

PHOENIX REPUBLIC

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OUR VIEW

Reverse-lane changes achieve nothing

Improvements to the reverse lanes in downtown Phoenix are not moving past the roadblock that is common sense.

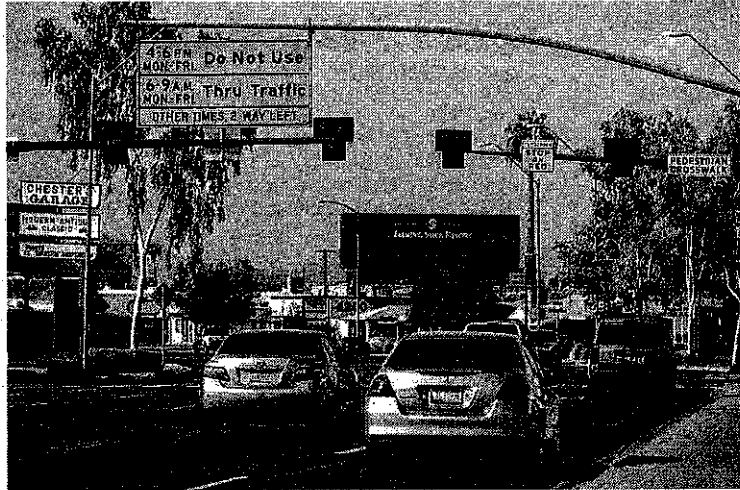
The City Council agreed this month to replace text signs with symbol signs it believes will better explain how to use the lanes. But the new signs are just as static as the old signs.

Even with new yellow lights flashing above them, drivers still will have to read and comprehend them. And drivers may take the yellow lights to mean to proceed with caution and slow traffic flow.

Instead of making reverse lanes better, the council has made them worse.

The committee that studied reverse lanes considered using red and green Xs over the turn lane, but rejected them because federal regulations pushed their cost to \$21.1 million.

The city needs only a single light over the center lane to flash green or red depending on the time of day and turn off the rest of the day. But the committee was opposed to a red light, fearing drivers would stop in the lane. It shouldn't have to be so costly or complicated to make



Traffic flows south on Seventh Avenue in Phoenix. The sign at upper left is over what is often referred to as the "suicide lane." THE REPUBLIC

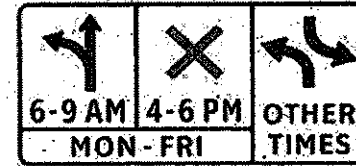
reverse lanes work.

The city will spend \$6.8 million in changes that will do nothing to advance the years-long debate over safety risks on the lanes, which aim to move downtown traffic more efficiently during rush hours.

The center lane is used as a southbound lane from Northern Avenue to McDowell Road on Seventh Avenue, and from Dun-

lap Avenue to McDowell on Seventh Street, from 6 to 9 a.m. weekdays, then as northbound lanes from 4 to 6 p.m.

Rudeness and unfamiliarity with the concept have led to accidents, illegal left turns and cut-through traffic in neighborhoods, which prompted area residents and merchants to ask the city to end what they dubbed "suicide lanes."



This sign uses universal symbols to tell drivers how and when to use reverse lanes. CITY OF PHOENIX

Instead of finding real solutions when it had the chance in 2009, the council passed it off to a committee, which wasn't created until 2010 because everyone's focus had turned to the tanking economy. Two years later, the council finally takes action and the improvements stink.

Studies have shown that the reverse lanes are not any more dangerous than other city streets. Reverse lanes create an extra through-lane during the busiest times of the weekday. They ease traffic congestion, and reduce pollution and drive time. They are popular with north Phoenix commuters and serve as alternatives to Arizona 51 and light rail.

They could be made safer

with the right kind of improvements that would make it clear how the lanes are supposed to be used. The right kind of signs and symbols would have enhanced other improvements, such as allowing left-turn access to homes and businesses.

The city also will install signals at Camelback Road and Seventh Avenue to allow traffic to turn left when reverse-lane hours are in effect. Currently, there are no arrows at the intersection and drivers can turn left only outside of reverse-lane hours. This responds to complaints that drivers are cutting through neighborhoods. It remains to be seen if it will improve safety or create more congestion.

Officials will gauge over the next year the arrows' effectiveness and determine whether other left turns are needed. Had this been done in 2009, the adjustments would already be set.

But then, the City Council and staff have been afraid to make any meaningful changes on the reversible lanes. They have merely burned time and energy, accomplishing nothing. That is unacceptable.