

# Woodrow Wilson Elementary School: Safe Routes to School Workshop Summary

Prepared for: Woodrow Wilson Elementary School

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## Recommendations Supporting Safer Routes to School & Healthy Community Design

On March 22, 2019 Woodrow Wilson Elementary School, along with the San Mateo County Departments of Education and Health, hosted a walk audit and healthy design workshop, facilitated by Mark Fenton. The intent was to develop recommendations to increase the safety of walking and bicycling to the school and reducing traffic hazards, with the goal of increasing the number of students actually walking and cycling while reducing the amount of vehicle traffic at school arrival and dismissal times.

Before the walk audit the group discussed the key elements that are known to increase walking and bicycling in a community. Mark summarized an overview of the research into what creates a more livable community generally, and settings that specifically encourage walking, bicycling, and transit use. This included the growing evidence that these factors not only support public health through increased physical activity, but also economic vibrancy, environmental sustainability, and quality of life. Four key characteristics of such thriving communities are as follows:

**A. Mixed land use patterns:** Compact development with different land uses and activities intermingled and close together, allowing for varied types of destinations within walking, cycling, and transit distance, while preserving open land and agricultural space. Neighborhood schools are thus integral to healthy and sustainable community design.

**B. Active transportation facilities:** A comprehensive and connected network of pedestrian, bicycle, and transit facilities, such as sidewalks, bicycle lanes, and non-motorized pathways, as well as frequent, affordable, quality transit service appropriate to the community scale, from dial-a-ride to scheduled buses.

**C. Functional site designs:** Destinations and routes are designed to reward, not punish, those who arrive on foot, by bike and transit, such as buildings at the sidewalk, with parking on-street or behind, and elements such as street trees and landscaping; street furnishings such as benches, shade structures, planters, and awnings; human scale lighting and way-finding signs; safe and appealing transit stops with cover, benches and schedule information; and quality, plentiful bicycle parking.

**D. Safety and access** for people of all ages, incomes, physical abilities and disabilities, including quality street crossings (e.g. highly visible markings, countdown timers and auditory pedestrian signals), full ADA-compliant design, and appropriately applied state of the art traffic calming such as curb extensions, chicanes, median islands, roundabouts, and lane narrowing and road diets.

## Recommendations and priorities

At the end of this report is a grid, and a rudimentary design map, with specific recommendations for actions that were generated during our working session. They are broken into the three Ps: programs (e.g. events, outreach, education, and promotional activities), projects (physical changes to infrastructure and the built environment), and policies (e.g. rules, ordinances, guidelines, practices, and procedures). And they are listed as short-term ideas that could be executed on the order of weeks to months, and longer-term initiatives estimated to take months to years. This makes clear that there are certainly some low cost, near term actions that can be pursued quickly to build momentum and begin making it safer for students immediately.

Following is a list of specific actions that should be high priorities, as they could lead to some fairly quick positive outcomes for walking and bicycling safely to school.

### 1. Launch a parent/caregiver, student, and neighborhood education program.

Workshop participants agreed that one of the greatest current safety issues is unsafe behavior by adults who are dropping off and picking up students by car. Double parking on both sides of streets by the school, illegal U-turns, and leaving unoccupied vehicles on the street as they run in to get children are particular problems. So a high priority is a program of outreach and education to parents and caregivers that has two specific goals:

- Encourage as many students as possible to be allowed to walk, and for older children to bicycle, to school. Make clear the myriad benefits, including evidence that more physically active students have been shown to perform better academically and have fewer disciplinary problems.
- If adults insist on driving to school, then make very clear the expected behavior to maximize the safety of everyone at the school, whether walking, cycling, or driving. This includes adhering to all traffic laws (e.g. no U-turns across the centerline), and following specific drop-off and pick-up locations and procedures, such as pulling up in sequence to the white curb areas, staying in the vehicle, and only allowing children in or out of the car at the curb, never in the street.



This program should also provide neighborhood outreach (e.g. through a school newsletter, flyers in mailboxes or on vehicle windshields, or even hosting an open house and picnic for neighbors) to explain traffic patterns,

procedures, and parking rules around the school. For example, the white-curbed loading/unloading zones on Santa Barbara Ave. and Miriam St. must be kept clear, but only from 8:00-8:30 am and 2:30-3:30 pm. Specific approaches suggested by the group included the following:

- A presentation by safety patrol students (with faculty support) on transportation and safety policies and procedures on ‘back to school’ night, at the community fair in May, and during any other gatherings of parents around school activities.
- At every opportunity continually reiterate the goal of having the maximum number of students possible walking to school, emphasizing the health, academic performance, and behavioral benefits to students, and safety benefits to absolutely everyone.
- Institutionalize school support and provide teachers with ways to recognize students who are frequent walkers – modest prizes, recognition at assemblies, etc.
- Generate maps indicating where there are clusters of students in surrounding neighborhoods, and suggest to parents that they create informal walking school buses so that each parent doesn’t have to walk with every student every day.

## 2. Restore active unloading/loading zones on Miriam St. and Santa Barbara Ave.

The white-curbed areas are designated active loading and unloading zones, which means there should be no parking there from 8:00-8:30 am and 2:30-3:30 pm.

Currently vehicles routinely park in these areas, and drivers regularly stop there and leave their cars to retrieve their students. These would be much safer, and ultimately more efficient, if the following procedures were implemented:

- The curbside lane can be coned off during the designated times, so that cars must move through in sequence (not just pull in and out anywhere), and drivers must stay with their vehicle.



- Unloading and loading should only be allowed at the curb – no children ever stepping out into the street.
- Safety patrol students or adults can act as valets, opening the curbside vehicle doors so that passengers get in and out quickly, and the driver can stay in the car.



- To ease connecting students with their car, one street could be designated for lower grades, the other for upper grades. At dismissal, students could queue in a particular area (say, near the Theta/Santa Barbara intersection) and only walk down to the loading area when their car is seen. Or an adult with a radio can be calling for students from a staging area as their cars pull up.
- Have safety patrol place cones across the school parking lot entrance at dismissal time, to preclude vehicles from pulling in there, as it's very dangerous for students walking out that way to Santa Barbara Avenue.

Although these steps may appear to slow the motor vehicle process, it will actually make it quite smooth and predictable, and take roughly the same amount of time. But drivers will have to be patient and wait their turn in an ordered way, which may be a disincentive to some drivers. The positive result may be an incentive to consider letting their children walk, which should be easier to do with the proposed safety enhancements and the opportunity to join neighborhood walking groups.

### **3. Encourage interested older students to bike to school.**

Bicycling to school is reasonable for older students coming from neighborhoods with safe routes for riding; some schools suggest students be in grade three or above, and have students pass a bicycling skills and safety course before being allowed to ride. The following ideas were suggested by the group:

- Provide bicycle skills and safety training class. This could be provided by a vetted, trained volunteer, or by PE instructors as a segment of PE class.
- Launch a recycle-a-bicycle program. Utilize experienced volunteer bike mechanics, using donated or found bikes to teach students bicycle maintenance, giving the bikes to those kids who complete the program.
- Provide free bike helmets, from the CA Office of Traffic Safety, and teach students how to wear them properly.
- Create a routine procedure to open the gate by the bike rack each morning and afternoon, but lock it during the day for security.

### **4. Install curb extensions at the critical intersections nearest the school.**

On the walk audit cars were frequently seen parked right next to the crosswalks at intersections. Curb extensions, or bump outs, extend the sidewalk at crosswalks to make crossing pedestrians more



visible and able to see traffic, preclude cars from parking illegally close to the crosswalk, shorten the crossing distance, and generally slow vehicle speeds. This may be easiest done as a phased approach as follows:

- First install pop-up curb extensions, using low cost and removable materials such as paint, cones, planters, rubber curbing material, and vertical delineators (flexible posts) to test their effectiveness in slowing traffic and improving pedestrian safety. (Two examples are pictured below). Specific intersections mentioned include:
  - Hillcrest Drive and Santa Barbara Avenue (photo at right).
  - Santa Barbara Avenue, at Theta and Vista Grande Avenues.
  - Miriam Street at Vista Grande Avenue.



- A number of intersections were seen to lack curb ramps for ADA access. Temporary wooden curb ramps can be installed at these intersections if they have pop-up curb extensions to protect the ramps from vehicles (photo right).
- Temporary curb extensions and ramps are specifically recommended for the red-curbed areas at the intersection of Theta and Santa Barbara Avenues.
- Whenever any of the roadways are repaved around the school, temporary curb extensions and ramps can be made permanent. These can include “green” infrastructure, such as natural plantings or swales that capture and allow some storm water to infiltrate the ground.
- In cases where there is a stop sign, it is usually advantageous to move stop signs out into the curb extension to make them much more visible to traffic.



## 5. Improve the John Daly Boulevard pedestrian crossing.

A number of students cross John Daly Boulevard, and more might walk from that direction if it were made to feel more safe. It is a very long crossing, but two things could be done to make it less threatening.

- Curb extensions could be placed on the frontage roads next to Daly Boulevard. Los Olivos and Los Banos Avenues on the north, and Knowles Avenue on the south all have on-street parking, and curb extensions at those crosswalks could help make them much shorter crossing distances.
- The median islands in Daly Avenue can be extended somewhat beyond the crosswalk (with the crosswalk cutting through island) so that the extended portion creates a protected refuge for pedestrians halfway across the street (see the photo example). In particular this protects pedestrians from left turning vehicles cutting the angle too sharply (both entering or turning off of John Daly Blvd.).



The focus of these steps is three-fold. First, make the area immediately around the school safer and more accessible (especially with curb extensions and curb ramps) for walking and bicycling. Second, organize the vehicle drop-off and pick-up to make it safer and more predictable, though not necessarily faster as that would simply be an incentive for more children to be driven. Third, generally promote walking (and for mature enough students, bicycling) as healthier for students and the environment, and as the preferred and recommended mode of travel for those who can do it safely.

## Program, project, & policy recommendations from workshop.

	<b>Short Term</b>	<b>Long Term</b>
<b>Programs</b> (e.g. events, outreach, education, promotions)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Parent/caretaker education. Include a safety patrol presentation on transportation and safety policies and procedures as part of parent outreach activities such as 'back to school night.' Teach parents the big goals for the school to maximize walking and bicycling to school; policies and rules around pick-up and drop-off, incentives for walking &amp; biking.</li> <li>Use the community fair in May to promote walking and biking to the school. Specifically recognize and reward families who walk and bike to school.</li> <li>Teacher support for students who walk and bike to school, such as classroom recognition and rewards.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Have safety patrol on Miriam as well as Santa Barbara, to help restore an active loading &amp; unloading zone.</li> <li>Recycle-a-bicycle program. Utilize experienced volunteer bike mechanics, using donated or found bikes to teach students bicycle maintenance, giving the bikes to those kids who complete the program.</li> <li>Provide free bike helmets, from the CA Office of Traffic Safety.</li> <li>Create Safe Routes to School heat maps to identify natural clusters of student households so that they might walk together, and possibly create neighborhood walking school buses.</li> </ul>
<b>Projects</b> (e.g. changes to physical infrastructure & the built environment)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Begin with pop-up demonstrations, such as cones, planters, paint, and other temporary materials to define drop-off and pick-up lanes, and to create curb extensions.</li> <li>Get guidance, and if possible borrow materials, from Mountain View SRTS initiative.</li> <li>Consider having kids paint wildcat paws on the crosswalks on Santa Barbara.</li> <li>Create a real parklet the intersection of Theta and Santa Barbara Avenues in the existing red zone. Perhaps create temporary wooden curb ramps in curb extensions, at the locations that will be getting new curb ramps during reconstruction.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Make the white zone on Santa Barbara a truly active drop-off/pick-up zone by coning it off, so that cars cannot stop but must pull right through.</li> <li>It's also possible to reclaim the white zone on Miriam Street as an active drop-off/pick-up area, even if only at arrival and dismissal time.</li> <li>Add curb extensions at intersections where students cross (and cars often park too close to the crosswalks) at: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Hillcrest Drive and Santa Barbara Avenue.</li> <li>Santa Barbara Avenue, at Theta and Vista Grande Avenues.</li> <li>Miriam Street at Vista Grande Avenue.</li> <li>The long crosswalks on John Daly Blvd. at Santa Barbara Avenue.</li> </ul> </li> <li>Enhance green infrastructure in curb extensions – rain gardens, bioswales, small planting areas, to capture storm water and help re-infiltration.</li> <li>Extend the median island on John Daly Blvd. to provide a mid-crosswalk pedestrian refuge.</li> <li>Create ADA ramps on Santa Barbara at the pedestrian crosswalks</li> </ul>

	<b>Short Term</b>	<b>Long Term</b>
<b>Policies</b> (e.g. rules, ordinances, guidelines, practices, & procedures)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Educate parents and neighborhood residents on area policies, including white zones.</li><li>• Allow no entry into the parking lot at arrival and dismissal (cones can be placed in the driveway entrance by safety patrol).</li><li>• Enforce no U-turn on Santa Barbara Ave. in or near the Theta Avenue intersection.</li><li>• Rethink the kinder drop off which currently occurs on Miriam Street, effectively encouraging parents to double park there so that the youngest students can come in the door closest to the office.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Move stop signs out onto curb extensions (as a matter of policy) to make them more visible; also provide tree trimming as needed for visibility.</li><li>• Include signage in Spanish as well as English.</li><li>• Implement progressive education for drivers, and eventually progressive enforcement if needed (first warnings, then low cost fines, which become increasingly expensive).</li><li>• Once short term programs are in place, place a 5-minute safety delay on the car pick-up lines at dismissal so that pedestrians and bike riders can clear the intersections nearest to school <i>before</i> the cars start moving.</li></ul>

### Schematic of typical recommendation locations



## References and Resources

The National Center for Safe Routes to School; lots of practical information and downloadable resources: [www.saferoutesinfo.org](http://www.saferoutesinfo.org)

The Safe Routes to School National Partnership; coalition of organizations and experts providing great implementation support to schools & communities: [www.saferoutespartnership.org](http://www.saferoutespartnership.org)

Complete Streets: National coalition working for streets that work for pedestrians, bicyclists, transits riders, and drivers of all ages, incomes, and abilities: <http://www.completestreets.org>

*Slow Your Street: A How-to Guide for Pop-Up Traffic Calming.* Available from Trailnet.  
<https://trailnet.org>

*The Tactical Urbanist's Guide to Materials & Design*, by the Streets Plan Collaborative.  
Downloadable for free. <http://tacticalurbanismguide.com>

*Urban Street Design Guide* and the *Urban Bikeway Design Guide* by the National Association of City Transportation Officials (NACTO \$50 each).  
<https://nacto.org/publication/urban-street-design-guide/>

*Small Town and Rural Multi-Modal Networks*, FHWA 2017. Lots of relevant images and information. Downloadable for free. [https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/environment/bicycle\\_pedestrian/publications/small\\_towns/](https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/environment/bicycle_pedestrian/publications/small_towns/)

*Guidebook for Developing Bicycle and Pedestrian Performance Measures*, FHWA 2016; downloadable for free. [https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/environment/bicycle\\_pedestrian/publications/performance\\_measures\\_guidebook/pm\\_guidebook.pdf](https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/environment/bicycle_pedestrian/publications/performance_measures_guidebook/pm_guidebook.pdf)

*Costs for Pedestrian & Bicycle Infrastructure Improvements*, Pedestrian & Bicycle Information Center (PBIC), 2013. [http://www.pedbikeinfo.org/cms/downloads/Countermeasure\\_Costs\\_Summary\\_Oct2013.pdf](http://www.pedbikeinfo.org/cms/downloads/Countermeasure_Costs_Summary_Oct2013.pdf)

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