

WALKABLE STREETS

A TOOLKIT FOR **OAKLAND**



URBAN ECOLOGY



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ABOUT

Urban Ecology

Founded in 1975, Urban Ecology's mission is to create neighborhoods that are thriving, healthy places to live. We specialize in participatory land use planning that creates a vision for change, and education and policy advocacy that turns a community's vision into reality. While the San Francisco Bay Area has many non-profits that advocate for neighborhood revitalization and regional sustainability, Urban Ecology is the only one that operates at both levels simultaneously. Based in downtown Oakland, Urban Ecology works in a range of communities throughout San Francisco and Alameda counties, with the majority of our clients in ethnically diverse, low-income neighborhoods. We promote communities that are environmentally healthy, economically fair and socially just. For more information about our planning projects and policy advocacy, tours and education events, see www.urbanecology.org.

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THE INSPIR- ATION

FOR THIS TOOLKIT

ON A BLUSTERY MARCH EVENING IN 2003, a woman whose children attend Garfield Elementary School stood over a large map of her neighborhood in Oakland's San Antonio district. Marker in hand, she drew a long and winding line from her home to the school. Yes, she said in Spanish, she walks her children the "long way" to Garfield. But the shortest and straightest route crosses wide, dangerous streets. So she leaves home early each day to shepherd her children the long way – just to be safe. ■ Not every Oakland child is so fortunate. Over and over, during our community planning workshops in Oakland and elsewhere, we have heard parents, merchants, residents, and others ask how to make streets safer — from speeding cars *and* from crime. Indeed, the numbers bear out the problem: Oakland has one of the highest pedestrian accident rates in the state of California. On average, a person is hit by a car *every day* in this city. ■ What is the solution? Many people think it's simply to install more stoplights and bring in more police. As we hope this Toolkit shows, however, truly healthy and livable streets take a broader, more holistic approach. We invite you to use this book to create a walkable street outside your front door!



WHO is this Toolkit for?

This Toolkit is for all Oaklanders, because everyone walks at some point during the day. Whether you are a resident who wants cars to stop speeding down your block, a student who wants to walk to school more easily, or a businessperson who wants to see more people walking through your front door, this Toolkit is for you.

WHAT is a Walkable Street?

Walkable streets are shared spaces. They are designed for all people, whether in cars, on foot, in wheelchairs or on bicycles. A walkable street makes you want to step outside. That means it has interesting things as you move along — trees, homes, people, apartment buildings. A walkable street doesn't make you feel you are risking your life trying to cross it. It has sidewalks, benches, lighting, curb ramps and signals to help you cross easily. Finally, a walkable street leads to destinations you want to go, whether they be stores, the bus stop, BART, your job or a park.

HOW do Walkable Streets relate to cars?

Walkable Streets are not “anti-car.” The reality is that many people drive or ride in cars often. Therefore, changing our approach to streets and roads doesn't have to pit “motorists” against “pedestrians.” Over the past five decades, traffic engineers and city officials have tended to value moving traffic quickly over moving pedestrians safely and comfortably. Whether driving, walking or biking, we all need to get around safely. This includes pedestrians, drivers, transit riders, and bicyclists of all ages and physical abilities.

WHERE do I get a Walkable Street?

Walkable streets are not born — they are created. If you want your street to become more walkable, this Toolkit is where you start. One thing you should know up front: You will need to get other people involved. The good news is that Oakland already has some great walkable streets that can serve as examples, along with active residents, business owners, and organizations dedicated to making their neighborhoods stronger, healthier and safer. We hope the following pages help give you the inspiration and the tools to make your streets more walkable.





WALK THIS WAY: **THE**
OAKLAND
STREETS
STORY

OAKLAND IS A WALKER'S CITY. It has a lot of short, straight blocks, a great collection of vibrant neighborhoods, and beautiful destinations like Lake Merritt, Fruitvale and Jack London Square. These qualities mean Oakland has one of the highest walking rates in California. Unfortunately, it also has some of the highest rates of pedestrian injuries and fatalities. This is partly because there are more people walking. But it's also because many Oakland streets are wide and hard to cross. A look at Oakland's history helps to explain how our streets got to be the way they are.

CHAPTER

1

A Walking History

Oakland was incorporated in 1852 and has been an important center for transportation ever since. The first city street was paved in 1864, along Broadway between 4th and 10th streets. In 1869, Oakland became the final stop for all transcontinental passengers traveling on the newly opened cross-country railroad. Hordes of visitors seeking their fortunes in the Sierra goldfields and San Francisco's commerce stepped off the train into what is now called Old Oakland. Less than fifty years later, with the advent of the automobile, the city remained a popular stopping point for motorists traveling on the Lincoln Highway, a New York-to-San Francisco route completed in 1913.

In 1869, the city's first "horsecar" — a horse-drawn streetcar — began running from the estuary to North Oakland. By 1891, Oakland had an electric streetcar to Berkeley, with many more lines added over the next decade. The Key System trolleys ran on Broadway, Telegraph and San Pablo avenues, Grove Street

(now Martin Luther King, Jr. Way), Grand Avenue and East 14th Street (now International Boulevard), to name a few. You could board a train or trolley in downtown Oakland and ride all the way to Mills College, Montclair, West Oakland, Berkeley, San Francisco and beyond.¹

As old photos of bustling streets show, these rail systems contributed to a lot of bustle — and walking — in Oakland. But by the late 1940s, Oakland's vast trolley system collapsed for a variety of reasons, many of them financial. The last trolley shut down in 1948, with the final run of the Grove Street Number 5.

From Trolleys to Traffic

When the tracks were taken up, they left behind wide streets built to accommodate two lanes of streetcars. In 1951, the city removed more than six miles of double streetcar tracks; another five miles were ripped up the following year along 12th, 16th and East 14th streets, and Telegraph Avenue.²

As cars and trucks became more commonplace, and as traffic mounted, Oakland's traffic engineers applied solutions that remain popular, and somewhat problematic, to this day: They widened streets, and made more streets one-way. The negative impact of such measures continues to be borne by the people, and neighborhoods, left to live with more pavement, pollution and perilous speeds.

In 1951, the city approved a plan to convert streets throughout downtown to one-way. The goal was to speed traffic and reduce congestion. All of the streets between 7th and 22nd became one-way (except for 14th and 20th streets), as well as Castro, Grove, Jefferson, Clay, Washington, Franklin and Webster.³ Eventually, 12th, 13th, and Harrison streets also became one-way to provide extra capacity between downtown and East 14th Street, particularly across the new 12th Street dam at the foot of Lake Merritt. Half a century later, the street at the foot of Lake Merritt is being redesigned to slow cars and once again make it friendlier for walkers and bicyclists.



Our darling child ran down the highway,
No fear of danger did he feel.
A speeding car bore down upon him,
A careless driver at the wheel.

*Oh drivers please do not be careless.
Please watch for children when you drive.
If there had been no careless driver,
My darling child would be alive.*

The sunshine from the home is missing,
Forever gone the chubby face.
My darling child is now in heaven
Where careless drivers have no place.

*Oh drivers please do not be careless.
Please watch for children when you drive.
If there had been no careless driver,
My darling child would be alive.*

"CARELESS DRIVER" 1946
Maddox Brothers & Rose

As far back as 1946, a country song written in Oakland called “Careless Driver” highlighted the danger of walking in an increasingly car-centered environment (see the header above).⁴

Hello Highways, Goodbye Neighborhoods

As more people drove cars in the 1950s and ‘60s, highways were constructed in cities across the country. Oakland was no exception. While the highways facilitated long-distance travel and added considerable capacity to the road system, they often cut through communities, especially low-income and minority neighborhoods, replacing homes and businesses with large concrete structures, blank walls, and fast-moving traffic.

The first modern-day highway in Oakland was the Cypress Freeway. When it opened in 1957, it cut through West Oakland where Mandela Parkway is today (it was reconstructed on the edge of West Oakland after the 1989 Loma Prieta earthquake). This was followed by Interstates 80 and 880, which severed East and West Oakland neighborhoods from the waterfront. Soon after came Interstate 580, which replaced MacArthur Boulevard as a major east-west route, and Highways 24 and 13, which divided more commercial districts and neighborhoods. The Webster tube, also constructed during this time, provided access to Alameda but added high-speed traffic through the center of Chinatown. Though much of the traffic that once congested downtown moved to these freeways, the wide, one-way streets remained.

The Next Generation of Transit

To provide transit service in the post-trolley era, the Alameda-Contra Costa Transit System (AC Transit) was created in 1956 and began running in 1960. The Bay Area Rapid Transit District — known as BART — followed, beginning construction in 1964 and first carrying passengers in 1972. Today, these bus and rail systems carry hundreds of thousands of Oaklanders every day, generating an estimated 200,000 daily walking trips to and from bus and BART stations.⁵ However, because nearly all of Oakland’s BART stations, and many of AC Transit bus routes, are located along wide streets that once carried trol-

leys and trains, transit users often have to contend with heavy, fast traffic just to get to their stop or station.

A History of Activism

Despite the challenges presented by our wide streets and numerous freeways, Oakland is a national leader in pedestrian issues. Indeed, Oakland has a history of pedestrian advocacy. In 1967, the Black Panthers took on pedestrian safety as a civil rights issue with an action demanding a traffic signal in North Oakland, at 55th & Market streets, near Santa Fe Elementary School. A sign there commemorates their protest.

The Oakland Pedestrian Safety Project (OPSP), created in 1995, is a unique city-sponsored program that promotes pedestrian safety and access through education, engineering, and enforcement. Due in part to advocacy from OPSP, the city installed about 1600 speed bumps from 1995 to 2000 to address speeding on residential streets, making Oakland the country’s “speed bump capital.” Oakland’s Pedestrian Master Plan, developed by OPSP and adopted by the City Council in 2002, was one of the first of its kind in the country.

Oakland’s history of activism and Oaklanders’ understanding of pedestrian safety as a civil rights issue are important legacies to build on as we continue to advocate for walkable streets.