

Improving Walkability in San Ysidro



Prepared by



for

Casa Familiar and the City of San Diego

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IMPROVING WALKABILITY IN SAN YSIDRO

Introduction

Walkability is fundamental to a community's health, vitality and quality of life. Increasingly, cities and communities are looking to improve the pedestrian environment as a strategy for revitalizing business districts, increasing the safety and ability of children to walk to school, improving the health of residents, and creating a greater sense of "place" and community character. The community of San Ysidro on the southern border of the City of San Diego retains a unique feel and, in many ways, a very walkable community. In the older, central part of the community, distances are short and walking is common as a means of transportation. Yet, the charm of this neighborhood is threatened by ever-increasing traffic volumes, high car speeds, a lack of pedestrian and public infrastructure and other factors that degrade safety, walkability and livability.

Casa Familiar - a local community based organization – has created the "Pathways of Knowledge" project in an effort to restore the walkability and livability of the older, central area of San Ysidro. The City of San Diego, in conjunction with Casa Familiar and WalkSanDiego, was recently awarded a Robert Wood Johnson Active Living by Design grant to hire a consultant to develop a Master Plan for the Pathways of Knowledge. With funding from the California Kids' Plates Program, WalkSanDiego was able to offer San Ysidro a Walkability Workshop and Walk Audit. The workshop and audit were intended to gather preliminary input from residents on the most critical pedestrian safety and access issues and the improvements they want integrated into the Pathways of Knowledge project. WalkSanDiego's efforts in San Ysidro are part of our Next Steps Project -- an initiative to provide outreach, training and technical assistance to low-income communities where walking for transportation is still common and the risk of being hit by a vehicle is documented to be 2-4 times higher than the general population.

This report summarizes an analysis of pedestrian collision data and the results of the workshop and walk audits, including participants' highest priority issues and recommendations for pedestrian improvements. WalkSanDiego also provides several suggestions on what can be done. The findings in this report should be used to inform Casa Familiar, the City of San Diego and the Pathways of Knowledge consultant on the needs and preferences of residents.

Who We Are

WalkSanDiego (www.walksandiego.org) is a 501(c)(3) non-profit membership organization dedicated to enhancing the livability of communities throughout the San Diego region by helping cities and neighborhoods make walking a safe and viable choice for people of all abilities. WalkSanDiego has approximately 150 members, an 11-member Board of Directors, and a 10-member Advisory Council of distinguished community leaders.

Acknowledgements

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Pedestrian Collisions in San Ysidro

The City of San Diego provided pedestrian collision data from the five most recent calendar years (2000-2004) for selected streets within the study area¹. During this period, there were 18 collisions involving 19 pedestrians, with 19 injuries but no deaths. Most of the handful of neighborhood streets examined, including all of the alleys, had no collisions reported. The larger commercial streets were clearly a greater problem than neighborhood streets. Streets with multiple collisions were as follows:

- San Ysidro Blvd – 8 pedestrians hit
- Willow Rd – 7 pedestrians hit
- Averil Rd – 3 pedestrians hit (2 while exiting or entering the same parked car)
- Cottonwood Rd – 2 pedestrians hit

Of the 18 incidents, 10 were officially the fault of the pedestrian, and 9 that of the driver. All of the cases in which the pedestrian was determined to be at fault involved a pedestrian crossing mid-block. This may be more of an indication of lack of safe crossing opportunities than careless walking behavior (a theory that is reinforced by resident input and observations during the walk audits). In addition, assignment of fault in the case of young children often overlooks the developmental limitations of children to safely negotiate traffic and street crossings. The majority of pedestrian collisions occurred during daylight hours, which is atypical for the San Diego region as a whole, and probably reflects the high number of transit riders and residents relying on walking for going to school and doing daily errands. Six of the incidents occurred during December. This is unusual, and suggests Christmas shoppers may have been involved.

Walkability Workshop and Walk Audit

The Walkability Workshop and Walk Audit was held on May 21, 2005 in the older, central part of the community of San Ysidro. Almost 20 people attended including residents, the Community Planner for San Ysidro and volunteers from Casa Familiar. Using both English and Spanish language slideshows, WalkSanDiego presented on 'why walkability is important to the health, vitality and quality of life of a community' and on the physical elements and design solutions that make a community safer and more convenient for pedestrians. To identify specific pedestrian hotspots, WalkSanDiego led walk audits of two different parts of the neighborhood. Along the routes, participants noted safety issues and walkability barriers and discussed potential solutions. To heighten awareness of the issues and needs of all pedestrians, several participants were asked to assume the role of different types of pedestrians - a child, person in a wheelchair, teenager and a frail, elderly person. Speaking from this perspective, they were asked to note the safety and walkability barriers from a new set of eyes. The workshop concluded with participants working as groups on aerials map of the area and coming to consensus on the highest priority problem locations and recommendations.

¹ Age-specific data was not available so pedestrian safety among different age groups is not addressed in this report.

The Good and Bad of Walking in San Ysidro

Participants were asked what they like least and most about walking in San Ysidro. Many of the participants were regular walkers and were very familiar with the neighborhood. The feature that residents like most -- and clearly one of San Ysidro's unique assets -- is the friendly atmosphere and sense of connection they feel when they walk. There is a wonderfully circular and reinforcing aspect to this in that the more people walk, the greater the sense that this is a place where people walk, interact with each other and feel safe which leads to more people walking and so on. The feature that residents like least is the condition and lack of pedestrian facilities, including the lack of safe street crossings. In addition, residents felt that walkability would be improved if there were more specialty stores and a more vibrant commercial district. The full range of responses is listed below.

Good	Bad
• Short blocks	• Lack of landscaping
• A lot of walkers	• No marked crosswalks
• Very pedestrian friendly	• Too far between intersections
• Walking to the commercial center	• Not good places to walk
• Walking to the park	• Parks are not walkable
• There are sidewalks	• Telephone and utility poles & boxes (blocking sidewalks)
• Few barriers	• Unsafe
• Friendly people	• The condition of sidewalks
• Variety of ways to get from place to place	• The lack of children walking place to place, including school
• Friendly culture	• The barren commercial corridors
• I know the community/people	• Crazy drivers
• The gardens and flowers	• Crossing the street
• Short cuts	• Walking when there is a lot of traffic
• The access to services, products and places	• Walking when there are a lot of people
• Friendly people	• Need upgraded sidewalks/paths
• Variety of options: alleys vs. main Blvd.	• Not enough specialized small stores
• Contact with other people	• Not enough shade
	• Unmaintained sidewalks
	• Not enough neighborhood stores and restaurants

Issues and Recommendations for the Pathways of Knowledge

Participants were divided and led on a walk audit of two important routes along the Pathways of Knowledge - the walk to the Trolley and through highly used alleys and the walk to the Recreation Center and San Ysidro Boulevard (though the Blvd. was not specifically audited as part of this project). Participants pointed out the safety and access barriers they and their children face along each of these routes and then identified which problems they see as priorities for improvements. The starting point for each of the walks was the Casa Familiar Recreation Center at 212 East Park Avenue.



Walk Audit Route 1: Alleys & Trolley Stop

Cypress Drive & Sellsway Street

The alleys in this area of San Ysidro are important pedestrian pathways. Residents often prefer walking in alleys over nearby streets, in part because they have a lower volume of cars and, while there are no sidewalks, they have wider areas for the pedestrian to walk (sharing the space with motorists). Many houses front the alleys – giving them the sense of “eyes on the street”. In addition, Casa Familiar has installed art and other improvements along Sellsway. While, the alleys have many “walkable” features, residents identified them as one of the most critical areas in need of safety, access and “beautification” improvements, including:

- ***Create a distinctive gateway from the trolley*** entrance to Cypress Drive. Currently this area is a barren patch of dirt with an unsightly chain link fence that opens up onto the alley. Yet, it is one of the most frequently used paths for those walking from the trolley to the commercial district on San Ysidro Boulevard and other community destinations. It is a key “gateway” welcoming transit riders to the community of San Ysidro. Improving the entire area around the trolley along with creating a more distinctive gateway at Cypress would create a sense of place in what now looks to be a place that is forgotten and abandoned. Specific improvements suggested by participants included: landscaping, pavement and fencing treatments and a gateway sign that reflects the culture of the community.
- ***Turn alleys into “home zones”***. A home zone is a street or group of streets designed primarily to meet the interests of pedestrians and cyclists rather than motorists, opening up the street for social use. The key to creating a home zone is to develop street design that makes drivers feel it is normal to drive slowly and carefully (10 mph maximum). Features often include traffic calming, shared surfaces, trees and planters, benches and play areas. They are common in many European countries and are increasingly being considered for use by many communities in the U.S. San Ysidro’s alleys are good candidates for applying the concept of home zones: they already have several home zone design features and, in many ways, the community already treats alleys as home zones. Creating a home zone on Cypress and Sellsway could include these treatments:

"Home zones are streets where you can enjoy taking time to stop and chat with your neighbors. Streets where cars are allowed, but the car is a guest."

Home Zone News,
www.homezonenews.org.uk

- Create a chicane effect by alternating and staggering obstacles such as large potted trees/plants, mid-block bulbouts and/or bollards. Using painted strips is a less expensive option. This would help slow cars and indicate that this is a pedestrian area.
- Use pavement treatments as an artistic and cultural element. Only at very slow speeds will pavement treatments serve to slow traffic.
- Add art installations on Cypress.
- Add benches and places for older residents and others to rest.

Trolley Stop at W. Seaward Avenue

The crossing at Seaward and the trolley was one of the most significant safety hazards reported by residents. The intersection is angled and has a fence, parked cars and other obstacles creating blind spots and forcing pedestrians to walk into the middle of the road to see and be seen by motorists. Despite these safety issues, drivers routinely speed through the intersection. Of greatest concern is that there are two elementary schools nearby so children attending those schools (and any using the trolley) must cross through this intersection. The traffic and crossing issues at this intersection are complex and will require a more detailed study by traffic engineers, working in conjunction with SANDAG. Additional recommendations include:

- **Chokedown the intersection** by adding bulbouts at all four corners. This will shorten the distance for crossing, eliminate the blind spot at the southwest corner and make the pedestrian more visible.
- **Improve crosswalks** by painting zebra or ladder style crosswalk markings.
- **Extend the sidewalk** along the south side of Seaward just west of the trolley track. This will need to be coordinated with the corner bulbouts.

Cottonwood Road

Cottonwood serves multiple purposes including: transit, emergency responders, motorists and a significant number of pedestrians. In the 5-year period from 2000-2004, two pedestrians were hit on Cottonwood (this compared to no collisions on any of the other audited residential streets). Safety and access issues identified by residents include speeding, narrow sidewalks and a lack of trees and shade for pedestrians. Several years ago, the sidewalks north of Hall Avenue were narrowed in order to widen the road. Now, despite heavy pedestrian use, residents must squeeze their way through a narrow sidewalk passage that is blocked in several places by utility poles and other obstacles. Improvements identified for Cottonwood include:

- **Reduce road width** back to its original size and use the extra pavement to widen the sidewalk. Because there are parked cars along the road, there is less of a need for a distinct parkway to buffer pedestrians from traffic. The community will need to work closely with the fire department on this issue.
- **Fix broken and uneven sidewalks** and remove all obstacles.
- **Add trees** to provide shade and create a street canopy.

Walk Audit Route 2: Recreation Center & San Ysidro Blvd.

West Park Avenue

This road fronts one side of the recreation center and community park, two important and sensitive community locations. This is a relatively wide, one-way street with conditions that make speeding common. In addition, there is no sidewalk on the park side of the street. Following are several of the residents' suggestions (many of these are relevant to both East and West Park Avenue):

- **Improve crossings at Hall Avenue** by installing bulbouts at each corner, painting zebra or ladder style crosswalk markings and fixing the offset intersection.
- **Expand street parking** to both sides of the street (particularly on the east side of W. Park Ave.). In addition to adding much-needed parking spaces, this would narrow the lane width and create "side friction" – both of which can slow speeds. It would also provide a buffer for pedestrians.
- **Add street trees** to provide shade to pedestrians and calm cars by creating a street canopy.



This area is used by children and the area's seniors – gathering to catch-up on the day's events.

Olive Drive

The main issue with Olive Drive is that it is vastly overbuilt for the volume of traffic served and the area near the I-805 pedestrian bridge is barren and unsightly. The wide lanes on Olive contribute to a speeding problem. Cars turning from Hall Avenue onto Olive Drive often take the curve at high speeds. This creates a problem for residents crossing the road to access the I-805 pedestrian bridge. Improving Olive Drive could include:

- **Put Olive Drive on a "road diet"**. Narrow the road by adding a center median island with street trees and/or painting shoulder stripes. The center median island could stretch all the way to the San Ysidro Boulevard intersection.
- **Add a bulbout** at the southwest corner of Olive and Hall. This would reduce the turning radius of the corner, forcing cars to make the turn at slower speeds. It also increases visibility and safety for the pedestrian and driver.
- **Paint marked crosswalks** at the intersection with Hall.
- **Work with Caltrans to improve and maintain landscaping** at the entrance of the I-805 pedestrian bridge.

Conclusions

This report outlines a number of problem areas and solutions for improving walkability along the San Ysidro “Pathways of Knowledge”. The locations that emerged as the highest priority for improvements include:

- ✓ Cypress Drive:
- ✓ The trolley stop at Seaward Avenue and the gateway to Cypress Drive;
- ✓ Corner of Hall Avenue and Olive Drive; and
- ✓ Intersections at Hall Avenue and E & W Park Avenue.

Many of the recommended solutions for these areas involve relatively inexpensive treatments such as painting shoulder strips and crosswalk markings and adding street parking. These recommendations could be implemented more immediately. Others, for example installing center median islands and multiple bulbouts, will require greater financing and longer-term collaboration between the community and the City of San Diego. As redevelopment occurs along San Ysidro Boulevard and other areas of the community, funds could be directed to improve priority locations identified in this report. Most of these locations also serve as critical pathways to the San Ysidro commercial district. In addition, Caltrans and the Federal Highway Administration offer several types of environmental justice and community-based planning grants that could help fund improvements.

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