

## **Recommendation to Launch a Capital Project to Research and Plan Beach Traffic Mitigation**

Beach traffic is possibly the most common complaint among the community members of Los Gatos. The last few months have been no exception. People are eager for the town to take further action on beach traffic.

The Town of Los Gatos has previously implemented a number of congestion mitigation measures with mixed results and sparse data analysis. For this reason, the Beach Traffic Ad Hoc Committee (BTAC) with the approval of the Complete Streets and Transportation Commission, recommends that the Los Gatos Town Council launch a capital project.

This capital project would dedicate resources to study and simulate:

1. Existing beach traffic patterns
2. The impacts of potential mitigation strategies drafted by BTAC included in the exhibits herein.

To be clear, this recommendation is to *only* launch a capital project to study and simulate traffic patterns. Exhibits 2 and 3 provide potential larger-scale strategies to deal with portions of beach traffic, but they are ultimately conceptual in nature—their implementation is not part of the recommendation. However, we would like to simulate how these exhibits, or elements of these exhibits, would impact traffic in Los Gatos.

## **The Current Challenges of Beach Traffic Management**

During weekends, traffic volumes exceed the capacity of Highway 17, leading to congestion that spills over into local roads. Beach traffic is, by its nature, a regional problem. It is the opinion of BTAC that, since Los Gatos does not control the source or the destination of beach traffic, entirely “solving” for beach traffic is not within the Town’s authority or capacity.

Car traffic *will* flow through Los Gatos. Even before the proliferation of navigation apps, many long-time residents remember beach traffic— apps and population growth have amplified the problem to the extent that its effects are unbearable.

However, Los Gatos is not wholly powerless in combating the effects of beach traffic.

First, Los Gatos has potential options in determining *where* car traffic flows. Currently, beach traffic cuts through major thoroughfares in town. As our major thoroughfares reach maximum capacity, beach traffic spills into the adjacent neighborhoods (referred to as “spillover” hereafter). Los Gatos has limited

capacity and authority to entirely stop beach traffic on major thoroughfares. But it has the ability to limit congestion to those thoroughfares and prevent spillover.

Previous measures to close off certain points of entry into targeted neighborhoods have historically decreased spillover into those neighborhoods while increasing spillover into other neighborhoods, effectively offloading congestion from one neighborhood to another. Additionally, frustrated by congestion, many drivers simply disregard traffic laws; Los Gatos, with its limited resources, often does not have the capacity to provide traffic enforcement on beach traffic regulations. This has led some to conclude that any effort to curtail beach traffic is futile— drivers will always find a way to circumvent whatever regulation or impediment the town implements.

BTAC observes that the results of previous efforts do not prove the futility of curtailing beach traffic, but instead prove flaws in previous approaches— targeting individual neighborhoods and/or relying on the continual physical presence of police officers are infeasible in the long run. Learning from these previous results, future approaches should therefore be:

1. Holistic, targeting multiple neighborhoods simultaneously
2. Infrastructure-oriented as opposed to enforcement-dependent. If drivers are unable to use *any* of the neighborhoods as shortcuts because of physical barriers (e.g. bollards), then drivers will be compelled to remain in the major thoroughfares in town.

Secondly, Los Gatos may further encourage walking, biking, and public transit through infrastructural improvements that increase safety, accessibility, capacity, and overall pleasantness. Future beach traffic efforts should aim to move people first and foremost with cars being just one of several means to travel.

*As the population of the greater Bay Area grows with time, our current transportation infrastructure is ultimately unsustainable. Traffic of all kinds, including beach, school, and commuter traffic, will continue to worsen over time. If we want the town to limit the increasingly harmful effects of car congestion, encouraging other forms of transportation is a long-term necessity.*

There are 3 exhibits in this memo. Exhibit 1 describes an approximation of some current beach traffic patterns. Exhibits 2 and 3 describe proposals to curtail spillover, employing bollards and conversions of some two-way streets to one-way streets to prevent traffic from cutting through neighborhoods but allowing neighborhood residents to enter and exit freely. Note that Exhibits 2 and 3 are mutually exclusive— they are not intended to be implemented in their entirety simultaneously.

These proposals are ultimately conceptual— any effective proposal will need trained professionals running traffic simulations to evaluate them.

## **What about Navigation Apps?**

As noted above, before the proliferation of navigation apps, beach traffic was a problem. However, apps seem to have increased the visibility of neighborhood shortcuts, creating spillovers that are particularly disruptive and painful.

There have been proposals for the Town to deceive traffic apps through false reports of traffic, spoofing slow traffic, or even false reports of road closures. The goal of these false reports is to prevent navigation apps from recommending drivers to use certain streets.

Indeed, users have found that false reports can work in the short run in reducing traffic. However, companies do eventually discover false reports, at which point they ignore the false input, and recommend drivers back onto the road. The end result is that traffic resumes as normal.

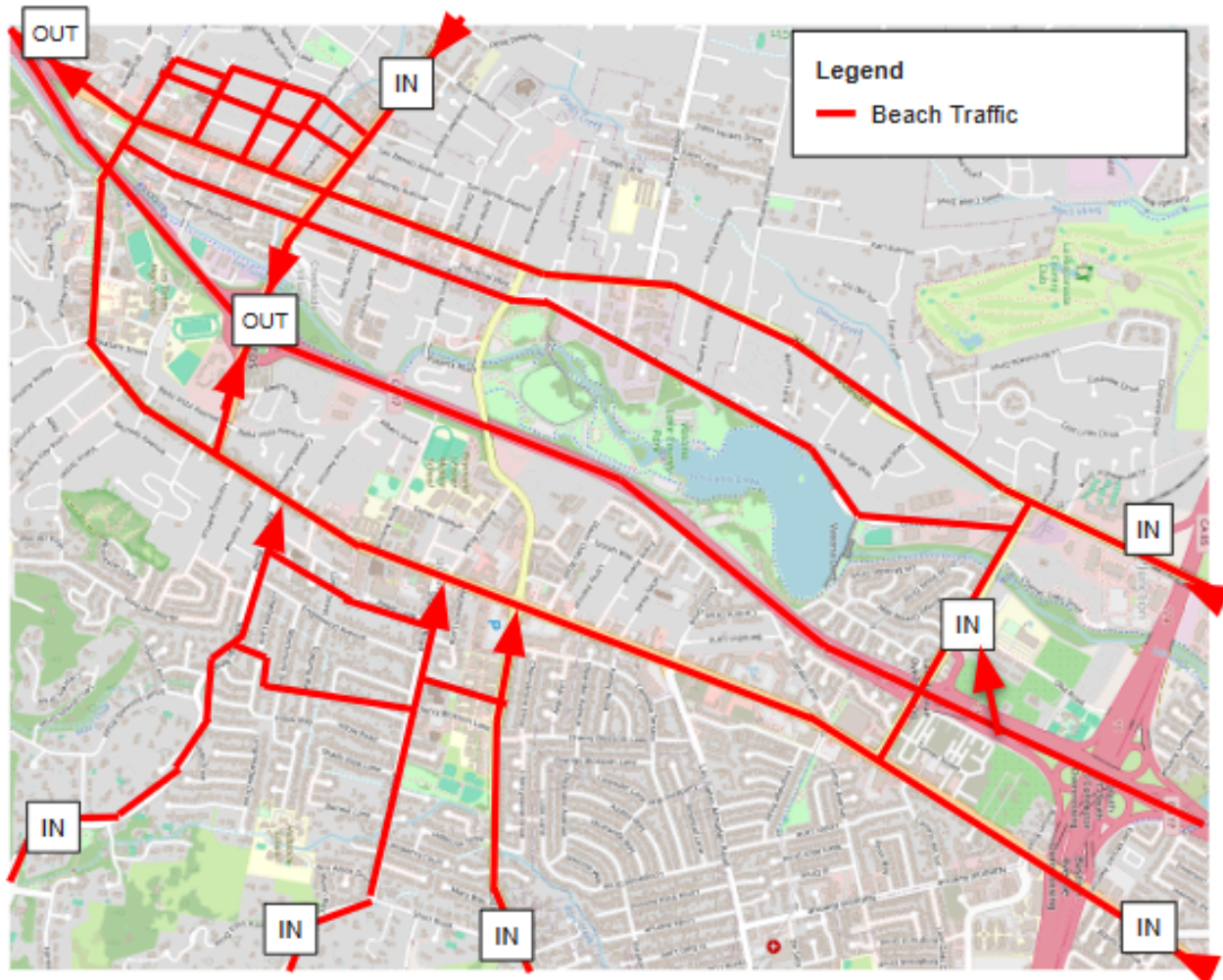
Los Gatos currently has a good relationship with Waze and Google Maps to report road closures; if the Town starts falsely reporting roads as closed, we run the risk of those companies not trusting our legitimate reports, compromising our ability to coordinate with these firms in the future.

Some people have proposed legislation that bars navigation apps from routing traffic through neighborhood streets. In our opinion, that could be a feasible long-term solution, but successfully lobbying for state-level legislation to compel that is not trivial or quick. In the meantime, measures that the Town can unilaterally implement should be considered.

In the opinion of BTAC, physically changing our streets to more intentionally reflect our desired usage of them is a better long-term solution that will be resilient to changes in algorithms and other corporate black boxes.

## Exhibit 1: Current Traffic Patterns

Exhibit 1 visualizes some of the well-known current beach traffic flows through Los Gatos on three of its major thoroughfares: Winchester Boulevard, University Avenue, and Los Gatos Boulevard. Exhibit 1 also shows how traffic spills into neighborhood streets.



**Exhibit 1: Some of the Existing Beach Traffic Patterns**

The entry points, labeled “IN” on the map, show the entry points of beach traffic *onto the map*, not Los Gatos in general. These entry points are:

- Highway 17 Exit onto Lark Ave, feeding into all three thoroughfares
- Winchester from south-bound traffic, originating from Highway 17, Highway 85, and Winchester in Campbell
- Los Gatos Blvd, originating from Highway 85 and Bascom Ave in San Jose
- Highway 9, originating from Saratoga and potentially Highway 85 there

The exit points, labeled “OUT” on the map, show our expected egress of beach traffic from the town.

Those exit points are:

- Highway 9 feeding Highway 17
- Wood Road, feeding Highway 17
- Lark Avenue might feed Highway 17, but given the traffic build up starts there, we don't anticipate this happening all the time

Because this is a concept map, we must acknowledge that this does not exhaustively show every neighborhood that has been impacted by beach traffic. The purpose of the recommended capital project is precisely to better understand existing beach traffic patterns. The Town does not have access to continuous or exhaustive traffic data, historical traffic data from companies like Google is unavailable, and scraping such information goes against their terms of service.

In all of our exhibits, the Almond Grove is used as an example of a neighborhood impacted by our proposals. Beach traffic is also known to impact Union Avenue, Blossom Hill Road, and Shannon Road on especially high-intensity days.

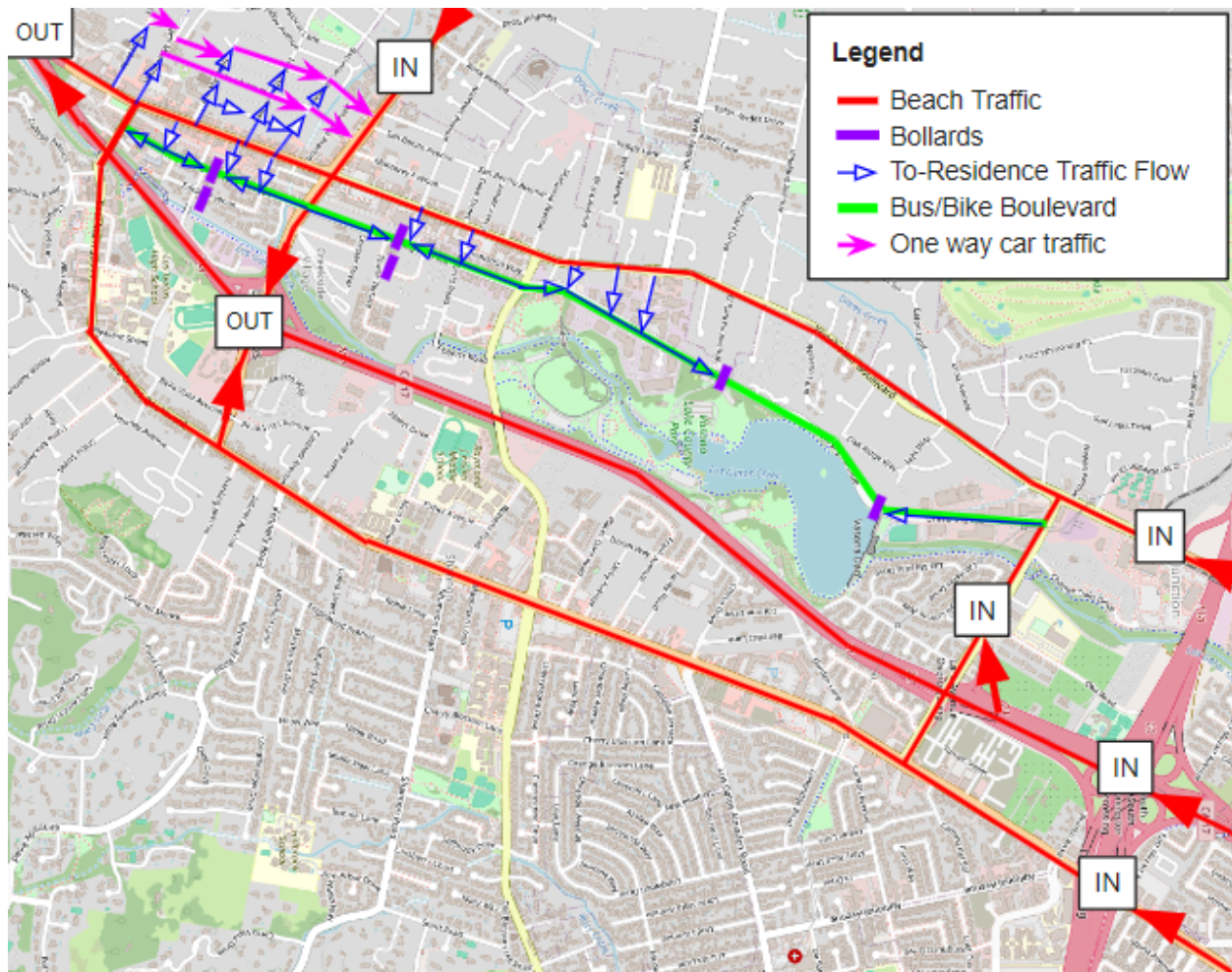
The Almond Grove does experience some traffic, but the Right turn prohibition on the weekends from 10 am to 3 pm is reasonably effective at diverting the worst of the traffic from Navigation apps.

We are aware that traffic impacts Los Gatos Boulevard and its feeder roads like Union Avenue, Blossom Hill Road, Shannon Road, and Kennedy Road, and are pondering solutions, but do not have any proposals at this time. Our proposed Exhibits mainly concern the North side of town and traffic that flows to and from Winchester Boulevard and University Avenue. We are currently considering potential traffic mitigation measures in other parts of town.

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## Exhibit 2: University Bike Boulevard Proposal

Exhibit 2 proposes transforming University Boulevard into a calm corridor for cyclists, buses, and pedestrians to traverse town. This plan employs bollards to divert cross-town car traffic from University to Winchester Blvd / N. Santa Cruz. The first primary benefit is the increased capacity for bike traffic through a major thoroughfare in town. The second primary benefit is the ability to establish dedicated bus lanes, increasing the speed, predictability, and, therefore, desirability of using buses. Currently, buses and their passengers are forced to sit through beach traffic. With a University Bike Boulevard, bus passengers would be able to move faster than if they were to traverse by car. With little to no car traffic, this route would also improve access for emergency vehicles.



**Exhibit 2: University Bike Boulevard Concept**

Within the neighborhoods across University, residents would still be able to drive to and from their homes; the route might be slightly more circuitous, but this would eliminate the multi-block line of cars idling in front of their homes during beach traffic.

If implemented correctly, the bollards along this route would be able to be raised and lowered by the town as needed. During beach traffic, a simple key-operated bollard could allow emergency services to drive up, drop the bollard, and proceed to an emergency almost unimpeded by the beach traffic, not to mention more safely than the alternative of driving in the opposing traffic lane. This is the main reason Exhibit 3 extends along Vasona Lake; that would give Fire Trucks from the Winchester Station or Ambulances from Good Sam and further a route straight into Downtown.

If we look further afield to places in Europe and Sunnyvale, we could use automatic bollards that could be lowered by an electronic signal. These automatic bollards would be useful to bus services in town, especially since they have recently altered their routes not to go Downtown because beach traffic delayed them too much. After a bus lowers an automatic bollard, it would encounter little to no traffic, enabling VTA to run nearly unimpeded bus services through town during beach traffic hours.

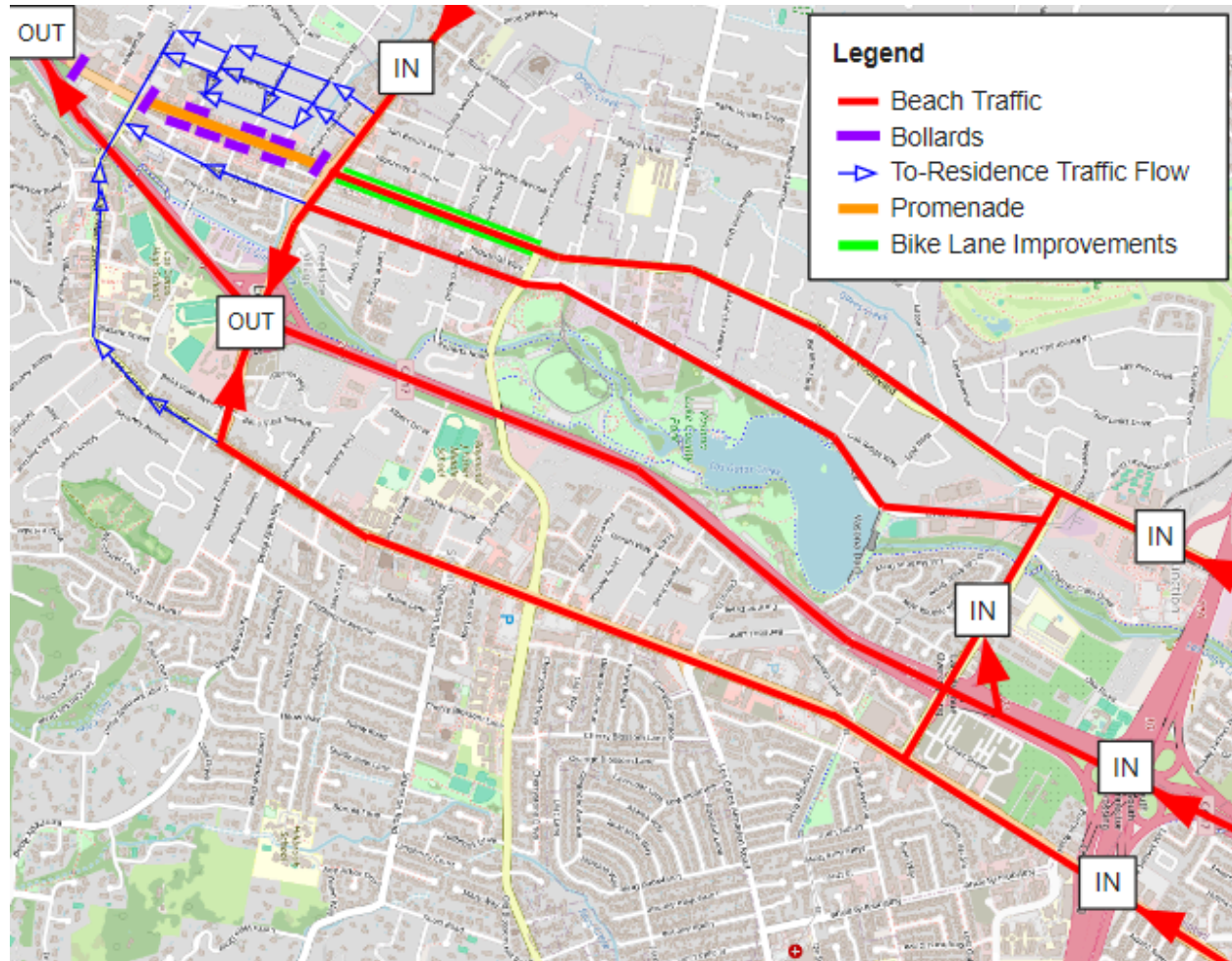
Regardless of which bollard control system is selected, the town also has the option to lower the bollards as needed for special events (like creating bypasses during the holiday parade) or in the event of an emergency evacuation.

A University Bike Boulevard ensures that residents and visitors have multiple ways to travel quickly across Los Gatos during Beach Traffic, substantially increasing its potential throughput.

Lastly, we believe that, as an infrastructural improvement, a University Bike Boulevard would contribute to the “small town character” of Los Gatos. There would be less pollution from car traffic, families could feel safer biking through town, and the areas that surround this route would be more tranquil and vibrant.

### Exhibit 3: Permanent Promenade Proposal

Exhibit 3 proposes establishing the Promenade as a permanent installation, cutting off the Southbound Wood Road entrance to Highway 17, and improving the bike infrastructure on N Santa Cruz Ave from Blossom Hill to the Promenade.



**Exhibit 3: Permanent Promenade Concept**

During the pandemic, Los Gatos hosted several Promenade Events where N Santa Cruz Ave was closed to car traffic from Highway 9 to W Main St on Thursday night, leaving the space for dining, shopping, mingling, and live music. By and large, residents of the community loved the Promenades, with many requests to bring them back, but the Town cited the expense of closing the street as the reason that more events could not be held. It is our understanding that much of the expense of hosting the events was having town staff set up and tear down the barriers and signage to temporarily close the street, as well as additional police presence to patrol and enforce the road closures.

The Promenades were so loved that a private group paid to hold another event, called the Taste of Los Gatos, with the same road closures.



It is BTAC's assertion that permanently installing the Promenade controls and signage **could be economically sustainable, with** a slightly higher upfront cost, but we would eliminate the cost to set up and tear down the previous temporary events.

A Permanent Promenade would create a primarily pedestrianized Downtown with access to cyclists. Without cars taking up most of the public right of way, the Downtown would become more spacious and a more desirable location to walk, bike, shop, and experience life. The Downtown would physically be able to accommodate more people, restaurant seating, greenery, and other aesthetic and functional improvements. It would also result in increased potential capacity for commercial activity.

If implemented, a Permanent Promenade would become a defining feature of Los Gatos, enhancing our small-town character. During Farmer's Markets and the previous Promenades, families and children could be found playing in the streets, something that is only possible if there is no car traffic. A Permanent Promenade would make the Downtown a more appealing space for families and visitors.

Exhibit 3 illustrates how this Permanent Promenade might be implemented conceptually. Where previous attempts at curtailing car traffic in one neighborhood have led other neighborhoods to suffer from spillover, Exhibit 3 shows how cars can be prevented from using neighborhoods as shortcuts— cars may enter neighborhoods on one end, but are prevented from exiting on the other end. Residents of these neighborhoods would still be able to enter and leave their own homes freely.

By blocking every potential shortcut through neighborhoods, drivers will be compelled to remain in the major thoroughfares in town. While the Promenade would be closed to car traffic, the bollards would be collapsible, enabling emergency services to access the downtown as needed, and even allow regular car traffic for extreme circumstances like wildfire evacuation. **We could also collapse the bollards during certain time periods, like the early morning, to allow business deliveries via the Promenade.**

With the completion of the quick build protected bike lanes on Winchester Blvd, there was a noticeable increase in the number of people cycling for casual transportation, namely more children and families. However, the bike lane ends abruptly just past Blossom Hill, where Winchester transitions into N Santa Cruz Ave, with no calm alternative route. BTAC observes that the cyclists on N Santa Cruz Ave mostly consist of sport cyclists and e-bike riders.

We need to extend the Winchester Bike lanes to the Promenade to give residents of Los Gatos a safe and calm way to reach the promenade, regardless of how congested car traffic is. Thus the proposed plan would transform Downtown Los Gatos into an even more desirable destination with a permanent pedestrian mall, along with bike lanes on N Santa Cruz Ave to let local residents comfortably travel the full length of Los Gatos regardless of how much car traffic there is.

To better understand how local residents were impacted by beach traffic and how they view the previous promenades, on June 9th, 2024, the BTAC conducted an informal survey by knocking on doors along University Ave adjacent to the downtown and asking residents the following questions:

1. To travel within the town, how often do you walk versus bike versus drive?
2. How does beach traffic affect your transportation choice?
3. What is your opinion on the previous Promenade? Would you like to see more Promenades in the future?

We knocked on dozens of doors and were able to interview 8 residents **who were present in their homes at the time**. Broadly speaking, all of the residents drive to varying extents and all of them stated that beach traffic reduced their tendency to drive. During beach traffic hours, residents opt to either walk to a local establishment (e.g. a restaurant) or just stay indoors, dissuaded from venturing outside. To reach a destination within the town, 7 out of 8 residents walked or cycled more than a third of the time.

All but one of the residents viewed the previously held promenade in a very favorable light; the one who did not was indifferent. We told some 3 of interviewees that we were contemplating making the promenade a permanent feature in town, and, for all 3 interviewees, the response to that proposal was excited and positive.

This survey indicates that previously held promenades had a positive local effect on some residents along University Ave. Residents did not complain of any negative effects. **To reiterate, this survey is informal and not exhaustive. Nevertheless, the Promenades have been greeted with a largely positive reception by the residents of the Town.** A substantial proportion of residents walk or bike to travel within town, and a Promenade would help further encourage this.

**Our proposal suggests closing the Southbound Wood Road entrance to Highway 17; this is done to remove the pressure of traffic traveling through University Avenue to reach 17. We intend to leave the Northbound Exit from 17 into Downtown open for the convenience of our neighbors in the Mountains. CalTrans has previously opposed closing any part of Wood Road, so we may have to contemplate a variety of options of where the promenade ends.**

## **Community FAQ and Other Considerations**

**All of the questions and concerns we have received so far have not mentioned the explicit recommendation in this memo—the capital project to study and simulate the existing traffic. People we’ve spoken to have been generally supportive of the capital project.**

We considered the possibility that our proposal may potentially worsen traffic on the major thoroughfares in town. However, given that those roads are already at maximum capacity during beach traffic, we believe that congestion will remain the same if some of our proposals are implemented.

Once beach traffic is limited only to the major thoroughfares, it is likely that navigation apps will recommend fewer drivers to cut through Los Gatos because they recognize that there will be less capacity for cars. Intentionally lowering the capacity engenders *reduced demand*, a known phenomenon where reducing the capacity of a roadway results in reduced total traffic, as drivers decide to take alternate routes or change their destination. Our primary concern currently is to manage spillover traffic when both the major thoroughfares and the neighborhoods are at maximum capacity.

Nevertheless, we believe that approving this capital project is the first necessary step for any serious, well-considered solution to combat beach traffic, regardless of whether that solution originates from Exhibit 2, Exhibit 3, or elements of either Exhibit of this memo.

The questions we've received have been exclusively focused on Exhibits 2 and 3.

**Q:** What is a traffic simulation?

**A:** It is software that takes the design of existing roadways and real life traffic counts to allow traffic planners to simulate traffic flows, both on a larger systemic level or a micro, per-car scale. For local governments, they cost money.

Most importantly, traffic simulations allow planners to test hypothetical "what if" scenarios. For example, these simulations could show how traffic could be impacted by connecting (or disconnecting) certain roads with each other, increasing or decreasing the number of lanes in roads, the speed limit of roads, and how roads could handle varying levels of traffic volume.

Additionally, as infrastructure plans are drafted for the town, they enable us to identify potential issues before the plan is implemented. For this reason, traffic simulations are known for saving money in the long run.

Another benefit is that traffic simulations allow us to plan on a broader scale. It can be difficult to anticipate how changing the function of many roads simultaneously can impact traffic in general. We reiterate for exhibits 2 and 3 above that we cannot definitively anticipate how they would impact the town. While we believe there is a strong chance that the exhibits with some refinements could be beneficial, a traffic simulation could improve our understanding of how they would work.

We should also note that if the Town decides to pursue using traffic simulations, they could be used for a wide variety of infrastructure projects. For example, it could be used to help plan projects that help manage school traffic.

**Q:** Why isn't East Los Gatos addressed in these exhibits?

**A:** Drafting and creating these exhibits takes time. We have contemplated East Los Gatos, but have not arrived at any conclusions of how to take on beach traffic holistically. We wanted to propose the capital project sooner rather than later, and we will continue contemplating potential courses of action for East

Los Gatos in the future. The primary purpose of this recommendation is to gather data and create traffic simulations that will help plan major changes throughout the Town, including East Los Gatos.

Q: Wouldn't Exhibits 2 and 3 worsen car traffic in certain areas of Los Gatos?

A: The basic answer is that we can't be sure without testing them, either in simulation or the real world. The proposed solutions trade slightly reduced car throughput at destinations for significant improvements in throughput for pedestrians, cyclists, and transit, which can be much more efficient methods of transportation.

We been asked about the following areas:

- Ridgecrest: Simulations will be useful to examine potential impacts in more depth, but traffic on this road has been noted during particularly bad backups on Highway 9 (including those not related to beach traffic). A potential solution would be to block off the road with plastic bollards that will deter normal traffic, but could be driven over during emergency evacuations.
- Industrial Way: We're unsure how Beach Traffic impacts Industrial way currently or under our proposed solutions. This is where data collection and simulation are very helpful. That said, it wouldn't be that hard to add bollards to divert through traffic from using it as another thoroughfare.
- East Side: Without any changes, almost certainly; people have previously observed an increase in traffic on the East side of Los Gatos when changes were implemented that impacted traffic on the West side. The Town has identified Los Gatos Boulevard as an area to address in the Bike Ped Master Plan, so the data and simulation from this Capitol project could be invaluable to combine with neighborhood input for any changes on that side of town.
- Downtown: Both exhibits trade car throughput for bicycle and pedestrian throughput, so car traffic could get potentially worse, particularly in the short term as people learn the changes. That said, many of our streets and roads are already at capacity during beach traffic. More importantly, both exhibits add infrastructure that makes it generally more pleasant and safe to walk and bike around town, which takes cars off the street. Exhibit 2 also adds the opportunity for bus transit to move through town unimpeded by traffic. Buses have much higher passenger capacities than cars. If our goal is to ensure that there are ways for large numbers of people through the town regardless of how many cars are trying to cram themselves through our streets, encouraging other forms of transportation with good infrastructure is necessary. Another possibility is that car traffic remains roughly the same in the long run because of reduced demand, a concept described before this FAQ.

Q: Would it be possible to use cameras to detect and mail tickets to cars that block intersections?

A: The Town does not currently use the license plate readers for ticketing on traffic violations. There are local governments in Southern California that do implement these, sometimes referred to as "gridlock cameras." Whether we have the administrative capacity to mail tickets to these drivers is currently unclear.

Q: How will the changes proposed in Exhibits 2 or 3 impact school pick-up and drop-off?

**A:** This depends on a number of factors. Both Exhibits provide safer streets for bikes and pedestrians for students. Parents may be more likely to encourage their children to bike or walk if they know that certain streets are very safe. Exhibit 2 in particular opens possibilities for more efficient bus routes that could skip traffic, increasing the desirability of taking the bus to school. Ultimately, traffic simulations would be necessary to have a functional approximation of the impacts of these proposals.

If our aim is to reduce school car traffic, we should aim to make other forms of transportation more desirable and practical. Having students primarily transport themselves to school by biking, walking, and bussing is not unimaginable— this used to be the norm.

**Q:** Previous promenade events did not necessarily increase revenues for businesses. How would merchants be impacted by Exhibit 3?

**A:** For the previous promenades, merchants did not immediately benefit because the Promenades we've held were not necessarily focused on increasing the number of visiting customers in shops. They were events to attract people to the Downtown area with attractions on the street. During normal operational hours, the focus of everyday visitors traversing the Permanent Promenade would be on our local stores, which could benefit our merchants.

As for the potential impact of the Permanent Promenade in Exhibit 3, we think there could be long-term economic benefits for the town. The potential number of customers that could fit in the downtown at any given time would increase multifold. There would be far more potential for on-street events and community activities that the town could hold with shops in the immediate vicinity.

Some have raised the possibility that Downtown may lose some customers as a result of the promenade. The first group of potential lost customers is those who visit shops that they notice on their way to the beach, who we will call “drive-by customers.” The second group may consist of those who are only willing to access shops by parking on a nearby curb and are unwilling to use the parking lots off of University Boulevard and Victory Lane, who we will call “curbside customers.”

For “drive-by customers,” if there is a substantial increase in foot traffic through the Downtown, the “walk-by customers” would likely more than compensate. It’s much physically easier to browse curiously for shops while walking— people have more time to notice and contemplate shopping at a store they are passing by than if they were in a car. For “curbside customers,” our answer overlaps with our perspective on the next question.

In our view, we are trading important streets for having higher potential peaks of commercial activity and engagement at all hours.

**Q:** Wouldn't closing N Santa Cruz Ave hurt our businesses because there would be less access and parking to the area?

**A:** Again, it is difficult to arrive at a conclusion without a traffic simulation.

The impact on businesses of removing curbside parking in front of businesses is worth discussion. For example, the Town, at the request of businesses, decided to remove roughly a third (~34 parking spots, by our count) of its available curbside parking on N Santa Cruz to install parklets. This decision has largely been vindicated because it has increased the carrying capacity of businesses to serve customers, while making the Downtown generally feel more vibrant and social. This has been a largely popular decision among both residents and merchants.

In implementing the permanent promenade, we will be trading highly convenient curbside car parking for greatly increased pedestrian space and the option for a significantly higher concentration of bike parking, as a car parking space can hold 12 bikes. If Exhibit 3 is implemented, drivers will no longer be able to park on a curb of N Santa Cruz Avenue, walk out of their car, and take a few steps to enter a shop. This loss of parking spots should be accounted for in their potential impact on businesses.

For that reason, BTAC conducted a manual in-person count of parking spaces and businesses along the proposed street of the Promenade in Exhibit 3. We wanted to understand the number of potential customers who can visit shops from these spaces.

On N Santa Cruz from Main Street to Highway 9, we counted a total of 87 curbside parking spots, excluding attached parking lots, 120 businesses that have a door that opens directly facing the sidewalk, and another 117 businesses clearly visible from curbside in alleyways or larger buildings. In other words, there are 87 parking spaces for 237 businesses, or roughly one parking spot for every three businesses on N Santa Cruz. If we assume that there is an average of 1.5 passengers per vehicle,<sup>1</sup> there are approximately 130.5 customers who park curbside, or one potential patron for every two stores.

To be clear, the estimate of the ratio above is an approximation relying on certain assumptions. However, we do believe that the economic impact of losing customers who cannot park in these specific spots is limited—there isn't much customer capacity lost if we were to remove parking spots.

There is also an opportunity cost in keeping our current parking spaces. As noted before, each parking spot can hold approximately 12 bikes.<sup>2</sup> If we converted all 87 curbside parking spots to become bike parking instead, the town would have a capacity to hold 1,044 bikes, or 4.4 potential customers per business. This is roughly a nine-fold increase in customer capacity compared to what currently exists for our current parking spots. Additionally, a nine-fold increase in capacity is almost certainly an underestimate, because unused space curbside that cannot currently fit a car, but can otherwise fit a bike, is not included in this calculation.

Whether more customers would be willing to bike and park to shop is an open question. But it is undeniable that the capacity for commerce would dramatically increase with a promenade. If the Town manages to encourage using bicycles sufficiently in town, the town's customer base would be much larger

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<sup>1</sup> U.S. Department of Energy (DOE), Oak Ridge National Lab (2022) Transportation Energy Data Book Edition 40.

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.sfmta.com/blog/store-your-bike-style-introducing-new-parking-option>

than it is currently. This is not unrealistic— many areas in the United States and around the world heavily rely on bicycles for transportation.

Q: Promenades sound like a good idea in theory. But are there any real-life examples of successful Permanent Promenades?

**A:** Yes. Other South Bay cities have implemented similar ideas, often referred to as Car Free Streets or Pedestrian Malls. Examples include:

- San Jose closed N San Pedro St. from W St John St. to W Santa Clara St. to create an outdoor dining zone and pedestrian area for San Pedro Square as early as 2016. That has been so successful that the City Council voted to make it permanent as of May 2024.<sup>3</sup>
- Mountain View City Council established three sections of Pedestrian Mall on Castro Street between West Evelyn Ave and California Street (leaving the East-West cross streets open) in October of 2022. It has been quite popular, and the town is actively seeking to continue to improve it, with discussions of eventually making it permanent.<sup>4</sup>
- After a successful pilot road closure in June 2023, Redwood City Council unanimously voted to close the 2000 block of Broadway and Redwood Creek to vehicle traffic in January 2024. During surveys to inform the vote, 93% of respondents supported the street closure, and 14 of 15 participating businesses supported it. There has been additional community interest in closing other streets too.<sup>5</sup>
- Palo Alto City Council initially closed California Avenue in June 2020 as a summer pilot. After the pilot, the Council extended it repeatedly until finally voting to permanently close it to cars in November 2024<sup>6</sup>. 80% of residents were in favor of keeping the street car-free, and some restaurants had seen a 40% increase over pre-pandemic business<sup>7</sup>.
- San Mateo City Council voted to establish a year-round Pedestrian Mall on B Street from 1st to 3rd Ave, and staff began work on a Pedestrian Mall Improvements Project, which continues to this day<sup>8</sup>. In 2024, City Staff reported that there were no vacancies on the Pedestrian Mall, which signals its success<sup>9</sup>.

As we research previous cases of pedestrian malls and car-free streets, we observed that resident sentiment seems to overwhelmingly favor them.

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<sup>3</sup> <https://sjdowntown.com/next-steps-for-san-pedro-pedestrian-walkway/>

<sup>4</sup>

<https://www.mountainview.gov/our-city/departments/public-works/roads-and-transportation/transportation-planning/castro-pedestrian-mall-feasibility-study>

<sup>5</sup>

<https://www.rwcpulse.com/recent-news/2024/01/11/redwood-city-permanently-closes-stretch-of-downtown-broadway/>

<sup>6</sup>

<https://www.cityofpaloalto.org/Departments/Transportation/Transportation-Projects/Car-Free-Streets-Cal-Ave.-Ramona-Street>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.paloaltoonline.com/news/2023/11/02/should-palo-altos-california-avenue-be-reopened-to-cars/>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.cityofsanmateo.org/4448/B-Street-Pedestrian-Mall-Improvements>

<sup>9</sup> [https://www.reddit.com/r/SanMateo/comments/1bu7lyc/pedestrian\\_mall\\_update/](https://www.reddit.com/r/SanMateo/comments/1bu7lyc/pedestrian_mall_update/)

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However, Los Gatos is not wholly powerless in combating the effects of beach traffic.

First, Los Gatos has potential options in determining *where* car traffic flows. Currently, beach traffic cuts through major thoroughfares in town. As our major thoroughfares reach maximum capacity, beach traffic spills into the adjacent neighborhoods (referred to as “spillover” hereafter). Los Gatos has limited



capacity and authority to entirely stop beach traffic on major thoroughfares. But it has the ability to limit congestion to those thoroughfares and prevent spillover.

Previous measures to close off certain points of entry into targeted neighborhoods have historically decreased spillover into those neighborhoods while increasing spillover into other neighborhoods, effectively offloading congestion from one neighborhood to another. Additionally, frustrated by congestion, many drivers simply disregard traffic laws; Los Gatos, with its limited resources, often does not have the capacity to provide traffic enforcement on beach traffic regulations. This has led some to conclude that any effort to curtail beach traffic is futile— drivers will always find a way to circumvent whatever regulation or impediment the town implements.

BTAC observes that the results of previous efforts do not prove the futility of curtailing beach traffic, but instead prove flaws in previous approaches— targeting individual neighborhoods and/or relying on the continual physical presence of police officers are infeasible in the long run. Learning from these previous results, future approaches should therefore be:

1. Holistic, targeting multiple neighborhoods simultaneously
2. Infrastructure-oriented as opposed to enforcement-dependent. If drivers are unable to use *any* of the neighborhoods as shortcuts because of physical barriers (e.g. bollards), then drivers will be compelled to remain in the major thoroughfares in town.

Secondly, Los Gatos may further encourage walking, biking, and public transit through infrastructural improvements that increase safety, accessibility, capacity, and overall pleasantness. Future beach traffic efforts should aim to move people first and foremost with cars being just one of several means to travel. As the population of the greater Bay Area grows with time, our current transportation infrastructure is ultimately unsustainable. Traffic of all kinds, including beach, school, and commuter traffic, will continue to worsen over time. If we want the town to limit the increasingly harmful effects of car congestion, encouraging other forms of transportation is a long-term necessity.

There are 3 exhibits in this memo. Exhibit 1 describes an approximation of some current beach traffic patterns. Exhibits 2 and 3 describe proposals to curtail spillover, employing bollards and conversions of some two-way streets to one-way streets to prevent traffic from cutting through neighborhoods but allowing neighborhood residents to enter and exit freely. Note that Exhibits 2 and 3 are mutually exclusive— they are not intended to be implemented in their entirety simultaneously.

These proposals are ultimately conceptual— any effective proposal will need trained professionals running traffic simulations to evaluate them.

## **What about Navigation Apps?**

As noted above, before the proliferation of navigation apps, beach traffic was a problem. However, apps seem to have increased the visibility of neighborhood shortcuts, creating spillovers that are particularly disruptive and painful.

There have been proposals for the Town to deceive traffic apps through false reports of traffic, spoofing slow traffic, or even false reports of road closures. The goal of these false reports is to prevent navigation apps from recommending drivers to use certain streets.

Indeed, users have found that false reports can work in the short run in reducing traffic. However, companies do eventually discover false reports, at which point they ignore the false input, and recommend drivers back onto the road. The end result is that traffic resumes as normal.

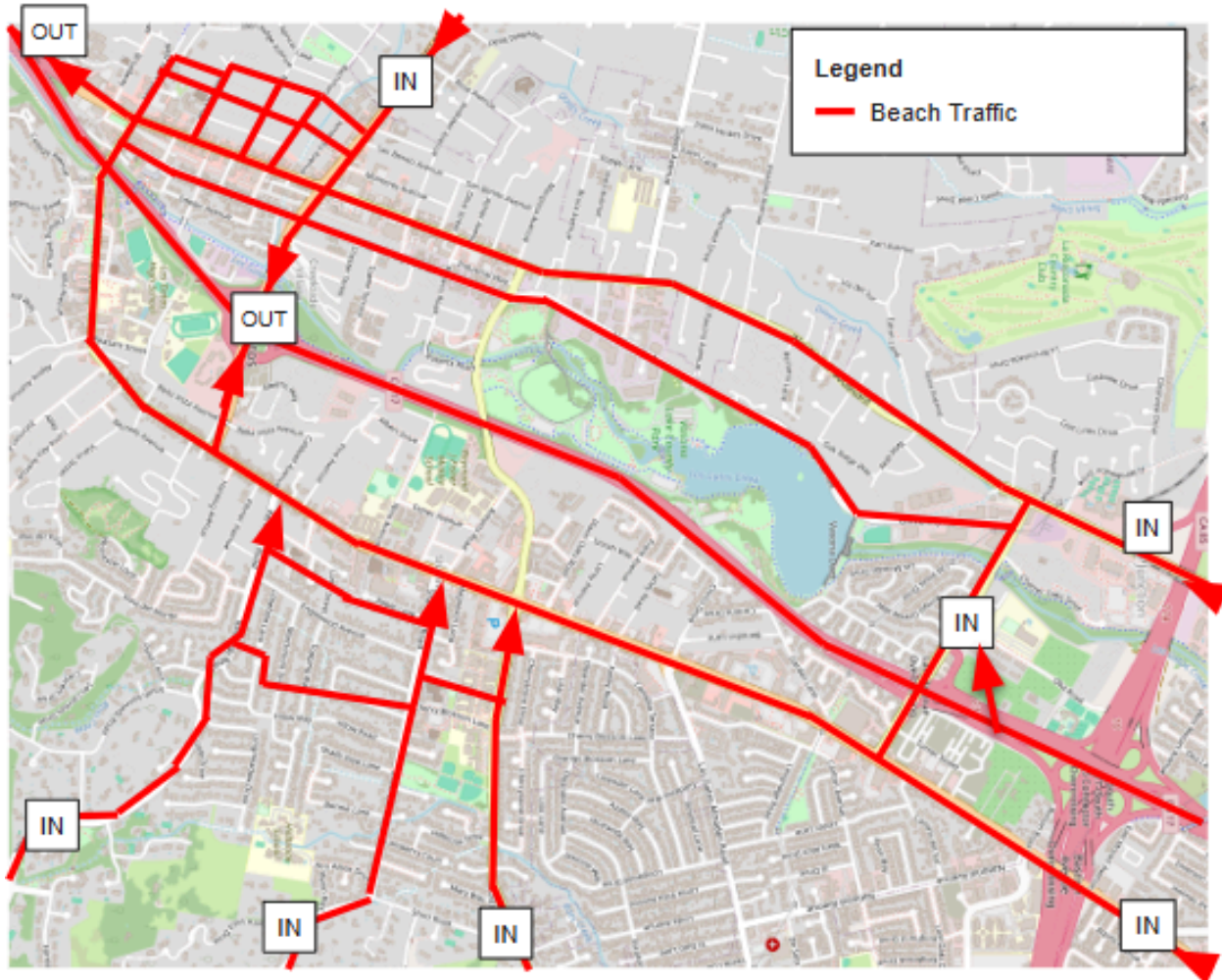
Los Gatos currently has a good relationship with Waze and Google Maps to report road closures; if the Town starts falsely reporting roads as closed, we run the risk of those companies not trusting our legitimate reports, compromising our ability to coordinate with these firms in the future.

Some people have proposed legislation that bars navigation apps from routing traffic through neighborhood streets. In our opinion, that could be a feasible long-term solution, but successfully lobbying for state-level legislation to compel that is not trivial or quick. In the meantime, measures that the Town can unilaterally implement should be considered.

In the opinion of BTAC, physically changing our streets to more intentionally reflect our desired usage of them is a better long-term solution that will be resilient to changes in algorithms and other corporate black boxes.

## Exhibit 1: Current Traffic Patterns

Exhibit 1 visualizes some of the well-known current beach traffic flows through Los Gatos on three of its major thoroughfares: Winchester Boulevard, University Avenue, and Los Gatos Boulevard. Exhibit 1 also shows how traffic spills into neighborhood streets.



**Exhibit 1: Some of the Existing Beach Traffic Patterns**

The entry points, labeled “IN” on the map, show the entry points of beach traffic *onto the map*, not Los Gatos in general. These entry points are:

- Highway 17 Exit onto Lark Ave, feeding into all three thoroughfares
- Winchester from south-bound traffic, originating from Highway 17, Highway 85, and Winchester in Campbell
- Los Gatos Blvd, originating from Highway 85 and Bascom Ave in San Jose
- Highway 9, originating from Saratoga and potentially Highway 85 there

The exit points, labeled “OUT” on the map, show our expected egress of beach traffic from the town.

Those exit points are:

- Highway 9 feeding Highway 17
- Wood Road, feeding Highway 17
- Lark Avenue might feed Highway 17, but given the traffic build up starts there, we don't anticipate this happening all the time

Because this is a concept map, we must acknowledge that this does not exhaustively show every neighborhood that has been impacted by beach traffic. The purpose of the recommended capital project is precisely to better understand existing beach traffic patterns. The Town does not have access to continuous or exhaustive traffic data, historical traffic data from companies like Google is unavailable, and scraping such information goes against their terms of service.

In all of our exhibits, the Almond Grove is used as an example of a neighborhood impacted by our proposals. Beach traffic is also known to impact Union Avenue, Blossom Hill Road, and Shannon Road on especially high-intensity days.

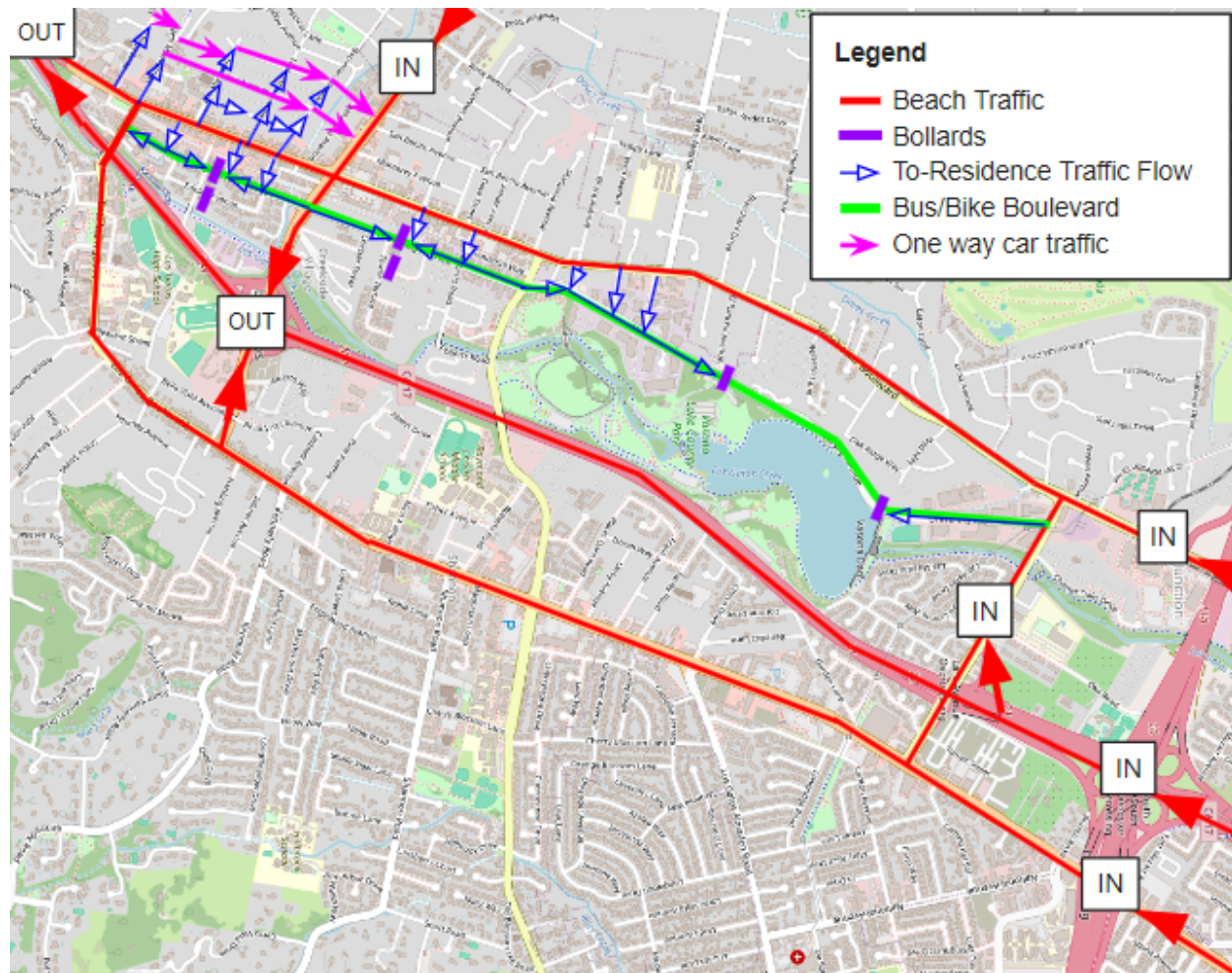
The Almond Grove does experience some traffic, but the Right turn prohibition on the weekends from 10 am to 3 pm is reasonably effective at diverting the worst of the traffic from Navigation apps.

We are aware that traffic impacts Los Gatos Boulevard and its feeder roads like Union Avenue, Blossom Hill Road, Shannon Road, and Kennedy Road, and are pondering solutions, but do not have any proposals at this time. Our proposed Exhibits mainly concern the North side of town and traffic that flows to and from Winchester Boulevard and University Avenue. We are currently considering potential traffic mitigation measures in other parts of town.

The Almond Grove does experience some traffic, but the right turn prohibition on the weekends from 10 am to 3 pm is reasonably effective at diverting the worst of the traffic from Navigation apps.

## Exhibit 2: University Bike Boulevard Proposal

Exhibit 2 proposes transforming University Boulevard into a calm corridor for cyclists, buses, and pedestrians to traverse town. This plan employs bollards to divert cross-town car traffic from University to Winchester Blvd / N. Santa Cruz. The first primary benefit is the increased capacity for bike traffic through a major thoroughfare in town. The second primary benefit is the ability to establish dedicated bus lanes, increasing the speed, predictability, and, therefore, desirability of using buses. Currently, buses and their passengers are forced to sit through beach traffic. With a University Bike Boulevard, bus passengers would be able to move faster than if they were to traverse by car. With little to no car traffic, this route would also improve access for emergency vehicles.



**Exhibit 2: University Bike Boulevard Concept**

Within the neighborhoods across University, residents would still be able to drive to and from their homes; the route might be slightly more circuitous, but this would eliminate the multi-block line of cars idling in front of their homes during beach traffic.

If implemented correctly, the bollards along this route would be able to be raised and lowered by the town as needed. During beach traffic, a simple key-operated bollard could allow emergency services to drive up, drop the bollard, and proceed to an emergency almost unimpeded by the beach traffic, not to mention more safely than the alternative of driving in the opposing traffic lane. This is the main reason Exhibit 3 extends along Vasona Lake; that would give Fire Trucks from the Winchester Station or Ambulances from Good Sam and further a route straight into Downtown.

If we look further afield to places in Europe and Sunnyvale, we could use automatic bollards that could be lowered by an electronic signal. These automatic bollards would be useful to bus services in town, especially since they have recently altered their routes not to go Downtown because beach traffic delayed them too much. After a bus lowers an automatic bollard, it would encounter little to no traffic, enabling VTA to run nearly unimpeded bus services through town during beach traffic hours.

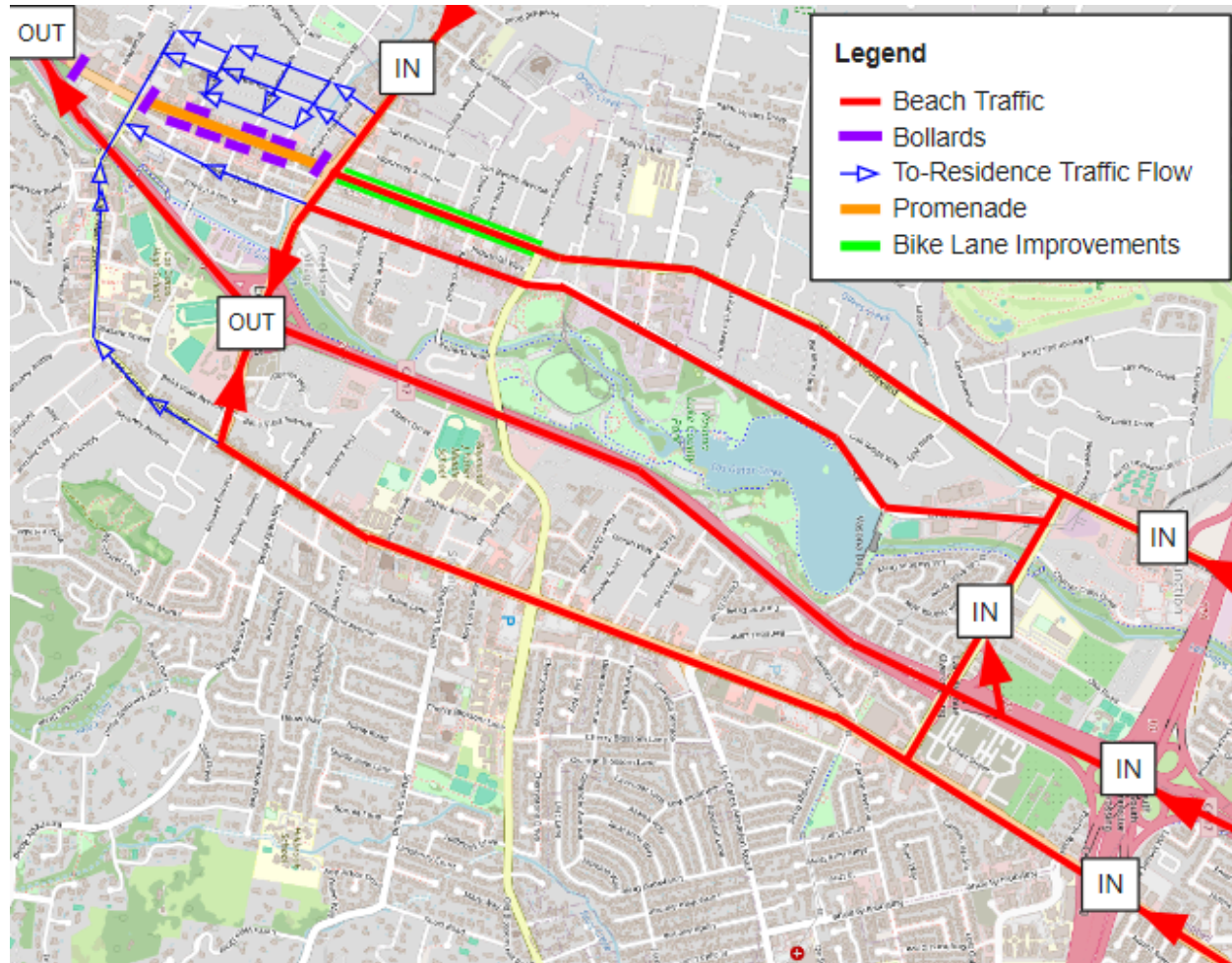
Regardless of which bollard control system is selected, the town also has the option to lower the bollards as needed for special events (like creating bypasses during the holiday parade) or in the event of an emergency evacuation.

A University Bike Boulevard ensures that residents and visitors have multiple ways to travel quickly across Los Gatos during Beach Traffic, substantially increasing its potential throughput.

Lastly, we believe that, as an infrastructural improvement, a University Bike Boulevard would contribute to the “small town character” of Los Gatos. There would be less pollution from car traffic, families could feel safer biking through town, and the areas that surround this route would be more tranquil and vibrant.

### Exhibit 3: Permanent Promenade Proposal

Exhibit 3 proposes establishing the Promenade as a permanent installation, cutting off the Southbound Wood Road entrance to Highway 17, and improving the bike infrastructure on N Santa Cruz Ave from Blossom Hill to the Promenade.



**Exhibit 3: Permanent Promenade Concept**

During the pandemic, Los Gatos hosted several Promenade Events where N Santa Cruz Ave was closed to car traffic from Highway 9 to W Main St on Thursday night, leaving the space for dining, shopping, mingling, and live music. By and large, residents of the community loved the Promenades, with many requests to bring them back, but the Town cited the expense of closing the street as the reason that more events could not be held. It is our understanding that much of the expense of hosting the events was having town staff set up and tear down the barriers and signage to temporarily close the street, as well as additional police presence to patrol and enforce the road closures.

The Promenades were so loved that a private group paid to hold another event, called the Taste of Los Gatos, with the same road closures.

It is BTAC's assertion that permanently installing the Promenade controls and signage could be economically sustainable, with a slightly higher upfront cost, but we would eliminate the cost to set up and tear down the previous temporary events.

A Permanent Promenade would create a primarily pedestrianized Downtown with access to cyclists. Without cars taking up most of the public right of way, the Downtown would become more spacious and a more desirable location to walk, bike, shop, and experience life. The Downtown would physically be able to accommodate more people, restaurant seating, greenery, and other aesthetic and functional improvements. It would also result in increased potential capacity for commercial activity.

If implemented, a Permanent Promenade would become a defining feature of Los Gatos, enhancing our small-town character. During Farmer's Markets and the previous Promenades, families and children could be found playing in the streets, something that is only possible if there is no car traffic. A Permanent Promenade would make the Downtown a more appealing space for families and visitors.

Exhibit 3 illustrates how this Permanent Promenade might be implemented conceptually. Where previous attempts at curtailing car traffic in one neighborhood have led other neighborhoods to suffer from spillover, Exhibit 3 shows how cars can be prevented from using neighborhoods as shortcuts— cars may enter neighborhoods on one end, but are prevented from exiting on the other end. Residents of these neighborhoods would still be able to enter and leave their own homes freely.

By blocking every potential shortcut through neighborhoods, drivers will be compelled to remain in the major thoroughfares in town. While the Promenade would be closed to car traffic, the bollards would be collapsible, enabling emergency services to access the downtown as needed, and even allow regular car traffic for extreme circumstances like wildfire evacuation. We could also collapse the bollards during certain time periods, like the early morning, to allow business deliveries via the Promenade.

With the completion of the quick build protected bike lanes on Winchester Blvd, there was a noticeable increase in the number of people cycling for casual transportation, namely more children and families. However, the bike lane ends abruptly just past Blossom Hill, where Winchester transitions into N Santa Cruz Ave, with no calm alternative route. BTAC observes that the cyclists on N Santa Cruz Ave mostly consist of sport cyclists and e-bike riders.

We need to extend the Winchester Bike lanes to the Promenade to give residents of Los Gatos a safe and calm way to reach the promenade, regardless of how congested car traffic is. Thus the proposed plan would transform Downtown Los Gatos into an even more desirable destination with a permanent pedestrian mall, along with bike lanes on N Santa Cruz Ave to let local residents comfortably travel the full length of Los Gatos regardless of how much car traffic there is.



To better understand how local residents were impacted by beach traffic and how they view the previous promenades, on June 9th, 2024, the BTAC conducted an informal survey by knocking on doors along University Ave adjacent to the downtown and asking residents the following questions:

1. To travel within the town, how often do you walk versus bike versus drive?
2. How does beach traffic affect your transportation choice?
3. What is your opinion on the previous Promenade? Would you like to see more Promenades in the future?

We knocked on dozens of doors and were able to interview 8 residents who were present in their homes at the time. Broadly speaking, all of the residents drive to varying extents and all of them stated that beach traffic reduced their tendency to drive. During beach traffic hours, residents opt to either walk to a local establishment (e.g. a restaurant) or just stay indoors, dissuaded from venturing outside. To reach a destination within the town, 7 out of 8 residents walked or cycled more than a third of the time.

All but one of the residents viewed the previously held promenade in a very favorable light; the one who did not was indifferent. We told some 3 of interviewees that we were contemplating making the promenade a permanent feature in town, and, for all 3 interviewees, the response to that proposal was excited and positive.

This survey indicates that previously held promenades had a positive local effect on some residents along University Ave. Residents did not complain of any negative effects. To reiterate, this survey is informal and not exhaustive. Nevertheless, the Promenades have been greeted with a largely positive reception by the residents of the Town. A substantial proportion of residents walk or bike to travel within town, and a Promenade would help further encourage this.

Our proposal suggests closing the Southbound Wood Road entrance to Highway 17; this is done to remove the pressure of traffic traveling through University Avenue to reach 17. We intend to leave the Northbound Exit from 17 into Downtown open for the convenience of our neighbors in the Mountains. CalTrans has previously opposed closing any part of Wood Road, so we may have to contemplate a variety of options of where the promenade ends.

## **Community FAQ and Other Considerations**

All of the questions and concerns we have received so far have not mentioned the explicit recommendation in this memo—the capital project to study and simulate the existing traffic. People we’ve spoken to have been generally supportive of the capital project.

We considered the possibility that our proposal may potentially worsen traffic on the major thoroughfares in town. However, given that those roads are already at maximum capacity during beach traffic, we believe that congestion will remain the same if some of our proposals are implemented.

Once beach traffic is limited only to the major thoroughfares, it is likely that navigation apps will recommend fewer drivers to cut through Los Gatos because they recognize that there will be less capacity for cars. Intentionally lowering the capacity engenders *reduced demand*, a known phenomenon where reducing the capacity of a roadway results in reduced total traffic, as drivers decide to take alternate routes or change their destination. Our primary concern currently is to manage spillover traffic when both the major thoroughfares and the neighborhoods are at maximum capacity.

Nevertheless, we believe that approving this capital project is the first necessary step for any serious, well-considered solution to combat beach traffic, regardless of whether that solution originates from Exhibit 2, Exhibit 3, or elements of either Exhibit of this memo.

The questions we've received have been exclusively focused on Exhibits 2 and 3.

**Q: What is a traffic simulation?**

**A:** It is software that takes the design of existing roadways and real life traffic counts to allow traffic planners to simulate traffic flows, both on a larger systemic level or a micro, per-car scale. For local governments, they cost money.

Most importantly, traffic simulations allow planners to test hypothetical “what if” scenarios. For example, these simulations could show how traffic could be impacted by connecting (or disconnecting) certain roads with each other, increasing or decreasing the number of lanes in roads, the speed limit of roads, and how roads could handle varying levels of traffic volume.

Additionally, as infrastructure plans are drafted for the town, they enable us to identify potential issues before the plan is implemented. For this reason, traffic simulations are known for saving money in the long run.

Another benefit is that traffic simulations allow us to plan on a broader scale. It can be difficult to anticipate how changing the function of many roads simultaneously can impact traffic in general. We reiterate for exhibits 2 and 3 above that we cannot definitively anticipate how they would impact the town. While we believe there is a strong chance that the exhibits with some refinements could be beneficial, a traffic simulation could improve our understanding of how they would work.

We should also note that if the Town decides to pursue using traffic simulations, they could be used for a wide variety of infrastructure projects. For example, it could be used to help plan projects that help manage school traffic.

**Q: Why isn't East Los Gatos addressed in these exhibits?**

**A:** Drafting and creating these exhibits takes time. We have contemplated East Los Gatos, but have not arrived at any conclusions of how to take on beach traffic holistically. We wanted to propose the capital project sooner rather than later, and we will continue contemplating potential courses of action for East

Los Gatos in the future. The primary purpose of this recommendation is to gather data and create traffic simulations that will help plan major changes throughout the Town, including East Los Gatos.

**Q: Wouldn't Exhibits 2 and 3 worsen car traffic in certain areas of Los Gatos?**

**A:** The basic answer is that we can't be sure without testing them, either in simulation or the real world. The proposed solutions trade slightly reduced car throughput at destinations for significant improvements in throughput for pedestrians, cyclists, and transit, which can be much more efficient methods of transportation.

We been asked about the following areas:

- Ridgecrest: Simulations will be useful to examine potential impacts in more depth, but traffic on this road has been noted during particularly bad backups on Highway 9 (including those not related to beach traffic). A potential solution would be to block off the road with plastic bollards that will deter normal traffic, but could be driven over during emergency evacuations.
- Industrial Way: We're unsure how Beach Traffic impacts Industrial way currently or under our proposed solutions. This is where data collection and simulation are very helpful. That said, it wouldn't be that hard to add bollards to divert through traffic from using it as another thoroughfare.
- East Side: Without any changes, almost certainly; people have previously observed an increase in traffic on the East side of Los Gatos when changes were implemented that impacted traffic on the West side. The Town has identified Los Gatos Boulevard as an area to address in the Bike Ped Master Plan, so the data and simulation from this Capitol project could be invaluable to combine with neighborhood input for any changes on that side of town.
- Downtown: Both exhibits trade car throughput for bicycle and pedestrian throughput, so car traffic could get potentially worse, particularly in the short term as people learn the changes. That said, many of our streets and roads are already at capacity during beach traffic. More importantly, both exhibits add infrastructure that makes it generally more pleasant and safe to walk and bike around town, which takes cars off the street. Exhibit 2 also adds the opportunity for bus transit to move through town unimpeded by traffic. Buses have much higher passenger capacities than cars. If our goal is to ensure that there are ways for large numbers of people through the town regardless of how many cars are trying to cram themselves through our streets, encouraging other forms of transportation with good infrastructure is necessary. Another possibility is that car traffic remains roughly the same in the long run because of reduced demand, a concept described before this FAQ.

**Q: Would it be possible to use cameras to detect and mail tickets to cars that block intersections?**

**A:** The Town does not currently use the license plate readers for ticketing on traffic violations. There are local governments in Southern California that do implement these, sometimes referred to as "gridlock cameras." Whether we have the administrative capacity to mail tickets to these drivers is currently unclear.

**Q: How will the changes proposed in Exhibits 2 or 3 impact school pick-up and drop-off?**

**A:** This depends on a number of factors. Both Exhibits provide safer streets for bikes and pedestrians for students. Parents may be more likely to encourage their children to bike or walk if they know that certain streets are very safe. Exhibit 2 in particular opens possibilities for more efficient bus routes that could skip traffic, increasing the desirability of taking the bus to school. Ultimately, traffic simulations would be necessary to have a functional approximation of the impacts of these proposals.

If our aim is to reduce school car traffic, we should aim to make other forms of transportation more desirable and practical. Having students primarily transport themselves to school by biking, walking, and bussing is not unimaginable— this used to be the norm.

**Q: Previous promenade events did not necessarily increase revenues for businesses. How would merchants be impacted by Exhibit 3?**

**A:** For the previous promenades, merchants did not immediately benefit because the Promenades we've held were not necessarily focused on increasing the number of visiting customers in shops. They were events to attract people to the Downtown area with attractions on the street. During normal operational hours, the focus of everyday visitors traversing the Permanent Promenade would be on our local stores, which could benefit our merchants.

As for the potential impact of the Permanent Promenade in Exhibit 3, we think there could be long-term economic benefits for the town. The potential number of customers that could fit in the downtown at any given time would increase multifold. There would be far more potential for on-street events and community activities that the town could hold with shops in the immediate vicinity.

Some have raised the possibility that Downtown may lose some customers as a result of the promenade. The first group of potential lost customers is those who visit shops that they notice on their way to the beach, who we will call “drive-by customers.” The second group may consist of those who are only willing to access shops by parking on a nearby curb and are unwilling to use the parking lots off of University Boulevard and Victory Lane, who we will call “curbside customers.”

For “drive-by customers,” if there is a substantial increase in foot traffic through the Downtown, the “walk-by customers” would likely more than compensate. It’s much physically easier to browse curiously for shops while walking— people have more time to notice and contemplate shopping at a store they are passing by than if they were in a car. For “curbside customers,” our answer overlaps with our perspective on the next question.

In our view, we are trading important streets for having higher potential peaks of commercial activity and engagement at all hours.

**Q: Wouldn't closing N Santa Cruz Ave hurt our businesses because there would be less access and parking to the area?**

**A:** Again, it is difficult to arrive at a conclusion without a traffic simulation.

The impact on businesses of removing curbside parking in front of businesses is worth discussion. For example, the Town, at the request of businesses, decided to remove roughly a third (~34 parking spots, by our count) of its available curbside parking on N Santa Cruz to install parklets. This decision has largely been vindicated because it has increased the carrying capacity of businesses to serve customers, while making the Downtown generally feel more vibrant and social. This has been a largely popular decision among both residents and merchants.

In implementing the permanent promenade, we will be trading highly convenient curbside car parking for greatly increased pedestrian space and the option for a significantly higher concentration of bike parking, as a car parking space can hold 12 bikes. If Exhibit 3 is implemented, drivers will no longer be able to park on a curb of N Santa Cruz Avenue, walk out of their car, and take a few steps to enter a shop. This loss of parking spots should be accounted for in their potential impact on businesses.

For that reason, BTAC conducted a manual in-person count of parking spaces and businesses along the proposed street of the Promenade in Exhibit 3. We wanted to understand the number of potential customers who can visit shops from these spaces.

On N Santa Cruz from Main Street to Highway 9, we counted a total of 87 curbside parking spots, excluding attached parking lots, 120 businesses that have a door that opens directly facing the sidewalk, and another 117 businesses clearly visible from curbside in alleyways or larger buildings. In other words, there are 87 parking spaces for 237 businesses, or roughly one parking spot for every three businesses on N Santa Cruz. If we assume that there is an average of 1.5 passengers per vehicle,<sup>1</sup> there are approximately 130.5 customers who park curbside, or one potential patron for every two stores.

To be clear, the estimate of the ratio above is an approximation relying on certain assumptions. However, we do believe that the economic impact of losing customers who cannot park in these specific spots is limited—there isn't much customer capacity lost if we were to remove parking spots.

There is also an opportunity cost in keeping our current parking spaces. As noted before, each parking spot can hold approximately 12 bikes.<sup>2</sup> If we converted all 87 curbside parking spots to become bike parking instead, the town would have a capacity to hold 1,044 bikes, or 4.4 potential customers per business. This is roughly a nine-fold increase in customer capacity compared to what currently exists for our current parking spots. Additionally, a nine-fold increase in capacity is almost certainly an underestimate, because unused space curbside that cannot currently fit a car, but can otherwise fit a bike, is not included in this calculation.

Whether more customers would be willing to bike and park to shop is an open question. But it is undeniable that the capacity for commerce would dramatically increase with a promenade. If the Town manages to encourage using bicycles sufficiently in town, the town's customer base would be much larger

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<sup>1</sup> U.S. Department of Energy (DOE), Oak Ridge National Lab (2022) Transportation Energy Data Book Edition 40.

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.sfmta.com/blog/store-your-bike-style-introducing-new-parking-option>

than it is currently. This is not unrealistic— many areas in the United States and around the world heavily rely on bicycles for transportation.

**Q:** Promenades sound like a good idea in theory. But are there any real-life examples of successful Permanent Promenades?

**A:** Yes. Other South Bay cities have implemented similar ideas, often referred to as Car Free Streets or Pedestrian Malls. Examples include:

- San Jose closed N San Pedro St. from W St John St. to W Santa Clara St. to create an outdoor dining zone and pedestrian area for San Pedro Square as early as 2016. That has been so successful that the City Council voted to make it permanent as of May 2024.<sup>3</sup>
- Mountain View City Council established three sections of Pedestrian Mall on Castro Street between West Evelyn Ave and California Street (leaving the East-West cross streets open) in October of 2022. It has been quite popular, and the town is actively seeking to continue to improve it, with discussions of eventually making it permanent.<sup>4</sup>
- After a successful pilot road closure in June 2023, Redwood City Council unanimously voted to close the 2000 block of Broadway and Redwood Creek to vehicle traffic in January 2024. During surveys to inform the vote, 93% of respondents supported the street closure, and 14 of 15 participating businesses supported it. There has been additional community interest in closing other streets too.<sup>5</sup>
- Palo Alto City Council initially closed California Avenue in June 2020 as a summer pilot. After the pilot, the Council extended it repeatedly until finally voting to permanently close it to cars in November 2024<sup>6</sup>. 80% of residents were in favor of keeping the street car-free, and some restaurants had seen a 40% increase over pre-pandemic business<sup>7</sup>.
- San Mateo City Council voted to establish a year-round Pedestrian Mall on B Street from 1st to 3rd Ave, and staff began work on a Pedestrian Mall Improvements Project, which continues to this day<sup>8</sup>. In 2024, City Staff reported that there were no vacancies on the Pedestrian Mall, which signals its success<sup>9</sup>.

As we research previous cases of pedestrian malls and car-free streets, we observed that resident sentiment seems to overwhelmingly favor them.

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<sup>3</sup> <https://sjdowntown.com/next-steps-for-san-pedro-pedestrian-walkway/>

<sup>4</sup>

<https://www.mountainview.gov/our-city/departments/public-works/roads-and-transportation/transportation-planning/castro-pedestrian-mall-feasibility-study>

<sup>5</sup>

<https://www.rwcpulse.com/recent-news/2024/01/11/redwood-city-permanently-closes-stretch-of-downtown-broadway/>

<sup>6</sup>

<https://www.cityofpaloalto.org/Departments/Transportation/Transportation-Projects/Car-Free-Streets-Cal-Ave.-Ramona-Street>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.paloaltoonline.com/news/2023/11/02/should-palo-altos-california-avenue-be-reopened-to-cars/>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.cityofsanmateo.org/4448/B-Street-Pedestrian-Mall-Improvements>

<sup>9</sup> [https://www.reddit.com/r/SanMateo/comments/1bu7lyc/pedestrian\\_mall\\_update/](https://www.reddit.com/r/SanMateo/comments/1bu7lyc/pedestrian_mall_update/)