Relationship Building for Temporary Demonstrations and Quick-Build Projects

Our second installment of Strengthening Partnerships: A 2022 Peer Exchange Series for former Community Pedestrian and Bicycle Safety Training (CPBST) sites was held virtually on March 29, 2022. The peer exchange was sponsored by the California Office of Traffic Safety and facilitated by UC Berkeley SafeTREC and Cal Walks, and drew 19 participants from state and county agencies, as well as the communities of Altadena, Bakersfield, Castro Valley, Costa Mesa, Empire, Fowler, Madera, Oakland, Redding, San Jose, Santa Barbara, Southwest Fresno, and Tulare County. Attendees shared their experiences with temporary demonstrations and quick-build projects, as well as how to build relationships with decision makers in order to implement these projects.

Peer Exchange Overview

Over the last five years, SafeTREC and Cal Walks have conducted 72 CPBST workshops statewide. We invited local leaders from the CPBST communities to this meeting to network and learn from their peers as well as to support the implementation of recommendations developed during their workshops. This peer exchange focused on relationship building with decision makers to help communities implement temporary demonstrations and quick-build projects.

The purpose of this exchange was to:

- Distinguish the difference between a quick-build and temporary demonstration;
- Share tips and tricks on how to build relationships with city and/or county decision makers;
- Share experiences working with decision makers to implement temporary demonstrations and quick-build projects; and
- Network with one another to build inter-community relationships to help create a support system as everyone continues to implement their CPBST recommendations and other projects.

With over half (55.3 percent) of the registrants either “very unfamiliar” or “somewhat unfamiliar” with the topic, the peer exchange started with an overview of what each project consists of, when and why to use them, and how to build strong relationships with decision makers. This was followed by a facilitated discussion where attendees shared their successes, challenges, and lessons learned in their communities with both these projects and building relationships with decision makers.

Quick-build project at Lake Merritt BART station in Oakland, CA
Credit: Oakland Department of Transportation (OakDOT)

What is a temporary demonstration?

A temporary demonstration is any project that installs short-term safety enhancements with the purpose to allow community residents to experience and give feedback on the project before it is permanently installed. They differ from quick-build projects because they provide a way to test out potential projects before the local government body votes on making them permanent. This allows for projects to be amended to better fit the needs of the community and for the specific corridor.

Materials for temporary demonstrations can oftentimes be borrowed through programs like the Southern California Association of Governments' (SCAG) Kit of Parts lending library and the forthcoming lending library from the Active Transportation Resource Center.

Why use a temporary demonstration?

A temporary demonstration is an apt choice for anyone who wants to test a potential project or infrastructure element before permanently installing it. The process provides the community a tangible way to experience the potential changes and give the planning team important feedback.Typically temporary demonstrations only last between a few days to a month, so materials used are low-cost and impermanent, such as cones or chalk. They are good for enhancing community engagement for those who do not typically attend transportation planning meetings.

What is a quick-build project?

A quick-build project is a semi-permanent project that can be implemented expeditiously to prioritize the safety of vulnerable road users. Often, they are intended to test improvements and can undergo changes after installation to make them more impactful for the corridor and community. They can be completed with as little as paint and posts, but can include concrete and other more permanent elements. They are especially effective because they can be planned rapidly and installed roughly within a year of the start of planning. A quick-build project is intended to be more durable than a temporary demonstration and remain in place until capital upgrades are possible.

Tips for building relationships with decision makers:

- Know who to target to win your project.
- Who has the power to make it happen?
- Learn who your decision maker is; do your research.
- Identify their self interest and use that to advocate for your project more effectively.
- Meet with your decision maker to demonstrate the support behind the project.
- Make it as easy for them to give you what you want.
- End the meeting with your ask.
- Maintain and deepen your relationship after the project; building trust takes time.

Why use a quick-build project?

A quick-build project is useful when looking to create impactful, money-saving safety projects, because they can improve the safety of a street for a margin of what a full streetscape project would cost. They are also a great way to test out a project or new infrastructure element before committing to it fully.

How to build relationships with decision makers

Once participants had a stronger sense of what each project was, the conversation moved to the question: how do you get your project into the ground? To put it simply, it takes solid relationships between the community and decision makers.

Temporary demonstration on West 19th Street in Costa Mesa, CA.
Photo credit: Costa Mesa Alliance for Better Streets (CMABS)

Discussion

After a brief presentation, a facilitated discussion opened up for participants to share their successes, challenges, and lessons learned when implementing temporary demonstrations and quick-build projects in their communities.

Successes:

- One participant shared a temporary demonstration for a bike lane on Hearst Avenue in Berkeley: https://vimeo.com/142928482.
- A quick-build project highlighted was a collaboration between Bike East Bay and Oakland's Department of Transportation which installed several protected intersections in Chinatown to create safe routes to transit, especially to the nearby Lake Merritt BART station. In this area, many senior residents felt unsafe traveling to transit because of high-speed vehicle traffic and cars making fast turns at intersections. You can see the project on the first page.
- Bakersfield shared that they've recently had success installing high-visibility crosswalks across the community, which has brought some much-needed encouragement to residents and engineers alike.
- In San Pablo, a temporary demonstration for a bike lane and bus boarding island was installed: https://twitter.com/derailluer/status/1441452393716072450?s=21.
- One topic discussed was how those opposed to temporary demonstrations or quick builds may become in favor of them once they actually experience such an improvement. Examples discussed included the Stevens Creek Trail in Santa Clara and walkway quick-build in Altadena to help provide more space for recreational activities during COVID-19.
- One participant talked about a multi-layered outreach process to win support for their project. They created a petition for the project, went to farmer's markets, attended every city council meeting, and even did a community walk for the project. They invited a local news station to the community walk, and the positive publicity led to the city's listening to their requests for safety improvements.

Challenges:

- Many participants said that a major challenge was hesitancy among city decision makers, planners, and engineers to try new projects or strategies. Specifically, quick-builds are hard for some engineers to create because they are nervous to try new ways of transforming streets.
- For smaller cities, we discussed how engineering and planning is often outsourced to a contractor that does not live in the community and is unfamiliar with the everyday challenges residents are facing.
- With the project in Oakland's Chinatown, there were some challenges with maintenance once the project was completed. For example, knocked-over posts needed to be replaced and faded sections needed to be repainted. This led to a larger discussion about challenges related to post-project maintenance.
- One participant shared about a successful bike lane pop-up event in their community, but then hit roadblocks once the community asked to move toward permanent installation. As advocates, they struggled to address city decision makers' concerns for the project in order to move it forward. They also named resistance to installing crosswalks and sidewalks across their community as a whole.

Building relationships with decision makers

- Participants on the peer exchange talked about the role that elected officials play in decision making and how they can be a great way to influence transportation decisions, especially in communities which are very car-friendly.
- A participant shared the resource Street Mix, an open source design tool, as an example of how advocates can draw projects and present them to city officials when asking for safety improvements in their communities.
- A popular topic discussed was how to build coalitions with other stakeholders in order to win the support of elected officials.
- SafeTREC's Transportation Injury Mapping System (TIMS) was shared as a free resource to provide crash data and maps for advocates to reference to show the need for safety improvements in their communities.
- One participant shared that a request for safety improvements or projects is greatly improved when a project plan is pre-packaged for decision makers. In particular, it's important to present them with a drafted plan, examples of similar successful projects, and a list of endorsements and petition signatures from the community.

Other topics discussed:

- A participant raised the topic about paint colors for projects and how green has now become somewhat of a universal sign for a bike lane across the state due to MUTCD color regulations. However, there are now projects using culturally- and community-oriented paint colors for specific projects to incorporate residents into the planning process.
- Participants also discussed how to incorporate local artists and artwork into projects.
- Crowdsourced data was a popular topic on the call as well, especially utilizing video to showcase how dangerous the current street space is without any safety improvements installed. One participant talked about using video to get crosswalks installed in their community.
- Funding for projects was discussed and participants talked about grants, such as the Southern California Association of Government's GoHuman Mini-Grants Program, Better Bike Share Partnership's Mini-Grant Program, and the Active Transportation Program which now has a quick-build specific grant.

About the CPBST

The Community Pedestrian and Bicycle Safety Training (CPBST) program 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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