller type improvement projects because I can visualize seeing them being completed in my own city.

Jeff Hereford P.E., T.E.  
Principal Civil Engineer for Transportation  
City of Ventura

