

The State of Street Design in San Diego County

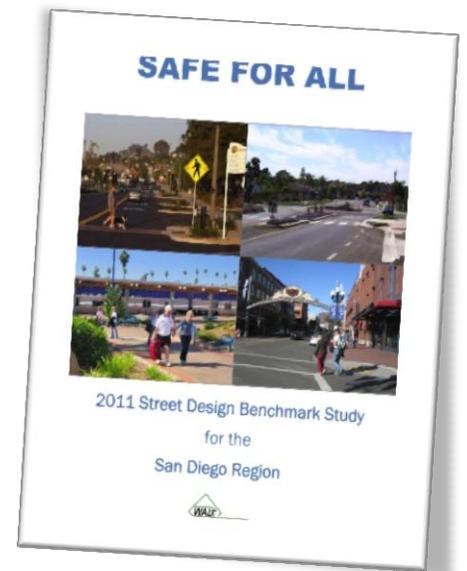
with
WalkSanDiego

A California WALKS Network Case Study

Introduction

WalkSanDiego (WSD) released its 2012 Street Design Benchmark Study, *Safe for All*, in May 2012 to highlight what regional cities are doing—or not doing—to make streets safer for all users.¹ The report also examines how cities around the country, under the banner of Complete Streets, are rethinking decades-old road standards to improve the safety and livability of their communities. The report provides a call to action for the region's 18 cities to better align our street design practices with goals of walkable, bikeable communities and to successfully implement SB 375.

The effort led to WSD's hiring of a new staff person, a bolstering of the organization's efforts and visibility to advance our mission, and development of new relationships and partnerships to create more walkable communities.



Background and Need

On an annual basis, approximately 65 pedestrians and nine bicyclists are killed in the San Diego region. About a thousand pedestrians and an equal number of bicyclists are injured. According to a 2011 national report, San Diego ranks fifth in most dangerous regions for walking. Since the 1930s, roads in the U.S. have been designed for automobiles with the primary goal of improving vehicular Level of Service (LOS), even amidst other statewide and local policies supportive of greater walking and biking. WSD recognized the need to analyze local policies that challenge more walking and biking, examine what cities around the U.S. are getting right to achieve these goals, and to document local practices as a benchmark for future progress.

Process and Actions

WSD sought funding from the San Diego Foundation in 2010 to hire a new staff person and conduct the necessary research. Once hired, staff brought on two interns to help conduct a literature survey of best practices around the U.S. This information helped to then create a survey questionnaire for regional cities that WSD would use in interviews with planning and transportation engineering staff during the next couple of months. Once interviews were complete, WSD compiled all of the data into a report and included recommendations at both the regional and local levels. Regional level recommendations were considered important as SANDAG was simultaneously drafting the Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) and related Sustainable Communities Strategy (SCS). WSD argued that Complete

¹ A copy of *Safe for All* can be found at walksandiego.org under Publications.

Streets were a critical piece to successful SCS and lowering of GHGs. Local recommendations were important to guide the way for better planning and implementation of safe, walkable and bikable streets.

According to Kathleen Ferrier, the new staff person hired for the project, “Completion of this report has only added to WalkSanDiego’s positive reputation in the region and allowed the organization to play an important role in advocating for healthy Complete Streets policies at the local and regional levels. It has been particularly successful in opening the door to discuss the missing links between policies that promote walkable communities and necessary implementation tools with city staff people and elected officials”

Results and Outcomes

There were many positive results to the report’s release:

- WSD conducted the research and wrote the report without any partners. However, afterwards as a result of the report’s findings and recommendations, WSD partnered with the San Diego chapter of the American Planning Association (SDAPA) to create a Complete Streets Task Force and with SANDAG, the San Diego County Health and Human Services Agency (HHSA), and the National Complete Streets Coalition to conduct 2 Complete Streets workshops with 4 local cities.
- The interview process with individual cities allowed WSD staff to develop personal relationships with planners and transportation engineers for ongoing work and advocacy. This process also helped establish WSD as an ally to these cities for promoting walkable communities and related policies.
- The report established a baseline of policies, opportunities and barriers related to street design for the region and outlined future advocacy activities for staff around the region.
- Release of the report resulted in a successful media splash with 1 radio news spot and 3 newspaper articles.²
- WSD continuously cites data from the report to advocate for more funding for biking and walking at the regional level, specifically.
- To date, WSD has made 19 presentations on the report to a variety of groups including the regional government, local elected officials, and planning committees.
- SANDAG, as part of its 2050 RTP, included an action item to create a regional Complete Streets policy. This reflected one of WSD’s advocacy points communicated verbally and in writing.



*Press event for release of Safe for All.
Photo credit: WalkSanDiego*

The results of the report were local to San Diego. However, the request for funding and research process can be emulated by other walk/bike advocates to hire new staff and get more involved in policy level decision making. Absolutely critical to the process was the consistent interview survey used for regional cities and the inclusion of multiple staff people for each city as it helped to form relationships and emphasize a positive reputation for WSD.

In essence, the report has led to the introduction and bolstering of Complete Streets policies and knowledge throughout the region. This has been especially timely as California’s Statewide Complete Streets law took effect in

² A copy of the news release can be found at walksandiego.org

January 2011 requiring cities to include Complete Streets policies in their General Plan update. WSD has met with 5 cities updating their general plans to introduce Complete Streets policy recommendations based on findings of the report.

Conclusion and Looking Forward

Two challenges include (a) identifying best practices in the literature survey that could be applied to San Diego. This required some knowledge of existing practices and policies in the San Diego region, and (b) refining the set of multiple recommendations into single a 'request for action' for local jurisdictions and/or elected officials. To date, WSD has focused its advocacy on support for Complete Streets and related policies and funding in general. More specific 'requests for action' should present themselves in the future.

For other groups interested in pursuing a similar strategy, WSD recommends a similar process in interviewing cities and gathering data. One change might be to bring in additional partners during the research of the report to broaden the scope and strengthen advocacy efforts after the report's release.



This case study is part of California WALKS's effort to share information and best practices from around California. We are highlighting the work of our network members and groups we have worked with to show the depth and breadth of pedestrian safety efforts in the state. Please contact Rhianna Babka (Rhianna@californiawalks.org) for more information or to share a case study from your community.