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****Press Release****

SFMTA Launches the Powell Street Safety & Sidewalk Improvement Pilot

A Study On Restricted Access to Private Automobiles on Powell between Ellis & O'Farrell streets

San Francisco—The San Francisco Municipal Transportation Agency (SFMTA), which oversees all transportation in the city, including the Municipal Railway (Muni), unveils the Powell Street Safety & Sidewalk Improvement Pilot. Unanimously approved by the San Francisco Municipal Transportation Board, during its November 3 session, the pilot aims to improve safety for people walking along Powell and free cable cars from traffic congestion in the area.

“The pilot plan restricts turns and vehicles, without commercial license plates, from the block of Powell between Ellis and O’Farrell,” said Tom Nolan SFMTA Board Chairman. “Similar restrictions were launched on Market Street, between Third and Eighth streets in August, and are showing promise in congestion reduction.”

The lanes on Powell Street are now painted red in both directions between Ellis and O’Farrell, which denote “transit only” lanes limiting access to Muni vehicles, Paratransit and color-schemed taxicabs and vehicles with commercial license plates. For the next 18-months, private vehicles will not be allowed on the Powell Street red painted lanes during the pilot.

“One of our top priorities was to collaborate with merchants and hotel establishments to best determine what would work for them to make a safer Powell Street,” said SFMTA Director of Transportation, Ed Reiskin. “The pilot design reflects their feedback, while at the same time making the street safer for pedestrians and for our staff and riders of the iconic cable car network.”

More than 4,000 people per hour walk along picturesque Powell at peak times. The large number of people crossing the street makes it difficult and dangerous for cars to turn onto or off of Powell. Consequently, by reducing the number of vehicles on Powell, safety is enhanced. The SFMTA is cognizant that Powell is home to thriving boutique hotels that greet their guests curbside. In furtherance of that experience, private vehicles will be permitted on southbound Powell, between O’Farrell and Geary, for the purpose of

passenger loading only. However, vehicles proceeding southbound without stopping to load or unload are subject to citation.

“Guests of our City are attracted to Powell Street for the charm that the cable car brings, the unique hotels located there coupled with al fresco dining nearly year-round,” said Karin Flood, Executive Director of the Union Square BID. “Limiting vehicle access heightens the outdoor dining experience, improves pedestrian safety, while elevating the visitor experience – starting at the curbside.”

The pilot will also study a separate set of restrictions between O’Farrell and Geary. Between these two streets, only the northbound lane of Powell will carry red paint. The southbound lane will remain blacktop, yet new restrictions will be in place. These restrictions are meant to dramatically reduce the number of pedestrian versus auto collisions being experienced on a street with San Francisco’s second-highest walking volume.

Powell Street, from Union Square to Market Street, is also the launching point for the historic Powell-Hyde and Powell-Mason cable car lines. However, extreme traffic congestion starting at Ellis Street may be the root of a potentially dangerous mechanical problem for the iconic streetcars. Since the year 2000, the SFMTA has documented a nearly 50 percent increase in cable stranding or breaks in the cable. This accelerated wear on the cable has serious safety implications. So the pilot program will study if the dedicated red transit lanes, for the cable cars, will lessen the cable stranding issues.

The SFMTA remains committed to the Vision Zero policy: elimination of all traffic injuries and death by 2024. However, we know that from 2010 – 2014, this section of Powell has experienced 25 reported collisions that resulted in 18 cases of injury. Most of the collisions occurred at Geary Street or between Geary and O’Farrell streets.

The Powell Street Pilot seeks to reduce traffic volume by 80 percent: by installing turn restrictions at the three intersections in the project area, designating active loading zones on Powell Street to either commercial or passenger loading zones, and creating 11 new commercial loading spaces in the area.

The Powell Street Pilot overview:

- Powell between Ellis and Geary will be closed to through traffic during an 18-month pilot period.
- The street surface will be painted red on both sides of Powell between Ellis & O’Farrell streets, and on the northbound lane only between O’Farrell & Geary.
- Southbound Powell between O’Farrell & Geary WILL NOT carry red paint; however, through traffic IS NOT permitted. Brief passenger loading and unloading is permitted on this segment only.
- Vehicles proceeding southbound on Powell, from the Geary intersection, without stopping to load or unload are subject to citation.
- Non-commercial vehicles are never allowed on the red painted lanes.

For more information please visit: [The Powell Street Safety & Sidewalk Improvement Pilot.](#)

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Established by voter proposition in 1999, the SFMTA, a department of the City and County of San Francisco, oversees the Municipal Railway (Muni), parking and traffic, bicycling, walking and taxis. With five modes of transit, Muni has approximately 700,000 passenger boardings each day. Over 1 million people get around this city each day and rely on the SFMTA to ensure safe and reliable travel by transit, walking, bicycling, taxi and driving.

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