



To:	Department Directors and Division Heads
From:	Michael J. Wright, City Administrator
Subject:	City Transportation Language Policy
Date:	November 14, 1996

Please be advised that the City of West Palm Beach has adopted a new transportation language policy. Employees are asked to follow the policy and encourage those who deal with the City to do the same. The intent of the policy is to remove the biases inherent in some of the current transportation language used at the City. This change is consistent with the shift in philosophy as the City works towards becoming a sustainable community. Objective language will be used for all correspondences, resolutions, ordinances, plans, language at meetings, etc. and when updating past work.

Everyone's cooperation will be greatly appreciated. Please ensure that your employees are aware of, and use, the objective language. After a few of weeks of practice, using the objective language will become second nature.

**Background**: Much of the current transportation language was developed in the 1950's and 1960's. This was the golden age of automobiles and accommodating them was a major priority in society. Times have changed, especially in urban areas where creating a balanced, equitable, and sustainable transportation system is the new priority. The transportation language has not evolved at the same pace as the changing priorities; much of it still carries a pro-automobile bias. Continued use of biased language is not in keeping with the goal of addressing transportation issues in an objective way in the City.

**Languages Changes**: There are several biased words and phrases that have been identified and summarized at the end of this memo. Suggested objective language is also summarized. The rationale for the changes is explained below. In summary, the City has to be unbiased, and appear to be unbiased. Objective language will also allow the City to be inclusive of all of the City's constituents and modes of transportation.

The word *improvements* is often used when referring to the addition of through lanes, turn lanes, channelization, or other means of increasing motor vehicle capacity and/or speeds. Though these changes may indeed be *improvements* from the perspective of motor vehicle users, they would not be considered *improvements* by other constituents of the City. For example, a resident may not think that adding more lanes in front of the resident's house is an *improvement*. A parent may not think that a channelized right turn lane is an *improvements* on their child's pedestrian route to school. By City staff referring to these changes as *improvements*, it indicates that the City is biased in favor of one group at the expense of others. Suggested objective language includes being descriptive (e.g. use <u>through lanes</u>, <u>turn lanes</u>, etc.) or using language such as <u>modifications</u> or <u>changes</u>.

Examples:	Biased: The following street <i>improvements</i> are recommended.	
		The intersection <i>improvement</i> will cost \$5,000.00.
		The motor vehicle capacity will be <i>improved</i> .
	Objective:	The following street modifications are recommended.
		The right turn channel will cost \$5,000.00.
		The motor vehicle capacity will be <u>changed</u> .

Like *improved* and *improvement*, there are similarly biased words such as *enhance*, *enhancement*, and *deteriorate*. Suggested objective language is shown in the examples below.

Examples:	Biased: The level of service for motor vehicles was enhanced.	
		The level of service for motor vehicles deteriorated.
		The motor vehicle capacity <i>enhancements</i> will cost \$40,000.00.
	Objective:	The level of service for motor vehicles was changed.
		The level of service for motor vehicles was decreased.
		The level of service for motor vehicles was increased.
		The <u>increases</u> to motor vehicle capacity will cost \$40,000.00.

*Upgrade* is a term that is currently used to describe what happens when a local street is <u>reconstructed</u> as a collector, or when a two-lane street is <u>expanded</u> to four lanes. *Upgrade* implies a change for the better. Though this may be the case for one constituent, others may disagree. Again, using *upgrade* in this way indicates that the City has a bias that favors one group over other groups. Objective language includes *expansion, reconstruction, widened,* or *changed*.

Examples:Biased: Upgrading the street will require a wider right of way.<br/>The upgrades will lengthen sight distances.Objective:Widening the street will require a wider right of way.<br/>The changes will lengthen sight distances.

*Level of service* is a qualitative measure describing the operational conditions of a facility or service from the perspective of a particular set of users (motor vehicle users, cyclists, pedestrians, etc.). If the set of users is not specified, then it is a mystery as to which set is being considered. The bias enters the picture when it is assumed that, unless otherwise specified, *level of service* implies for motor vehicle users. The objective way to use this term is to add the appropriate modifier after "level of service".

Examples:	Biased: The level of service was "A".		
	Objective:	The level of service for motor vehicle users was "A".	
		The level of service for pedestrians was "A".	

If "level of service" were used frequently for the same users in the same document, using the modifier every time would be cumbersome. In these situations, the modifier is only required at the beginning of the document and periodically after that.

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*Traffic* is often used synonymously with <u>motor vehicle traffic</u>. However, there are several types of traffic in the City: pedestrian traffic, cycle traffic, and train traffic. To be objective, if you mean <u>motor vehicle traffic</u>, then say <u>motor vehicle traffic</u>. If you mean all the types of traffic, then say <u>traffic</u>.

Examples:	Biased: The problem is speeding <i>traffic</i> .	
		The <i>traffic</i> queued back for one mile.
	Objective:	The problem is speeding motor vehicles.
		The motor vehicles queued back for one mile.

At the City, we frequently discuss the concept of *traffic demand*, fluctuations in *traffic demand*, peak hour *traffic demand*, etc. Not withstanding the concerns about the word *traffic*, the concept of *traffic demand* contains a bias. There is really no such thing as *demand* for *traffic*; *traffic* is not a commodity that most people desire. *Demand* is an overly strong word which implies a sense of urgency which does not necessarily exist at the City, especially considering the shift in priorities as discussed at the beginning of this memo. Objective language would be motor vehicle use or travel demand.

Examples:	Biased: The <i>traffic demand</i> will increase.	
		The <i>traffic demand</i> projections will be complete soon.
		The peak hour <i>traffic demand</i> is falling.
	Objective:	Motor vehicle use will increase.
		Travel demand will increase.
		The projections of <u>motor vehicle use</u> will be complete soon.
		The peak hour motor vehicle use is falling.

Promoting *alternative* modes of transportation is generally considered a good thing at the City. However, the word *alternative* begs the question, "Alternative to what?" The assumption is alternative to automobiles. *Alternative* also implies that these *alternative* modes are nontraditional or nonconventional which is not the case with the pedestrian, cycle, nor transit modes. If we are discussing *alternative* modes of transportation in the City, then use direct and objective language such as <u>non-automobile</u> modes of transportation. Alternatively, one can add an appropriate modifier as shown in the last example.

Examples: Biased: *Alternative* modes of transportation are important to downtown.

Objective: <u>Non-automobile</u> modes of transportation are important to the downtown.

<u>Non-motorized</u> modes of transportation are important to the downtown.

Alternative modes of transportation <u>to the automobile</u> are important to the downtown.

Accidents are events during which something harmful or unlucky happens unexpectedly or by chance. Accident implies no fault. It is well known that the vast majority of accidents are preventable and that fault can be assigned. The use of accident also reduces the degree of

responsibility and severity associated with the situation and invokes a inherent degree of sympathy for the person responsible. Objective language includes <u>collision</u> and <u>crash</u>.

Examples:	Biased: Motor vehicle accidents kill 200 people every year in the County.	
		He had an <i>accident</i> with a light pole.
		Here is the <i>accident</i> report.
	Objective:	Motor vehicle <u>collisions</u> kill 200 people every year in the County.
	-	He <u>crashed</u> into a light pole.
		Here is the <u>collision</u> report.

*Protect* means shielding from harm. However, when we discuss *protecting* land for a right of way for a road, the intent is not to shield the land from harm, but to construct a road over it. Objective words include <u>designate</u> and <u>purchase</u>.

Examples: Biased:We have *protected* this right of way. Objective: We have <u>purchased</u> this right of way. We have <u>designated</u> this a right of way.

Everyone at the City should strive to make the transportation systems operate as *efficiently* as possible. However, we must be careful how we use *efficient* because that word is frequently confused with the word <u>faster</u>. Typically, *efficiency* issues are raised when dealing with motor vehicles operating at slow speeds. The assumption is that if changes were made that increase the speeds of the motor vehicles, then efficiency rises. However, this assumption is highly debatable. For example, high motor vehicle speeds lead to urban sprawl, motor vehicle dependence, and high resource use (land, metal, rubber, etc) which reduces efficiency. Motor vehicles burn the least fuel at about 30 miles per hour; speeds above this result in inefficiencies. In urban areas, accelerating and decelerating from stopped conditions to high speeds results in inefficiencies when compared to slow and steady speeds. The there also are efficiency debates about people's travel time and other issues as well. Therefore, be careful how you use the word *efficient* at the City. If you really mean <u>faster</u> then say <u>faster</u>. Do not assume that faster is necessarily more efficient. Similarly, if you mean <u>slower</u>, then say <u>slower</u>.

Examples: Biased:The traffic signal timings were adjusted to increase motor vehicle *efficiency*.

Let us widen the road so that cars operate more *efficiently*.

Objective: The traffic signal timings were adjusted to <u>increase</u> motor vehicle <u>speeds</u>.

Let us widen the road so that it cars operate <u>faster</u>.

## Summary

**Biased Terms** 

**Objective Terms** 

improve

change, modify

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enhance, deteriorate	change, increase, decrease
upgrade	change, redesignate, expand, widen, replace
level of service	level of service for
traffic	motor vehicles
traffic demand	motor vehicle use
accident	collision, crash
protect	purchase, designate
efficient	fast

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