



Complete Streets Big and Small

A San Joaquin Valley Economic Development Tool

The streets that connect residents and visitors to homes, schools, businesses and places of livelihood in San Joaquin Valley communities present opportunities for economic growth. Local governments can maximize these public assets by building Complete Streets — streets that provide safe, easy access and greater mobility for people who are walking, bicycling, driving or riding public transit.

“Complete Streets” are roadways that safely and comfortably serve all users, including motorists, cyclists, pedestrians, transit and school-bus riders, delivery and service drivers, haulers and emergency responders. Users include people of all ages and abilities. Complete Street designs take into consideration the entire right of way, including the road and sidewalk, and the relationship to surrounding properties.



Complete Streets are affordable

Complete Streets can be developed incrementally and at different cost scales. They help transportation projects achieve more with less by providing multiple benefits to the community. When sidewalks, bike lanes, transit amenities and safe crosswalks are integrated into initial design, agencies can avoid costly retrofits, emergency-response expenses and increased healthcare costs.

A community’s existing transportation budget can incorporate some Complete Streets improvements with little to no additional money, by re-prioritizing projects and funds to support multiple modes of travel. Many ways to create more complete roadways are low-cost, fast-to-implement, and high-impact.

In a 2012 analysis, transportation staff in Charlotte, NC, found that complete-street components (specifically bike lanes and sidewalks) only slightly increased the cost of a project (by about 3-5%). In cases where complete-street design elements replace larger car-infrastructure requirements, the cost may remain constant or decrease.¹

Carlsbad, CA, implemented traffic-calming measures in 2012 and avoided expensive stormwater treatment costs as part of a construction project along Valley Street and Magnolia Avenue. Narrowing the roadway from 40 to 34 feet reduced vehicle speeds, improved safety, and saved the City more than \$78,000. Future repaving costs will also be lower.²

The Town of Bridgeport in Mono County, CA, took advantage of a Caltrans repaving project to reduce the number of lanes and add angled parking and bicycle lanes on its Main Street, U.S. 395. The result: a slower, safer, more comfortable street where it’s easier to park and frequent local businesses.

A factsheet from



Complete Streets reduce health and safety costs

Complete Streets policies encourage communities to begin retrofitting poorly designed roads by adding sidewalks, curb ramps and bicycle facilities, reducing crossing distances, and installing crosswalks and better bus stops to make walking and biking safer and more inviting. Redesigns help lower speeds and reduce points of conflict between motorists and between cars and pedestrians.

The money saved by preventing injuries and fatalities can more than offset the costs of improving our streets and roads.

The National Safety Council estimates the comprehensive cost — including economic costs and diminished quality of life — for each traffic death at \$4.3 million. If you multiply that figure by the 6,957 pedestrians killed in California from 2000 to 2009, the total cost is nearly \$30 billion.³

Reducing fatalities by just 10% would have saved an estimated \$3 billion statewide.

Complete Streets can also save health costs by helping people become more physically active and by reducing car use and automobile-generated pollution.

One California study showed that obesity rates were about 10% in those who drove the least, compared to almost 30% in those who drove the most.⁴

New Policy and Incentives

Complete Streets Act, Smart Mobility Framework, SB 375.

The California Complete Streets Act of 2008 requires cities and counties to integrate Complete Streets networks into the circulation element of their General Plan. Funding support to plan and build these networks is provided through:

- Caltrans Sustainable Communities Planning grants (planning)
- Active Transportation Program (ATP) grants (planning and implementation)
- Affordable Housing and Sustainable Communities grants (implementation)

Another study showed that California children who lived near busy roads gained more weight over eight years than those in low-traffic neighborhoods.⁵

Health research is clear about the benefits of increased physical activity. A variety of research studies have shown that corridors and communities with more non-motorized infrastructure have more people, including children, walking and bicycling, and in fact encourage such activity.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's "Recommended Community Strategies and Measurements to Prevent Obesity in the United States" lists Complete Streets policy adoption as one of 24 strategies to help reverse the obesity epidemic.⁶



Complete Streets stimulate economic activity and investment

Complete Streets are good for business.

"Several studies have found that pedestrians, transit users, and bicyclists routinely visit stores along commercial strips in urban areas more often and spend more money overall than do patrons who drive," according to a literature review conducted by Caltrans. Their review also found that pedestrian improvements to a downtown business area were associated with both increased pedestrian traffic and increased property values.⁷

Complete Streets improvements are a readily available economic development tool. They can provide simpler development strategies to implement because municipalities own or control the public right of way. When combined with supportive zoning and increased land-use efficiencies, Complete Streets create optimal conditions for private enhancements and infill development.

Investment in Complete Streets is especially useful to help re-invigorate underperforming

land uses served by corridors oversized for moving cars at the expense of other travel modes.

The San Joaquin Valley is blessed with a number of ingredients for developing recreation and bicycling culture and industry, including a favorable climate and terrain, and an abundance of open space.

A 2013 report on the economic impacts of walking and bicycling in Sonoma County found that these travel modes aided the region's business vitality, employment base and property values.⁸

A 2012 report on the economic impacts of bicycling and walking in Vermont found that totals from bicycle-pedestrian infrastructure and program expenditures, bicycle-pedestrian event tourism and bicycle-pedestrian-oriented businesses resulted in a total 2009 economic contribution of \$82.7 million in output, and more than 1,400 jobs with \$40.9 million in labor earnings (wages and salaries plus proprietor income) — \$1.6 million in net state tax and fee revenues.⁹



BEFORE



AFTER

People-Friendly Improvements for First Street | Livermore, California

In Livermore (population 84,000), the transformation of First Street from a wide, noisy arterial into a people- and business-friendly main street in 2006 was the keystone improvement in the City's Downtown Plan.

To stimulate near-term downtown investment, the City narrowed the roadway from four to two lanes, used the outside lane for diagonal parking and a second row of trees with flexible dining in the parking space, widened the sidewalks, created seating areas for pedestrians, and replaced a wide right-turn slip lane with a new park plaza and fountain.

Pedestrians have much shorter crossing distances, parking and trees buffer the sidewalk from traffic, and parking was expanded from 75 to 101 spaces.

Downtown merchants celebrated completion of the First Street streetscape project in November 2005, at the conclusion of major construction

activity. After the New Year, several of the merchants reported that the holiday shopping season had been their most successful season ever.

Final details of the \$12 million streetscape project were completed in 2006. The former Redevelopment Agency contributed 44% of the cost, with the remaining 56% paid by a General Fund loan that is being repaid from development impact fees and a grant acquired by the City.

Private funds maintain the street (through a maintenance district), and the streetscape improvements stimulated private investment in storefront and interior store improvements, serving as a catalyst to bring new business to downtown.

Livermore's new Downtown Main Street is the setting for significant new investment in new restaurants, shops and offices, a regional theater, and a high-profile multi-screen movie theater, as well as nearby infill housing. Five new businesses opened shortly after the project was completed.

Sales tax increases in the downtown increased more than in the rest of the city (5% versus 3%).

"The increase in biking and walking has been dramatic. Downtown was a ghost town prior to this project, very few people would go there to dine or shop. Now there are people throughout the downtown day and night, weekdays and weekends," said Debbie Bell, with the City of Livermore. "There is always a feeling of energy due to the number of people around. Many people and families ride their bikes to First Street as evidenced by at-capacity bike racks and requests for additional bike parking."

The City adopted a Complete Streets policy in 2013 and amended the General Plan Circulation Element in 2014 to further formalize language already in place and incorporate the vision, principles, implementation and exemption elements adopted in the City's Complete Streets Policy.

photos: City of Livermore



BEFORE



AFTER

Flagpole Plaza

Rebranding Lancaster Boulevard | Lancaster, California

Lancaster Boulevard was a high-speed, five-lane road built primarily for moving cars through Lancaster, a city of 160,000 people. In 2010, a nine-block downtown segment of the corridor was converted to a two-lane street, slowing cars and allowing removal of traffic signals.

The lane reduction made room for a central “rambla” median patterned after the design of a street in Barcelona, providing flexible space that accommodates parking, outdoor seating, lighting, art, trees, kiosks, vendors and community events. Sidewalks were also widened to provide additional space for walking, outside dining and lighting.

Rebranded as “The BLVD,” Lancaster’s complete-streets redesign made the street safer and inviting for pedestrians and bicyclists, helping to establish it as a retail and entertainment destination and a hub for community events such as farmers’ markets and holiday festivals.

Car traffic remains steady but at a speed that allows people walking and biking to feel comfortable. By 2013, three years after project completion, traffic collisions fell by nearly one third, and injuries among all users decreased by 67%.

The \$11.6 million public investment in the project sparked an estimated \$125 million in private

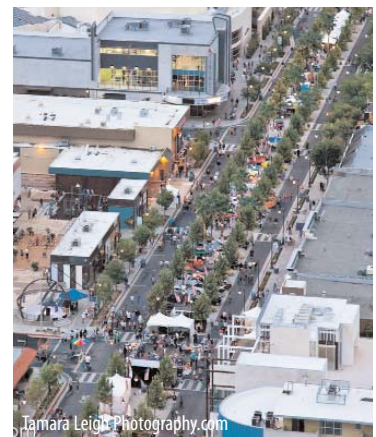


The complete-streets redesign made Lancaster Boulevard safer and inviting for pedestrians and bicyclists, and helped to establish it as a retail/entertainment destination and a hub for community events.

investment — and has generated more than \$273 million in total economic output.

Over 40 new shops, restaurants and businesses opened along the street, along with a new park and museum. Downtown property values increased 9.5% and sales revenue is up 96%, compared to pre-construction 2007 revenue.

More than 800 new jobs were created and 807 new housing units were constructed or rehabilitated along or near the corridor.



Tamara Leigh Photography.com

photos (top-bottom): City of Lancaster





BEFORE



AFTER

Placemaking on La Jolla Boulevard – Bird Rock | San Diego, California

The Bird Rock neighborhood is located south of La Jolla in San Diego, with a population of about 16,000. La Jolla Boulevard, the primary route through the neighborhood, was a high-volume road that suffered from blight due to high speeds (38-42 mph), lack of safe pedestrian crossings, parking constraints, struggling businesses and inadequate public space.

After a period of visioning, the community settled on a plan to alter the boulevard using Complete Street concepts. Construction began in 2007.

Five roundabouts, 10-foot landscaped medians, pedestrian crossings and plazas, and diagonal parking were constructed. Traffic efficiency from the roundabouts enabled the number of lanes to be reduced from five to two, improving safety and

maintaining capacity of up to 25,000 vehicles per day.

The pedestrian crossing distance was reduced from 68 feet across five lanes of traffic to two 14-foot crossings across one lane of traffic at a time, with a median refuge in the center of the street.

The roundabouts reduced speeds to about 15-20 mph, substantially reducing both the number and severity of crashes. The reduction in lanes made space available for bike lanes, pedestrian seating and plazas, landscaped medians and other beautification treatments.

The accompanying reduction in traffic noise has been hailed as one of the project's greatest benefits, with a considerable reduction in measured decibels. As a result, sidewalk cafes and strolling

conversations are now common in the area. Thriving businesses, sidewalk seating, outdoor sales and chance encounters with neighbors have made La Jolla Boulevard a community-gathering place.

Landscaped roundabouts and medians combined with diagonal parking spaces create a village atmosphere that promotes more walking and better accommodates outdoor activities.

The project triggered substantial revitalization of the adjacent businesses, and spurred a number of new projects, including a 139-unit condominium development, several new mixed-use developments, a major drug store, and a coffee shop. A survey of tax receipts among 95 businesses along the corridor showed a 20% boost in sales.



BEFORE



AFTER

Downtown Lodi, California

A \$4.5 million investment in downtown Lodi (population 63,000) to retrofit five main-street blocks combined with economic development incentives led to 60 new businesses, a drop in the vacancy rate from 18% to 6%, and a 35% increase in downtown sales tax revenues during mid-2000 since the work was completed in 1997. Property valuation, measured by average rent per square foot, more than quadrupled.

The retrofit includes wider sidewalks, extended curbs at intersections, colored and textured paving, a gateway arch, landscaping, street furnishings and way-finding signs.

Downtown Lodi today has an old-town feel with restaurants, shops, wine bars and a movie theater. School Street was transformed into a walkable, lively downtown main street. Large trees were positioned between parked cars to shade and enclose the previously overly wide, sun-baked corridor.

The Downtown Gateway Arch creates a dramatic entrance to the district. Directory kiosks related to the gateway theme provide guidance for visitors.



BEFORE



Gateway Arch

AFTER



BEFORE



New Theater

AFTER



BEFORE



Elm Street

AFTER

Investing in Walkability | Decatur, Georgia

Steady investment in walkability for more than four decades has been central to reviving downtown Decatur, a town of 20,000 people located six miles west of Atlanta.

Efforts began with delisting the town's Main Street from the Georgia highway system, allowing more flexibility for street design changes, including installation of street trees and wider sidewalks. In advance of the 1996 Summer Olympics, Decatur acquired federal funds for more sidewalk improvements, new mid-block crosswalks, way-finding signage, and traffic signal upgrades.

The City has also focused on making transit stops attractive and accessible through its street design, such as ensuring curb heights don't impede bus service.

Creating a pedestrian-friendly environment has yielded returns. The downtown has seen significant investment in the last 15 years. More than 700 new housing units were built between 2000 and 2008. More than 100,000 square feet of new retail space has been added since 1999.

Decatur has required all downtown development to provide ground-floor retail space for more than a decade. Between 1996 and 2008, retail businesses and restaurants in this area more than doubled.

In 2003, more than 955 businesses and 9,820 employees were operating within a one-mile radius of the city's downtown district.

Decatur is committed to implementing complete streets throughout the city. But its small size does



not allow many large-scale capital projects to occur at once. Instead, the city relies on annual budget allocations and regional, state and federal funds and bond revenue issued in 2006 to provide matching dollars for grant funding.

The majority of Decatur's improvements are funded through modest annual budget allocations to target traffic-calming and re-striping improvements, and add sidewalks over time to every neighborhood street.



Hamburg, New York

The \$23 million reconstruction of a two-mile segment of U.S. Route 62 serving as the main street through Hamburg, a village of 10,000, improved safety and spurred economic revitalization.

Working with the New York State Department of Transportation and walkability expert Dan Burden, the village narrowed travel lanes, replaced traffic signals with roundabouts at four intersections, installed mid-block crosswalks, extended sidewalks, and installed enhanced on-street parking.

After the redesign, automobile traffic on Main Street increased by 24% but crashes were reduced by 66% and injuries were cut by 60%.

Business owners spent \$7 million on 33 building projects. The number of building permits rose from 15 in 2005 to 96 in 2010, and property values along Route 62 more than doubled over the same period.

Downtown Hamburg now boasts a low 3% vacancy rate, compared to 10% across the village. In 2012, its Main Street was placed on the National Register of Historic Places, bringing tax incentives that can support further investment. Residents participate in civic activities along the street, including a soapbox derby and street-music festival.

"If you build a place for cars, it will be a gathering place for cars," said Laura Hackathorn, a village trustee. "If it's built for people, it will be a gathering place for people."

"You can't bring back a village without bringing back a street."

— Dan Burden, Blue Zones, LLC

Community Amenities for Historic Downtown Riverbank, California

Riverbank (population 24,000) revamped its historic downtown in 2009, investing about \$9 million in redevelopment funds for street and other improvements. The project spanned several blocks with a focus on the intersection of Santa Fe Avenue and Third Street.

The project undergrounded utilities, almost doubled the width of sidewalks, and added new curbs and gutters, a landscaped median to calm traffic and improve the look of Third Street, and angled parking along several streets to better serve businesses and reduce the need for off-street parking.

The City also installed bike racks on every corner and added benches throughout the area. Colorful murals and brick accents in street and sidewalk paving add visual interest. New street trees will increase shade throughout downtown.

A new plaza at the main intersection added the final touch, providing an attractive gathering place for residents and visitors.



Since the project was completed, five new businesses have opened downtown, creating about 30 jobs and generating new sales tax revenue.

Riverbank's downtown revitalization efforts won an award from the San Joaquin Valley Blueprint Awards Program in 2010.

Endnotes

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Castro Street



Civic Plaza

Castro Street | Mountain View, California

In the 1980's, Castro Street in Mountain View (population 77,000) was an underperforming, car-dominated arterial through the downtown. Sidewalks were narrow, the roadway wide, rents were low, vacancies numerous, and the area was deserted after dark.

The City resolved to turn Castro Street into the heart of the city with a \$12 million renovation completed in 1989. The four-lane road was converted to a three-lane, walkable street with 10-foot sidewalks and 18-foot wide, tree-shaded "flex zones" for on-street parking or outdoor dining in the commercial blocks and to a two-lane street with a wide median in the civic blocks.

Mid-block curb extensions with crosswalks were added to improve safety and circulation for pedestrians.

Bus shelters were designed as "civic umbrellas" accommodating shelter, seats and lean rails, while contributing to the street's identity.

Foot traffic increased along the street, and new businesses opened, particularly restaurants with outdoor dining. This economic growth not only translated into revenue for businesses, but also increased City revenue.

Castro Street's increased attractiveness to individuals and businesses helped attract new multi-family, pedestrian-oriented housing developments along the corridor and adjacent to nearby Caltrain and light-rail stations, including townhouses with individual entrances that face the sidewalk.

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