

“My community is energized about pedestrian and bicycle safety! Where do we go from here?”

Safe Routes to Parks

On February 15, 2023, SafeTREC held the third session of the 2023 Peer Exchange Program, “My community is energized about pedestrian and bicycle safety! Where do we go from here?” Participants from urban and rural communities throughout northern, central, and southern California attended the virtual event to discuss the topic: Safe Routes to Parks.

Peer Exchange Overview

Over the last five years, SafeTREC and California Walks have conducted 119 CPBST workshops statewide. The Peer Exchange Program is a three-part webinar series for individuals, community agencies, and governmental agencies interested in furthering ideas and actions that surfaced in the past [Community Pedestrian and Bicycle Safety Trainings](#) (CPBST) or [Comunidades Activas y Seguras \(Active and Safe Communities\)](#) (CAyS) program trainings. Other stakeholders interested in pedestrian and bicycle safety programming were invited to join the webinars as well.

Webinar Overview

On February 15, 2023, attendees gathered virtually to discuss potential methods to create safe routes to parks and strategies communities can use to imagine or improve park access. Topics discussed included infrastructure changes, policies, and programmatic approaches to help communities envision what safe, comfortable, and vibrant access to park spaces looks like. Participants were encouraged to network with each other to create a system of support beyond the webinar.

During the discussion portion, attendees

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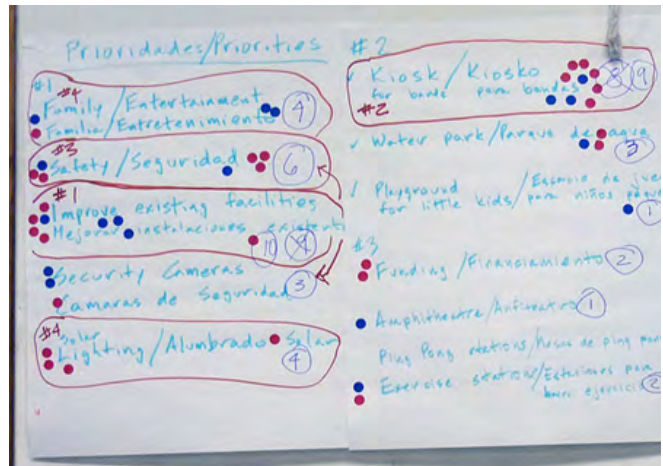
had the chance to learn from one another’s successes and challenges to create safe and convenient access to parks. Safe and convenient access to parks was identified as roadways that are:

- Accessible by foot, bicycle, transit, etc., for all ages and abilities;
- Conveniently located; and
- Comfortable and appealing places to walk or bike¹.

1 <https://www.saferoutespartnership.org/healthy-communities/saferoutestoparks>



Splash Pad sketch



Workshop idea board

- The purpose of the webinar was to:
- Learn best practices for developing Safe Routes to Parks programs;
- Share experiences and expertise among participants who have worked on and/or are interested in building Safe Routes to Parks programs; and
- Network with one another to build inter-community relationships to create a support system as participants implement their CPBST recommendations.

Promoting Safe and Equitable Routes to Parks

Areli Ariana Balderrama, a Policy and Program Analyst at SafeTREC, began the webinar by establishing the purpose of the Peer Exchange and introducing the [Safe Routes to Parks Framework](#). The Framework includes Assessment, Planning, Implementation, and Sustaining as its core tenets, and encourages community engagement throughout each phase. A common thread among the webinar panelists, Claudia Corchado and Dorothy “Dot” Wong, and Areli, was the critical importance and value of community input when promoting safe routes to parks and planning to ensure parks are welcoming to all members of the community.

Safe Routes to Parks: Why Do We Conceptualize This?

Historically-disenfranchised communities face significant public health concerns, including high traffic-related injuries, crime, and chronic diseases. Along with public health concerns, there is also often a lack of park spaces that are accessible for people with limited mobility, the lack of linguistically-inclusive signage, and an absence of parks designed with the needs of all ages, ethnicities, and abilities of community members in mind. This often can lead to underutilization of the park space. Additionally, the need for more infrastructure to safely ride a bike, ride a scooter, or walk and roll to and from a park creates another significant deterrent.

The Safe Routes to Parks Framework underscores engagement at all levels of the process. Gathering perspectives from diverse voices combats the underutilization of parks by designing parks that reflect a community’s desired activities. Moreover, cross-collaboration among multiple levels of stakeholders prevents siloed planning and ensures optimal use of time and financial resources by investing in routes and park designs that will yield high use.

Quantitative Data

Open source data can identify the baseline status of park accessibility and inform brainstorming approaches for community engagement with residents to identify gaps and assets. Areli mentioned that [TIMS](#) and [CATSIP](#), both developed by SafeTREC, serve as tools to help an individual or organization better understand a neighborhood's needs and provide tutorials on using the resources. In addition, the webinar included an overview of the [Healthy Places](#) and [ParkScore](#) Indices, which can be paired with qualitative data sources to depict the need for traffic safety infrastructure investments that create safer routes to and from parks.

- The [Healthy Places Index](#) pulls multiple factors such as economic, education, social, transportation, housing, and healthcare access to examine a neighborhood and provides an overall ranking, which can be used to funnel investment and programmatic changes.
- The [ParkScore Index](#) measures how well cities meet their residents' park needs. When ranking cities, the score considers investment, amenities, equity, and access.

Visioning with a Mixed Methods Approach

Once data is collected, it is vital to demonstrate how it fits into the larger story of the community. Along with the quantitative sources named above, adding qualitative sources such as walking audits, focus groups, [Street Story](#) entries, and interviews with community members can help paint the complete picture. For example, suppose a community wants to influence decision-makers to fund park access. In that case, they can use data to show significant barriers that lead to the underutilization of a park, display health disparities, or highlight a mismatch in existing strategies. This can be especially helpful given new funding streams in the past few years tailored to neighborhoods with high concentrations of people categorized as disadvantaged, such as the [Reconnecting Communities Pilot Program](#).



Workshop idea board

Panelist Perspectives on Safe Routes to Parks:

Panelists Claudia Corchado from Cultiva la Salud and Dorothy “Dot” Wong from Altadena City Council shared their experience implementing Safe Routes to Parks in their communities.

Claudia Corchado of Cultiva la Salud

shared a success story in Planada, CA, a primarily Latine² farmworker community with many undocumented residents. Claudia discussed the community’s work on Houlihan Park and the impact eight community engagement sessions had in making the project fit the community’s various needs. The sessions included community members, local engineers, and local government officials who came together to plan the project. Through the planning process for Houlihan Park, participants advocated for amenities like a splash pad for children, exercise machines, barbecue pits, shaded trees, and an amphitheater. Claudia spoke about the power of community advocacy, using the splash pad as an example of community persistence. Because of the determination of the community and the space to talk directly to the community during the sessions, the community built a splash pad. The Splash Pad was designed with the children of Planada, CA, in mind, which serves to combat the underutilization of park.

Dorothy “Dot” Wong of Altadena Town Council

provided a linear narrative of her involvement with the CPBST program, which helped her promotion of traffic safety improvements in Altadena, CA. The webinar marked five years since the start of Altadena’s Safe Streets Committee, which advocates for safe, inclusive, and active streets for all road users, prioritizing the most vulnerable community members. Dot shared how the inclusion of data sharing, data synthesis, and inclusion of all voices throughout the past five years of advocacy shaped projects in the community and created more opportunities to put the safety of those walking and biking at the forefront of city planning efforts. In her conversation, Dot emphasized cross-collaboration as a critical factor for success within an unincorporated area. That cross-collaboration between decision-makers and the community allowed Altadena to effectively and proactively propose and implement transportation safety and mobility solutions. Throughout her conversation, Dot wove in multiple examples of essential funding options for an unincorporated community, including [SCAG’s Go Human Grant](#) and [AARP Community Challenge Grant](#) which allowed Altadena to host a park pop-up focused on promoting Safe Routes to Parks.

2 In this research brief, the term Latine and Latines encompasses people of Latin American origin or descent who identify as Latina, Latino, or non-binary Latines. ‘Latinx’ was formerly used to address the gender inequality rooted in Spanish Language, but recent articles suggest that Latine is more linguistically appropriate (New York Times, 2020; 2021).

During the Discussion

The discussion period provided participants a space to reflect on their lessons learned and to ask each other questions regarding their challenges. Topics discussed included:

- Challenges due to the proximity of high-traffic corridors to park spaces; many referenced using Street Story, leveraging walk audits for funding, and gathering key facts to connect with decision-makers such as Public Works to advocate for changes.
- Participants highlighted policy strategies that promote safer streets for pedestrians and cyclists, including Safe Streets, Vision Zero, and Complete Streets policies. Participants suggested infrastructure changes such as complete street elements, such as traffic calming that narrows lane widths, and painted bike lanes, which can help slow drivers down.
- A participant offered an example of the barriers due to the lack of connectivity to park spaces. They shared that even if a park might have amenities like a walking path if that path is disconnected from the neighborhood pedestrian network, residents cannot and do not feel safe accessing it because of the lack of safe walking and biking routes.



Kids playing games

- Many people underscored the importance of connecting with special populations such as children, youth, and seniors when planning safe routes to parks.



About the CPBSP

The Community Pedestrian and Bicycle Safety Program (CPBSP) is a statewide active transportation and community engagement project of UC Berkeley Safe Transportation Research and Education Center (SafeTREC) and California Walks (Cal Walks). It uses an adapted Safe System Approach to engage residents and advocates to develop an action plan to improve active transportation safety in their communities, support complete streets planning, and strengthen collaboration with local officials and agency staff.

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