

RECOMMENDATIONS TO IMPROVE PEDESTRIAN SAFETY IN PACOIMA



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INTRODUCTION

The Pacoima neighborhood of the City of Los Angeles was identified as a focus community for a Community Pedestrian Safety Training, in collaboration with Pacoima Beautiful, based on residents' interest in pedestrian safety and walkability, as well as recent and planned active transportation improvements in and around the neighborhood.

Following additional conversations with the Active Transportation Division of the Los Angeles Department of Transportation (LADOT), Los Angeles Walks, Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority (Metro), faculty from the Urban and Environmental Policy Institute at Occidental College, and the office of Councilmember Felipe Fuentes, the community invited the University of California at Berkeley's Safe Transportation Research and Education Center (SafeTREC) and California Walks (Cal Walks) to Pacoima to facilitate a community-driven pedestrian safety action-planning workshop. Cal Walks facilitated the workshop on August 29, 2015, which consisted of: 1) an overview of multidisciplinary approaches to improve pedestrian safety; 2) two walkability assessments along Van Nuys Boulevard and other neighborhood streets; and 3) small group action planning discussions to facilitate the development of community-prioritized recommendations to inform the City's ongoing active transportation efforts, as well as the County's planning efforts for the East San Fernando Valley Transit Corridor project. This report summarizes the workshop proceedings, as well as ideas identified during the process and recommendations for pedestrian safety projects, policies, and programs.

BACKGROUND

Community Pedestrian Safety Training Program

The Community Pedestrian Safety Training (CPST) program is a joint project of UC Berkeley SafeTREC and Cal Walks. Funding for this program is provided by a grant from the California Office of Traffic Safety (OTS) through the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA). The purpose of the CPST is to train local neighborhood residents and safety advocates in pedestrian safety and to educate them on how to collaborate effectively with local officials and agency staff to make communities safer and more pleasant to walk. The half-day training is designed to provide participants with pedestrian safety best practices and a range of proven strategies (the 6 E's: Empowerment & Equity, Evaluation, Engineering, Enforcement, Education, Encouragement) to address and improve pedestrian safety conditions and concerns. Participants are then guided on a walkability assessment of nearby streets before setting pedestrian safety priorities and actionable next steps for their community.

For a summary of outcomes from past CPST workshops, please visit:
www.californiawalks.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/CPST_Follow-Up_2009-14.pdf

Selected Pedestrian Safety Conditions in Pacoima

High Traffic Speeds on Van Nuys Boulevard

Van Nuys Boulevard is one of the San Fernando Valley’s main streets, running through the heart of Pacoima. Van Nuys is also the seventh busiest bus corridor in the Metro system with nearly 25,000 daily boardings. Currently, the Pacoima section of Van Nuys is a 4-lane, 35 MPH arterial that runs northeast from I-5 toward the foothills. Parking lanes are on both sides, and a fifth middle lane alternates for left turns at signalized intersections. The current street configuration prioritizes the movement of automobiles despite the high transit ridership, the many destinations concentrated along the corridor—including retail, community services such as the library, the post office, and Pacoima City Hall, and restaurants—and the accompanying pedestrian activity. During our site visit, the Cal Walks team observed drivers frequently exceeding speed limits along the corridor.

Distance between Marked Crossings

For many stretches of Van Nuys Boulevard, there is a lack of marked crosswalks between signalized intersections. For example, between the signalized intersections of Telfair Ave/Van Nuys and San Fernando Rd/Van Nuys, there are three to four legal, unmarked crossings at Tamarack Ave, El Dorado Ave, and Ilex Ave in addition to the marked crossings at the signalized intersections. The distance between Telfair Ave/Van Nuys and San Fernando Rd/Van Nuys is just over a quarter mile, meaning a person would need to make a over 0.5 mile detour if she wished to only use marked crosswalks. It is unlikely that many people would make this detour, and many currently—and legally—utilize the unmarked crossings that lack safety enhancements to make the crossings safe for pedestrians.

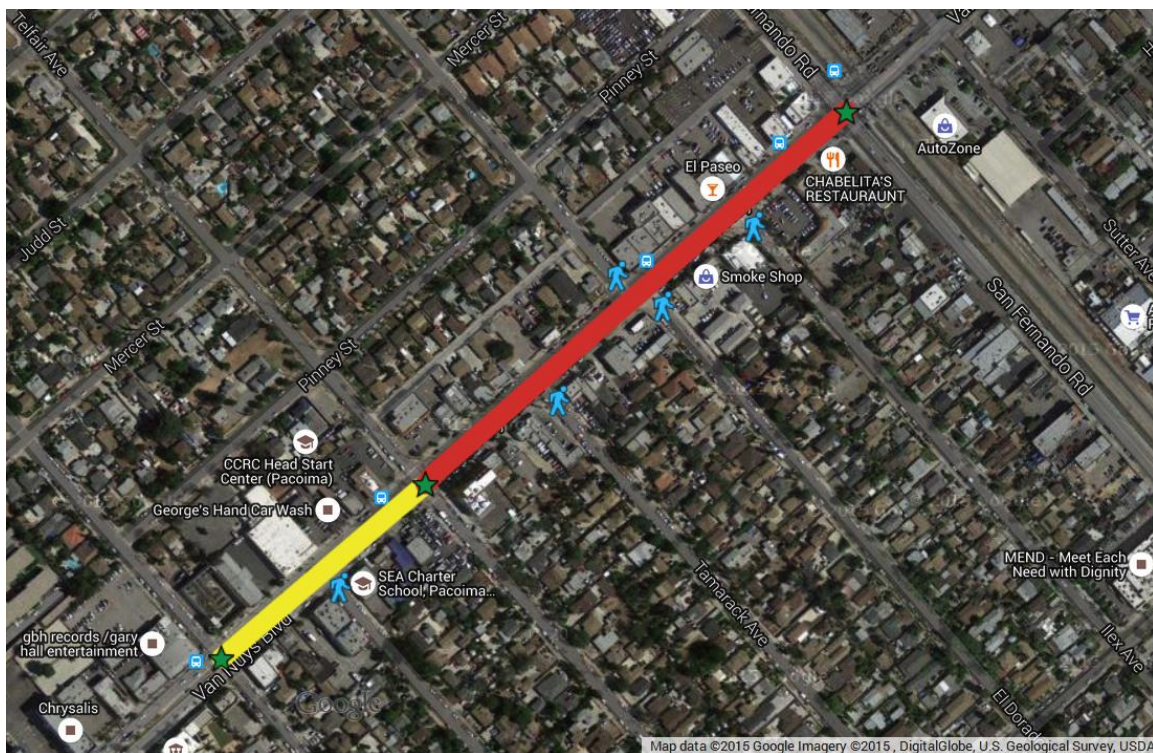


ILLUSTRATION OF DISTANCE BETWEEN MARKED CROSSINGS (GREEN STARS) ON VAN NUYS BOULEVARD; UNMARKED CROSSINGS INDICATED BY BLUE PEDESTRIAN FIGURE

Discontinuous Sidewalks & Lack of Curb Ramps throughout Neighborhood Streets

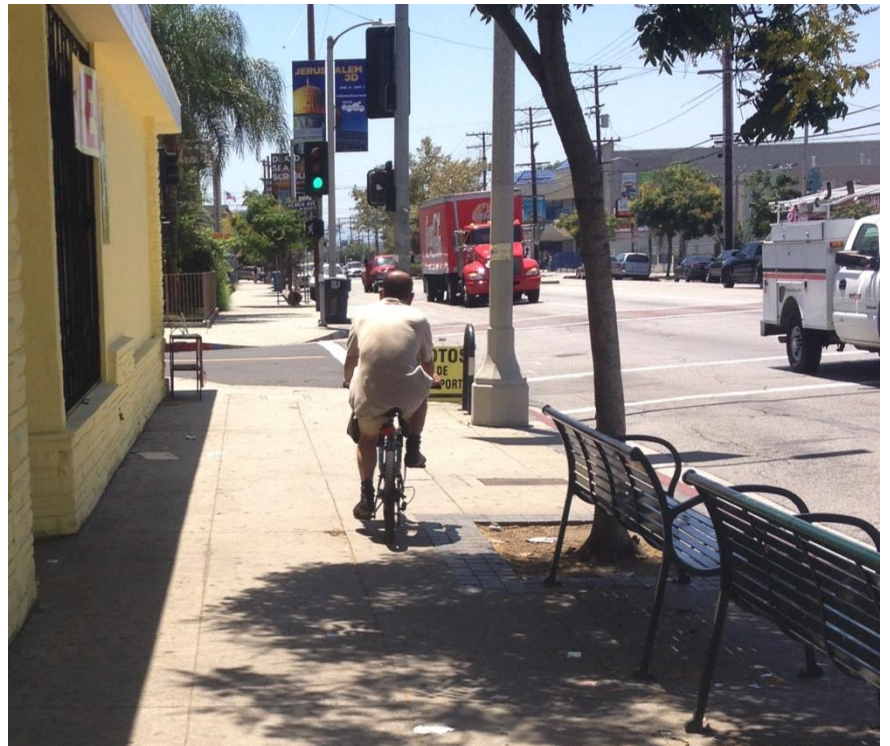


While sidewalks are present and wide along Van Nuys Boulevard, many neighborhood streets and other arterial roads lack pedestrian facilities or feature discontinuous sidewalk networks. Streets observed lacking sidewalks include Laurel Canyon Boulevard, Pierce Street, and Oneida Street. Moreover, ADA-compliant curb ramps are largely missing on neighborhood streets, including where they intersect with Van Nuys Boulevard.

DISCONTINUOUS SIDEWALKS NEXT TO HIGH SPEED TRAFFIC

Lack of Bicycle Facilities Contribute to User Conflicts on Sidewalk

The lack of bicycle facilities on Van Nuys Boulevard between Laurel Canyon Boulevard and San Fernando Road results in bicyclists using the sidewalk as a safe refuge from fast moving traffic. Bicycle activity on Van Nuys Boulevard should be expected given the existing multi-use path along the Metrolink right-of-way on San Fernando Road, as well as the on-street Class II bicycle lane on Van Nuys Boulevard north of San Fernando Road that continues to Foothill Boulevard. The gap in the bicycle network invites unnecessary conflict between pedestrians and bicyclists on the sidewalk, especially near transit stops where there are large numbers of bus riders boarding and alighting.

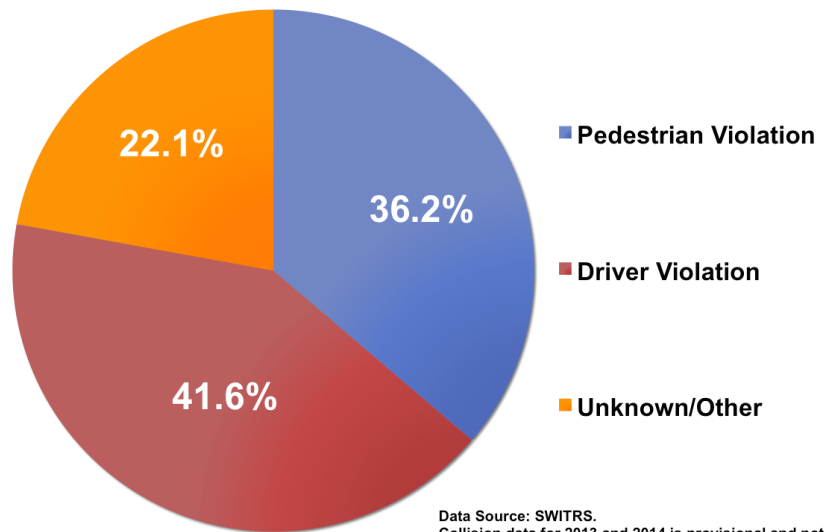


BICYCLISTS SEEK REFUGE ON SIDEWALKS DUE TO LACK OF DEDICATED BICYCLE FACILITIES

Pacoima’s Pedestrian Collision History

Between 2010-2014, there were 153 pedestrian collisions in Pacoima,¹ including 8 fatalities and 22 severe injuries—an alarmingly high number of pedestrian collisions given Pacoima’s compact size of 7.14 square miles. Pedestrian collisions during this time period occurred throughout the neighborhood, though many are clustered along Van Nuys Boulevard and Laurel Canyon Boulevard. Roughly 42% of pedestrian collisions in Pacoima can be attributed to a driver violation, while 36% can be attributed to pedestrian violations. The the top two Primary Collision Factors (PCF) in terms of driver violations were: Pedestrian Right-of-Way Violations² (63%) and Unsafe Speed (14.7%)—accounting for over three-quarters of driver violations found to be the PCF in pedestrian collisions. For pedestrian violations, the top two PCFs were: Failure to Yield to Drivers when Outside a Marked or Unmarked Crosswalk³ (60%) and Disobeying a Pedestrian Signal⁴ (20%).

Pedestrian Collisions by Primary Collision Factor (PCF), (2010-2014)



Data Source: SWITRS.
Collision data for 2013 and 2014 is provisional and not final.

AUGUST 29 WORKSHOP

The community-based organization, Pacoima Beautiful, requested a workshop to 1) provide City/County staff, community organizations, and residents with a toolkit for promoting pedestrian safety and walkability to inform future comprehensive active transportation planning and improvement efforts, including the East San Fernando



RESIDENTS LEARNING ABOUT THE 6 E'S TO PEDESTRIAN SAFETY

¹ Collision data for 2013 and 2014 are provisional and not final.

² Pedestrian Right-of-Way Violations are defined as instances where a driver fails to yield to a pedestrian in a marked or unmarked crosswalk when the pedestrian has the right of way (e.g., when the pedestrian has a “Walk” signal at a signalized intersection).

³ Pedestrians have the right-of-way in marked and unmarked crossings, and drivers are legally required to yield to pedestrians in these instances. However, when pedestrians cross outside of marked or unmarked crossings, pedestrians must yield the right-of-way to drivers. This is not the same as the term “jaywalking,” which refers to crossing outside of a marked or unmarked crossing between two signalized intersections. A pedestrian is legally able to cross outside of a marked or unmarked crossing between two intersections where one or none of the intersections is signalized but only if the pedestrian yields the right-of-way to oncoming drivers.

⁴ Disobeying a pedestrian signals refers to crossing when a “Don’t Walk” signal, or red hand, is displayed or when a pedestrian begins a crossing during the “Flashing Don’t Walk” phase of a pedestrian signal that may be accompanied by a countdown timer. Pedestrians are legally allowed to only begin to cross when presented with a “Walk” signal or white pedestrian figure.

Valley Transit Corridor project; 2) foster an open and collaborative relationship between community groups, residents, and City/County of Los Angeles agencies; and 3) develop consensus pedestrian safety priorities and actionable next steps for the Pacoima neighborhood.



WORKSHOP PARTICIPANTS EXPLORING VAN NUYS BOULEVARD DURING WALKABILITY ASSESSMENT

The workshop was hosted from 9:00 am-1:30 pm with lunch, childcare, simultaneous Spanish translation, and Spanish-language workshop materials provided to encourage community resident participation; residents were encouraged to join at any point during the workshop. Fifteen (15) individuals attended the workshop, representing the community-at-large, including: Pacoima Beautiful staff and members, Pacoima residents, Pacoima youth, and Pacoima seniors and persons with disabilities. One of the two small groups was facilitated entirely in Spanish during the action planning session, and participants were

encouraged to communicate in the language they felt most comfortable in throughout the workshop.

Reflections from Walkability Assessment.

Workshop participants conducted walkability assessments along major streets including Van Nuys Boulevard, Laurel Canyon Boulevard, and San Fernando Road, as well as minor streets, such as Pierce Street and Oneida Avenue. Participants were asked to 1) observe infrastructure conditions and the behavior of all road users; 2) apply strategies learned from the 6 E’s presentation that could help overcome infrastructure deficiencies and unsafe driver, pedestrian, and bicyclist behavior in Pacoima; and 3) identify positive community assets and strategies which can build upon these assets. Following the walkability assessment, the participants shared the following reflections:

- **Bradley Avenue People Street Plaza:** Participants lauded the recently opened Bradley Avenue People Street Plaza as an engaging and positive asset for the plaza’s neighbors and the community at large. Participants observed formal physical activity activities programmed in the plaza, such as Zumba and stationary bicycle riding, and strongly supported such uses for the plaza.
- **Wide Sidewalks & Partial Shade on Van Nuys Boulevard:** Participants appreciated the width of sidewalks on Van Nuys Boulevard between Laurel



PARTICIPANTS EXPLORE THE BRADLEY AVENUE PLAZA FIRST HAND DURING WALKABILITY ASSESSMENT

Canyon Boulevard and San Fernando Road, as well as the existing shade trees present on the east side of street.

- **Pedestrian Activity on Van Nuys Boulevard:** Participants remarked upon the large numbers of people walking along and across Van Nuys Boulevard to access transit stops, retail, restaurants, and other local businesses. Adult and youth participants alike expressed that they felt safe walking along Van Nuys Boulevard due to high level of pedestrian activity on the street.
- **Discontinuous Sidewalks & Lack of Curb Ramps:** Apart from Van Nuys Boulevard, participants noted the lack of continuous sidewalks on Laurel Canyon Boulevard, Pierce Street, and Oneida Avenue. The dirt “sidewalks” present an accessibility barrier to residents and appeared to encourage dumping and littering. Participants also observed how these “sidewalks” appeared to contain more obstructions than present in areas with sidewalks and how these areas were challenging for able-bodied participants to navigate, let alone people using wheelchairs, walkers, and other mobility-assistance devices.



SIDEWALK ABRUPTLY ENDS MULTIPLE TIMES ALONG PIERCE STREET

- **Bicycle/Pedestrian Conflicts on Sidewalks:** Participants observed several conflicts between bicyclists using the sidewalk and people walking, largely due to the lack of bicycle facilities on Van Nuys Boulevard.
- **High Speeds on Van Nuys Boulevard:** Participants were provided with speed radar feedback devices for the walkability assessment. One workshop participant with limited mobility spent the assessment time measuring the speed of drivers on Van Nuys Boulevard in front of Pacoima City Hall. While most drivers were traveling 40 MPH, the participant did note that another tier of drivers were traveling in the 45-50 MPH range. Perhaps most egregious was the one driver recorded traveling 57 MPH.
- **Accessibility Challenges & Conflicts at Driveways:** Participants commented on how the numerous driveways and drive-through businesses presented a number of challenges for people walking. First, the ingress/egress of vehicles increased potential conflicts between drivers and

pedestrians, particularly due to driver inattention when exiting driveways. Participants also noted how the frequent driveways make it difficult to navigate in a wheelchair or using other mobility-assistance devices due to the steep and possibly non ADA-compliant cross slopes.

- **Long Distances between Marked Crossings along Van Nuys Boulevard:** Participants noted the long distances between marked crossing, and California Walks facilitated a discussion on the legality, right-of-way, and safety at unmarked crossings. Fully understanding the trade-offs and standards for uncontrolled crossings, participants agreed that some additional marked crossings should be warranted, especially given the distance between existing marked crossings and the need to access community services and destinations on both sides of Van Nuys Boulevard.

- **Inadequate Bus Facilities:** Participants noted the general lack of shade or shelters at bus stops along Van Nuys Boulevard and Laurel Canyon Boulevard. Participants also commented that the bus landing pads and stations were generally too small to accommodate the crowds of waiting bus riders, which resulted in less navigable sidewalk space for people walking.

- **Sidewalk Obstructions & Trash on Van Nuys Boulevard:** On Van Nuys Boulevard, participants commented about the numerous obstructions present on the sidewalks, including dumped large items; litter and trash strewn about; and large tire displays of adjacent tire and automotive shops.



LARGE TIRE DISPLAYS OBSTRUCTING SIDEWALK ALONG VAN NUYS BOULEVARD

Community Resident Recommendations

Following the walkability assessment, Cal Walks facilitated small-group action planning discussions; one group was co-facilitated by Pacoima Beautiful staff in Spanish. Workshop participants were tasked with developing concrete recommendations based on the 6 E's of pedestrian safety and walkability to improve pedestrian safety in Pacoima observed during the workshop, as well as more broadly to take into account the East San Fernando Valley Transit Corridor project. Workshop participants provided the following recommendations for overall pedestrian safety improvements in Pacoima:

- **Mark Additional Crosswalks on Van Nuys Boulevard:** Residents were unanimous in the need for additional marked crosswalks on Van Nuys Boulevard, particularly in sections with long distances between existing marked crosswalks. Fully understanding the LADOT crosswalk marking guidelines and the potential that the East San Fernando Valley Transit Corridor project may ultimately restrict crossings between Laurel Canyon Boulevard and San Fernando Road, residents were adamant that marking of crosswalks with additional safety enhancements—such

as accompanying high-fluorescent signage, advanced yield lines, beacons, safety islands, etc.— where needed, should be pursued in the near-term to provide immediate pedestrian safety benefits, especially given the long-term timeline of the Transit Corridor project.

- **Provide Protected Bike Lane on Van Nuys Boulevard:** Participants expressed strong support for providing bicycle facilities on Van Buys Boulevard. Participants commented that they have visited the Reseda Boulevard protected bike lane and would like the same treatment for Van Nuys Boulevard.



PARTICIPANTS ENGAGED IN ACTION PLANNING DISCUSSIONS

- **Improve Accessibility throughout Pacoima:** Participants underscored the need to improve accessibility for people with disabilities and seniors throughout the neighborhood. Particularly, residents placed a high priority on installing sidewalks and accessible curb ramps where they are currently missing, as well as addressing sidewalk obstructions through community-based programs (discussed below).
- **Public Education Campaign:** Participants agreed that a public pedestrian safety education campaign should be implemented within the neighborhood. Participants identified the need for all road users to be educated through this multi-lingual campaign, with a particular focus on youth prior to driving age.
- **Pair Safety Improvements with Public Art:** Participants identified the opportunity presented by pedestrian safety and walkability projects to incorporate more public art throughout the neighborhood. This could be accomplished with decorative crosswalks, decorative bicycle racks, and neighborhood banners paired with pedestrian-scale lighting.
- **Increase Engagement with Public Agencies:** Though several City/County agencies were involved in the planning for this workshop, no agency staff were able to attend the workshop. Participants highlighted this as an opportunity to improve relationships with City/County

agencies, particularly to establish an ongoing, bi-directional partnership. Participants also noted the importance of further involving Councilmember Fuentes' office, as well as Mayor Garcetti's office, as pedestrian safety and walkability improvements are rolled out throughout the neighborhood.



PACOIMA YOUTH SHARING THEIR RECOMMENDATIONS AND PRIORITIES TO IMPROVE PEDESTRIAN SAFETY IN THE NEIGHBORHOOD

- **Launch Community Campaign to Educate Businesses about Sidewalk Obstructions:** In order to address the numerous displays, including tires, obstructing the sidewalks along Van Nuys Boulevard, participants proposed launching a community campaign to educate and work with local businesses to remove or better locate their tire displays and sandwich board signs. Residents commented that many businesses along the corridor are influenced by the behaviors of their peer businesses and that this campaign could leverage positive peer pressure to encourage better behaviors by the businesses. Participants also suggested establishing a target number of businesses to contact and educate as part of this campaign in order to measure and evaluate progress.
- **Increase Shade on Van Nuys Boulevard:** The walkability assessment underscored the lack of shade on the west side of Van Nuys Boulevard. Participants strongly supported installation of additional shade trees to make walking along Van Nuys Boulevard comfortable and pleasant on both sides of the street.

California Walks/SafeTREC Recommendations

Cal Walks and SafeTREC also submit the following recommendations for consideration by the City of Los Angeles and LA Metro:

- **Install Traffic Signal & Marked Crosswalk at El Dorado Avenue/Van Nuys Boulevard:** Cal Walks and SafeTREC recommend installing a traffic signal at the El Dorado Avenue/Van Nuys Boulevard

intersection with an accompanying high-visibility marked crosswalk and pedestrian countdown timers. This intersection currently features bus stops on either side of Van Nuys Boulevard, as well as an office of Neighborhood Legal Services of Los Angeles County. Since access across Van Nuys Boulevard may be restricted to signalized intersections with the East San Fernando Valley Transit Corridor project, installing a traffic signal and crossing in advance of the Transit Corridor project will ensure that this crossing is preserved. With transit signal priority equipped vehicles, delays to the rapid transit service on Van Nuys Boulevard due to pedestrian crossings would be minimal to non-existent. Additionally, this marked, signalized crossing is a logical midway point between the marked signalized crossings at Telfair Avenue/Van Nuys and San Fernando Road/Van Nuys.

- **Mark Additional Crossings Paired with Safety Enhancements along Van Nuys Boulevard:** Beyond the section of Van Nuys Boulevard under study in the East San Fernando Valley Transit Corridor project between Laurel Canyon Boulevard and San Fernando Road, Cal Walks and SafeTREC recommend LADOT evaluate the installation of additional marked crosswalks between signalized intersections. Cal Walks observed many pedestrians unwilling to make the long detours required to access the existing signalized marked crosswalks on Van Nuys Boulevard north of San Fernando Road, choosing instead to utilize the legal unmarked and unimproved crosswalks. To better accommodate pedestrians needing to cross Van Nuys Boulevard, as well as to improve the safety of these uncontrolled crossings, Cal Walks and SafeTREC recommend the installation of high-visibility crosswalks, advanced yield lines, pedestrian safety islands, curb extensions/bulb-outs, and possibly rectangular rapid flashing beacons (RRFBs) at reasonable intervals in compliance with LADOT's crosswalk installation guidelines.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We would like to thank the Pacoima neighborhood for inviting us into their community and for hosting the Community Pedestrian Safety Training. Thank you to Veronica Padilla-Campos, Yvette Lopez-Ledesma, Max Podemski, and Mercedes Ortiz of Pacoima Beautiful for their full commitment to and leadership of community-driven transportation planning and meaningful engagement with community residents. We would also like to thank the Councilmember Fuentes' office and Pacoima Beautiful for generously donating the meeting space for the workshop.

We would like to acknowledge the many community members and the youth whose attendance of the workshop and dedication to pedestrian safety meaningfully informed and strengthened the workshop's outcomes.

Funding for the Community Pedestrian Safety Training program was provided by a grant to University of California at Berkeley Safe Transportation Research & Education Center (SafeTREC) from the California Office of Traffic Safety through the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration.