



Placemaking Strategies

VTA Connections

WALK SAFE SAN JOSÉ
Pedestrian Safety Plan

**VISION
ZERO**
SAN JOSÉ



Background and Overview



What is Walk Safe San José?

- A **pedestrian safety plan** to encourage more walking, transit, and emerging mobility in four council districts encircling downtown (Districts 3, 5, 6, and 7).
- The **2020 Vision Zero Action Plan** identifies these districts as experiencing the most traffic fatalities and severe injuries in the City.

Project Deliverables:

1. Inclusive outreach (CalWalks)
2. 30% quick build street designs in focus areas
3. **Placemaking strategies** to be used citywide

WSSJ will support goals in:

- VTA's Access to Transit Plan
- Caltrans D4 Pedestrian Master Plan
- City of San José's 2040 General Plan
- City of San José's Climate Smart Plan
- City of San José's Access and Mobility Plan

Project Vision

*People in San José's inner neighborhoods help decide where and how to make investments that lead to **safe, comfortable, and appealing walks** to the places they live, work, play, and learn.*



Task 2.7 – Placemaking Strategies

Building on the success of others (and learning from common pitfalls!) is an effective way to identify potential strategies for Walk Safe San José.

Convene work groups to research and discuss potential strategies to improve the safety and overall experience of people in three topic areas:

- 1. Accessing transit and VTA Connections** (Nelson\Nygaard)
2. Signal infrastructure for crossing city streets (Fehr & Peers)
3. Navigating urban spaces (Metta Urban Design)

Research Overview:

VTA Connections

Working Group Meeting 1: Explored and discussed potential case studies, innovations, and an interview guide

- *Topic 1: Initial Case Studies and Interview Guide (08/31/2023)*

Peer Community Interviews: Gained ideas and strategies about how transit agencies and cities work together towards improved safety

- *Initial interview with VTA*
- *Seattle Department of Transportation and King County Metro (Seattle, Washington)*
- *Portland Bureau of Transportation and Tri-Met (Portland, Oregon)*
- *Houston Department of Planning and Development and Department of Public Works*

Working Group Meeting 2: Reviewed case studies and draft strategies

- *Topic 2: Strategies (01/19/2024)*

Working Group Survey: Informed and supplemented draft strategies

- *Working Group members reviewed draft strategies and provided feedback on actions that VTA and San Jose DOT could take (01/19/2024 – 02/29/2024)*

Research Overview:

VTA Connections

Peer Community Interviews: Gained ideas and strategies about how transit agencies and cities work together towards improved safety

- *VTA (November 1, 2023)*
- *Seattle Department of Transportation: Kadie Bell Sata (October 31, 2023) and Caylen Beaty (November 15, 2023)*
- *King County Metro: Stephanie Yu, Jacob Armstrong, Paul Roybal, Daniel Rowe (November 20, 2023)*
- *Tri-Met: Michelle Wyffels and Ben Baldwin (November 8, 2023)*
- *Houston Department of Planning and Development and Department of Public Works: David Fields and Veronica Davis (November 17, 2023)*

Strategies



KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

- Once per year, send contact information and org charts to your counterpart agency
- Create a project charter template, perhaps using the format that VTA currently uses, for all VTA-San Jose projects
 - Create project-specific goals for each project that align with agency-specific goals and state those in intergovernmental agreements
- Rename the Bus Stop-Bikeway Integration Meeting to “VTA-SJ SOT Design Integration Meeting” and use it as a time to discuss bus stop relocation and pedestrian safety improvements
- Use existing meetings and use meeting planning best practices, like agendas and reminders
- Work together for safety improvements
- Data sharing (crash data specifically): Analyze data to understand where pedestrians and riders and getting injured on their way to bus stops to understand the safety concerns

No One's Mad Over Breakfast

Communication Between Executives

- Set recurring meetings between executives
 - Set a bi-annual or quarterly informal meeting for executive staff to discuss more general topics
 - Relationship-building
- Example: Houston's breakfast meetings

Response:

Would recommend that each agency (city and VTA) take stock internally and share what recurrent coordination meetings occur and who attends them, and create crossover

No One's Mad Over Breakfast

Communication Between Executives

Survey Response

- VTA's Chief Planning & Programming Officer and Deputy Director of Planning and Programming meet monthly in an informal setting with San Jose's Director of the Department of Transportation and Deputy Director of Transportation Planning & Project Delivery.
 - VTA staff on the Planning and Programming team can request topics for the meetings at 1:1s with the Deputy Director or via email.
- Additionally, VTA and San Jose co-host monthly coordination meetings with a formal agenda to which executives and staff are invited.
 - Topics: transportation, land use, and transit projects/plans/policies/funding/grants that both agencies have an interest in.
 - The first part of the meeting is devoted to updates/highlights, and the second part is reserved for diving deeper into a specific project, if necessary.
 - Recognizing the value of people's time, attendees who don't need to be in the second part may leave.
- The monthly VTA-SJ coordination meetings could benefit from including transit service planning topics. VTA's Transportation Planning Manager – Service Planning noted the need for conversations.

It's Nice to Have a Friend

Consistent, Recurring Communication

- Set recurring meetings between project-level staff
 - Have meetings to discuss specific projects, and meetings to discuss overall agency coordination
 - These should be regular meetings – at least once a month
- At these recurring meetings, discuss safety-related transit access issues and confirm action items with responsible partners (as safety-related transit access issues arise)
 - The monthly San Jose-VTA coordination meeting can be used to discuss safety-related transit access issues

It's Nice to Have a Friend

Consistent, Recurring Communication

- Where possible, use existing meetings to discuss projects, rather than setting up ad-hoc meetings
 - Put the project on the agenda (which should be shared in advance) so each agency can ensure that necessary participants are there
- Each agency should evaluate if there needs to be better internal communication, so staff know these meetings are happening, what the purpose is, and how to get items on the agenda

Survey Responses

Existing meetings that San Jose DOT and VTA participate in together:

- Monthly SJ-VTA coordination meeting
- Monthly Bus-Stop Bikeway Integration Meeting
- Monthly Development Review Meeting
- Monthly Signals Meeting
- Monthly Monterey Meeting
- Project-specific ongoing meetings

Response:

Circulate a list of meetings like this annually

It's Nice to Have a Friend

Consistent, Recurring Communication

- Identify key points of contact at each agency
- Get to know your counterparts
 - You should know who your contact is at the other agency
 - Multiple levels of contacts – staff level, management level, executive level
 - Send org charts with contact information each year
- Attend the other agency's public meetings to understand what they're planning

Survey Responses

Given often changing org charts at both agencies, it would be helpful to share org charts and responsibilities at least once per year.

Personal relationships is a good but challenging model. What agencies could do to improve this is provide and update (at least once per year) a list of key contact people at both cities and transit agencies, going down to the granularity of who plans bus stop locations, and even how far ahead operational or planning coordination is needed.

Survey Responses

Staff capacity can make attending a wide variety of public meetings difficult

Lay Some Ground Rules

Outline Responsibilities

- Set up detailed agreements – you should know who has responsibility over what down to the individual intersection level
 - Each project should have its own agreement
- Routine and ongoing operations need agreements as well
 - Draft intergovernmental agreements with the DOT, transit agency, and other partners to delineate who is responsible for investment and maintenance for bus stops

Survey Responses:

Clarifying roles up front can set expectations, reduce ad-hoc negotiations, and allow each agency to plan for the necessary staffing and budget to fulfill their roles and responsibilities.

Survey Responses:

We've identified the need for project charters for joint planning efforts between VTA and member agencies. It's up to the project manager to create these agreements right now. We would like to have a general agreement for all Member Agencies regarding on-street bus stops. VTA would lead development of that agreement. Could cover maintenance responsibilities, trash pickup, who pays for ADA upgrades if a bus stop is moved, who pays for damage to bus stop, role of city in permitting process.

There Will be a Quiz!

Shared Goals

- Know your own goals and the goals of the other agencies you're working with
 - Understand your goals, your partner's goals, and what the goals are for the specific project
 - Even if there are differences that can't be reconciled, spell them out
- Goals and priorities should be discussed early on – both for specific projects and overall agency relationships

Survey Responses:

Create shared goals for a project through the project charter. Project goals should support overall agency goals.

Everybody Loves a Map

Share Data to Increase Accountability

- Share data publicly and between organizations
 - This helps hold agencies accountable – are you lowering crashes? Are you increasing the frequency/reliability of buses?
- Share and collaborate on maps and other documents
 - Seattle collaborates on development review maps

Survey Responses:

Staff capacity limits a lot of data sharing. The biggest challenge for sharing more data is that we don't have the staff capacity/headcount/budget to do the necessary data processing to share data with external agencies.

Response:

VTA's limitation is real, and we have experience with VTA not wanting to datashare the crash data we want them to share. I think there is a lot of work to do here, and this area seems quite promising

Survey Responses:

Would be helpful for agencies to share geocoded public input with each other, to create a catalog of public comments that can be referred to for all projects.

Let's Share Our Wins!

Prioritization

- Prioritize a set of shared goals, rather than just your own goals
 - Identify shared priorities and goals as the basis of a project or relationship between agencies
- Set an annual goals setting meeting
 - Alternatively, set a goals setting meeting at the beginning of each project

Response:

Work together on identifying potentially unsafe bus stop locations on Priority Safety Corridors and high speed corridors.

Get People on Board!

Work Together for Safety Improvements

- Often, the transit agency is responsible for bus stop design, construction, placement, relocation, and amenities. How can a city DOT work with the transit agency to address safety?
 - In many cities, this is an area where the DOT and the transit agency have overlap. This makes it complicated to understand how the city can have influence over transit stops
- Create shared agreement over goals and priorities
 - Both the DOT and the transit agency have to agree that safety (pedestrian, bicyclist, transit, vehicle) is the main priority
- Share data – crash data specifically
 - Analyze data to understand where pedestrians and riders are getting injured on their way to bus stops to understand the safety concerns

Get People on Board!

Work Together for Safety Improvements

- Convene an interagency bus stop working group that will coordinate decisions on planning or removing stops, placing amenities, and maintaining stops
 - This group should include staff from each organization involved in bus stop decisions, who have the authority to speak for the agency and can actively take part in mutual planning and decision-making processes
- Increase transparency
 - The transit agency should outline how the city can request that a bus stop be relocated
 - If denied, the transit agency should explain why it was denied

Survey Responses:

We would not want to add another meeting. Bus stop decisions need input from multiple people and departments at VTA, and so we want to value people's time by bringing requests to already existing meetings. Bring bus stop relocation requests to the monthly Bus Stop Bikeway Integration meetings

Survey Responses:

Work with VTA to avoid putting new bus stops in advance of RR crossings without a marked crossing

Get People on Board!

Work Together for Safety Improvements

Survey Response:

VTA frequently receives requests to move bus stops from San Jose. These requests are spurred by road reconfiguration, developments, decoupling, political interest. VTA does its best to accommodate the changes, while considering service and operations needs and safety. VTA evaluates the requests and will facilitate them if they support service and safety priorities. Often, we find that we can come to a mutually beneficial design/arrangement. VTA cannot move a bus stop to a location that is not ADA compliant. VTA's ADA Transition plan is approved by FTA. We have scored every non-compliant bus stop (criteria include equity, ridership, wheelchair boardings, lawsuits, among other factors). We have to respect our ADA Transition process. If a city's relocation request means the bus stop will jump the line, VTA will need funding from the city for us to make the ADA improvements.

There's an Exception to Every Rule

Be Flexible if Things Need to Change

- Things get interesting – there may be times when the city builds the bus stop, or the transit agency improves the sidewalk on an entire block, or the city pays for transit
- You must build the relationship to be flexible (and successful!)
- Changes in the political landscape can dramatically change projects and plans
 - See Houston, TX update (slide 39)

Appendix 1: Case Studies



Case Studies

- Seattle, WA
 - SDOT
 - King County Metro
- Portland, OR
 - PBOT
 - Tri-Met
- Houston, TX
 - Houston Planning and Development and Department of Public Works
 - Houston Metro

Seattle, WA



Seattle, WA



Seattle
Department of
Transportation



Seattle Department of Transportation

- Seattle's department of transportation (SDOT)
- Core responsibilities include maintenance and operations of the city's transportation right-of-way, the expansion of the city's bicycle and pedestrian network, care of over 240 bridges, permitting use of public spaces and enhancing access to the regional transit system

King County Metro

- King County's transit agency (KCM)
- Serves the larger Puget Sound region (including Seattle)
- Provides bus, paratransit, vanpool, and water taxi, and on-demand services, and operates the Seattle Streetcar, Sound Transit Link light rail and Sound Transit Express bus service
- Like VTA, KCM has many other smaller municipalities that they work with, and they are balancing Seattle's transit needs with the needs of smaller municipalities

Key Takeaways



Seattle
Department of
Transportation



King County
METRO

- Anything in the public right-of-way is the responsibility of the city. However, KCM is responsible for installing bus stops and amenities (bus shelters), and making sidewalk improvements to the nearest intersection
 - KCM has to go through SDOT for permitting for a bus stop
 - Issues arise over areas with overlap, like paving
 - SDOT has a significant lead role in implementing active transportation projects
 - SDOT facilitates relationship between KCM and micromobility operators (must be permitted through the city)

Key Takeaways



Seattle
Department of
Transportation



King County
METRO

- Funding

- Seattle leads (funds and delivers) many projects, like corridor projects. KCM may be involved, but provides bus service, rather than major capitol/corridor improvements.
- Since SDOT provides transit funding, they play a larger role in KCM's planning than other cities (like San José) might play.
 - Seattle provides funding for bus service in the city that KCM would not otherwise be able to provide based on funding constraints. In 2015, Seattle voters passed a 9-year, \$930 million tax levy for transit. The funding improves safety for all travelers, maintains streets and bridges, and invests in reliable, affordable travel options for a growing city. The levy aims to take care of the basics, while also investing in the future with improvements to move more people and goods in and around a growing Seattle. Seattle funds an additional 20,000 bus service hours annually with King County Metro. Anything beyond KCM's base level of service, Seattle pays for. Amazon pays for about 12,000 additional bus service hours annually as well. With this funding, Seattle can choose which routes it wants to have run more frequently.
 - See Appendix 2 for the 2015 funding agreement and Appendix 3 for the 2021 funding agreement.

Key Takeaways



Seattle
Department of
Transportation



King County
METRO

- Communications
 - Long-term master agreement provides a framework for partnering
 - Long history of partnering
 - Executives at SDOT, KCM, Sound Transit, and the Downtown Seattle Association have a regular meeting to discuss mobility issues and funding
 - Informally, SDOT and KCM staff have self-led, ad-hoc groups to discuss projects, priorities, overlap, etc.
 - Key: Each agency and department should know who their contact at Metro and SDOT is – the relationship is already developed
- Priorities
 - KCM is a division of King County, so has priorities in alignment with King County
 - SDOT and KCM both recognize safety as a top priority
 - Safety of riders, pedestrians, cyclists, etc
 - Both share an equity focus
 - SDOT has a racial equity toolkit and Metro does an analysis that looks at demographics like % low income and % BIPOC in an area.
 - Joint recognition that transit doesn't exist in a vacuum – the underlying built environment, infrastructure must be safe, convenient, welcoming, and customer-friendly

Portland, OR



Portland, OR



Portland Bureau of Transportation

- Portland's department of transportation
- Core responsibilities: plan, build, manage, maintain, and facilitate an effective and safe transportation system and provide access and mobility throughout the city

TriMet

- Tri-County Metropolitan Transportation District of Oregon (TriMet)
- Serves the Portland metro region (Multnomah, Washington, and Clackamas Counties)
- Provides bus, light rail and commuter rail service in the Portland, Oregon region

Key Takeaways



- Responsibilities

- PBOT: Responsible for right-of-way and overall improvements (like a corridor project or sidewalk improvements), as well as development review
- TriMet: Provides service, responsible for bus stop placement, design, amenities.

Works within existing infrastructure and relies on PBOT to take care of other issues

- PBOT does not have any input on bus stop designs or amenities unless TriMet is updating planning and design guidelines
- If TriMet is moving a stop outside of a major project, they do not specifically consult with PBOT transit planning staff on where the stop should go. TriMet does reach out to adjacent property owners, riders, and PBOT's parking staff. PBOT staff can provide feedback during this public feedback opportunity
- If moving a stop or installing a stop, PBOT and TriMet coordinate during permitting to ensure that the stop does not block pedestrian paths
- PBOT sends TriMet and other agencies notices about development review and TriMet can submit transit-related infrastructure needs for a new development

Key Takeaways



- Priorities

- TriMet: safety and speed of buses
- PBOT: pedestrian and bicyclist safety and modes are prioritized over transit/drive-alone modes for planning
- Bus operations
 - PBOT can request a stop be moved, but TriMet has to agree to move it
 - TriMet has to consider the operational impacts of moving it – bus speed, reliability, etc

Key Takeaways



- Communications

- Joint effort from PBOT and TriMet leaders to improve relationship and communication
- Meetings are based on project needs – generally, no recurring coordination meetings
- Relationship between agencies is often built on personal relationships – challenging to see progress on relationship with personnel turnover
- Successful relationships have been built by ensuring the city and transit agency begin conversations early. Communication must occur at the conceptual point at the latest.
- Commissioner-based system for TriMet – sometimes, commissioners have political requests, which can impact relationships with colleagues if a representative from TriMet has to make a political request at the behest of a commissioner

Houston, TX



Houston, TX



PLANNING &
DEVELOPMENT
DEPARTMENT



Houston Planning and Development Department

- Mission: grow and preserve Houston's diverse communities to create a resilient city
- "Simply put, our goal is to try to get everyone home safely"
- Transportation planning is split across Houston Planning and Development and Department of Public Works (interviewed together!)
 - Both agencies work closely together
 - Planning and Development is focused on plans, designs, and priorities from those plans
 - Public works is focused on corridor planning and design. Also hosts an interagency team, which includes Metro and TxDOT

METRO

- Metropolitan Transit Authority of Harris County
- Operates bus, light rail, bus rapid transit, HOV and HOT lanes, and paratransit within the City of Houston and Harris County
- Also a property owner in Houston

Key Takeaways



PLANNING &
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- Anything within the right-of-way comes through the City of Houston
- Development
 - City of Houston handles permitting
 - Metro owns the land where they build transit centers - Treated as a private property owner and must get permits for development like any other property owner
 - For TOD, Metro ran into issues with parking requirements like a property owner would, so Houston implemented legislation that removes parking requirements along high-capacity transit lines.
- Sidewalks/Bus Stops
 - Metro is responsible for the shelter and certain sidewalks under their Universal Accessibility program
 - Property owners are responsible for building sidewalks

Key Takeaways



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- Communications
 - Very formalized process - agreements for everything
 - As specific as what traffic lights Metro will maintain on a rail line, versus Houston
 - Interlocal agreements – if there is any transfer of money, Houston and Metro set up an agreement (approved by the Metro Board and the City of Houston)
 - Important to normalize that level of formality
 - Metro’s board is set by the Mayor of Houston – effect is that both Metro and the City of Houston answer to the same person
 - Multiple standing meetings per week with Metro (not including project meetings), and monthly breakfast meeting for Metro and Houston leaders to meet without needing to speak on a specific project
 - DPW Interagency team has one key point of contact for Metro and vice versa
 - Attend each other’s community and public meetings to stay informed
 - Where possible, have in-person meetings with other agencies

Key Takeaways



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- Key priority: Vision Zero
 - Commitment from both City of Houston and Metro to reduce traffic fatalities
 - Metro provides service but Houston governs the right-of-way/street design – neither can complete their missions without the other
 - Metro has to get permits from the City of Houston
 - Understanding that each agency needs each other and that “winning” is irrelevant and unproductive
 - Robust data-sharing agreement
 - City and Metro believe that everyone should have access to the data so they can be held accountable
 - Leadership from Mayor to ensure that Houston and Metro collaborate
 - Mayor’s goal is to move more people in less space
 - For Houston and Metro, this means a set of shared goals and reporting to the same figure to ensure collaboration
 - Vision from leadership must match up for success

Key Takeaways



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Update since Working Group #2 Meeting:

- In December 2023, Houston Public Works began construction on center medians along Houston Avenue as part of the Houston Avenue Multimodal Improvement Projects. This project was supposed to reduce the street from six lanes to four lanes to increase safety for pedestrians.
- In February 2024, Houston's new mayor stopped construction on pedestrian safety improvements and required Houston Public Works to tear up new medians and return the street back to previous traffic operations.
- Advocates have raised concerns about the lack of transparency from the city and what this decision means for other, already constructed, projects aiming to increase pedestrian safety.

For more information, see:

- <https://houstonlanding.org/is-houston-avenue-median-removal-the-start-of-a-trend-or-a-one-off-advocates-watch-closely/>
- <https://www.axios.com/local/houston/2024/02/05/whitmire-houston-avenue-pedestrian-safety>
- <https://www.houstonchronicle.com/politics/houston/article/houston-avenue-median-curbs-18650817.php>



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