Design for Walking and Biking

Why is it important to design good pedestrian and bicycle access to transit?

A place designed without good walking and biking connections is less likely to have people sitting on benches, meeting up with friends, or conveniently running errands on foot. People attract each other. The more people outside on sidewalks and in plazas, the safer and more enjoyable a place is. In order to create Great Communities near transit stations, street networks should be dense and interconnected, with short blocks, wide sidewalks, narrow streets, bike lanes, and interesting cut-through paths. Pedestrians and bicyclists needs should be considered as carefully as motorist needs for parking or movement.

Great Communities are places full of people sitting, reading, talking and gathering. These same places almost always have wide, well-maintained sidewalks and bike paths.

Most Americans are willing to walk just over 1/3 of a mile. People will walk twice as far when they can walk through appealing spaces. Shorter blocks, sidewalks, trees, and lights can increase the number of people walking to transit. Research has also shown that there is greater pedestrian and bicyclist safety in numbers. Collisions between motorists and pedestrians or cyclists diminish when more people walk and bicycle. More eyes and ears on the street also improves neighborhood safety and reduces crime.

A bunch of kids cycling through an intersection at an Ohlone Greenway street crossing, next to the El Cerrito Plaza BART Station.

A full crosswalk near Fruitvale BART Station.

What is good pedestrian and bicycle design?

Safety, convenience and consistency are common to both pedestrian and bicyclist needs. Safety comes from increased visibility, lighting, and buffering from cars. Convenience comes from locating various destinations next to each other and ensuring there are no barriers to obvious paths of travel. Consistency comes from better signs as well as traffic signal timing at intersections. Great places for walking and biking allow people to enjoy being outdoors.

The Pedestrian Environment

SIDEWALKS Transit station areas need large pedestrian plazas and sidewalks to accommodate morning and evening commutes. Sidewalks leading to transit stations should be at least 10 feet wide along main paths. Benches, trash cans, light poles and other "street furniture" should have extra space.

INTERSECTIONS Smooth and frequently placed curb ramps ensure easy movement up and down from street to sidewalk. This is necessary for the disabled, families with strollers or travelers towing suitcases. Crosswalks should increase in visibility and width with increased walkers. Pedestrian countdown signals and push buttons allow motorists and pedestrians to navigate predictably at intersections, minimizing collisions.

STREET FURNITURE

Objects found on sidewalks and plazas of great places:

- benches
- shade/shelters
- trees and landscaping
- water fountains
- lighting
- public art
- signs for directions and destinations
- trash cans

The Bicycling Environment

Bicycle access creates another practical option for getting around. In 10 minutes with average conditions, bicycles can go about four times as far as someone on foot. This extends the acceptable travel distance to 1.5-2 miles.

BIKEWAY TYPES

Bikeways are usually divided into three catagories. Multi-Use Paths are wide off-street paths protected from vehicles and designed for both walking and biking. Striped Bike Lanes are on-street bikeways whose width depends on whether street parking is there or not. Signed Bike Routes are marked with sign posts and occasionally have pavement markings that alert drivers to watch out for cyclists.

BICYCLE PARKING

Bicyclists need secured bike parking that is protected from weather and accounts for long term (8 hours or more) parking needs. Bike parking should be placed out of the travel zone of the sidewalk.

Transit villages that successfully accommodate pedestrian and bicycle access:

EL CERRITO PLAZA BART STATION

Recent improvements to crossings and streetscape near the BART Station include high visibility crosswalks, widened mid-crossing medians, street lighting, benches, trash cans and banners.

FRUITVALE BART STATION

A pedestrian median island provides a safe refuge for crossing wide and busy streets. This island also has seating, protective posts and a pedestrian crossing signal.

SAN JOSE DIRIDON STATION

Public art contributes to a sense of place at a station in addition to attracting attention and awareness from neighbors and those traveling to and from the station.

LARKSPUR FERRY TERMINAL

In addition to allowing bicycles on the Ferry, the Larkspur Ferry Terminal is surrounded by plenty of bicycle parking as well as pedestrian and bike paths from all sides of the terminal.

Checklist to ensure good pedestrian and bicycle access:

- ☐ Do the designs of areas and buildings allow people to walk directly between transit, shops, offices and surrounding areas?
- ☐ Is there an interesting and enjoyable pedestrian environment along and between buildings?
- ☐ Are there sidewalks along each block? Do they connect to sidewalks and streets on adjacent and nearby properties?
- ☐ Are there trees sheltering streets and sidewalks? Is there lighting that allows people to feel safe and secure while walking at night?
- ☐ Are walking routes protected from fast-moving traffic and expanses of parking?