

KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEWS

PARK ACCESS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Key Informant Interviews were conducted from December 2018 through February 2019 in order to understand barriers to park access, identify opportunities for improving access to parks within Sacramento County, and identify types of information and resources that would be most effective for decision-makers, implementers, and advocates to advance Safe Routes to Parks.

Stakeholders included local agencies, park districts, program implementers, age and ability oriented organizations, and school districts. The list of stakeholders interviewed is below:

- AARP
- City of Sacramento Department of Youth, Parks, and Community Enrichment
- Fulton-El Camino Recreation and Parks District
- Health Education Council
- Sacramento Regional Transit
- San Juan Unified School District
- Society for the Blind
- Southgate Recreation and Parks District

Results from the interviews are summarized into stakeholder profiles. Each profile includes a description of what the organization does and who they represent, current gaps and barriers, and priorities and opportunities to improve park access in the Sacramento region. Key takeaways from the interviews include:

SAFETY: Traffic safety and personal safety were identified as the main barriers and concerns for active travel to parks. In particular, sidewalk gaps and unsafe crossings along routes to parks are key infrastructure needs. Personal safety concerns along routes to parks as well as at park sites can be addressed through Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) strategies and programs to activate park spaces.

VULNERABLE ROAD USERS: Creating safer active transportation infrastructure for vulnerable road users such as youth, older adults, and people with mobility disabilities is a priority.

COLLABORATION: Facilitating greater cross-sector collaboration between local agencies, program implementers, retailers and business owners, and other organizations is key for advancing safe access to parks. Information and resource-sharing among vested stakeholders was identified as an opportunity to strengthen partnerships and share best practices.

PROGRAMS: Identifying and implementing age-appropriate and culturally sensitive programs was highlighted as a priority to encourage park use.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT: A better understanding of how to conduct meaningful community engagement and how to translate community needs and priorities into policy and implementation would help local agencies and program implementers improve park access and programs.



Who They Are

AARP is a national organization that advocates for independence and choice for individuals as they age, and as such mobility and the ability to “age in place” are key areas of focus. AARP applies an all-ages lens to various livability criteria including housing, transportation, and healthcare, and has recently begun exploring the domain of parks and open space. AARP advocates for 10-minute walks to community destinations and has released resources that highlight how to create parks and other public spaces for all ages, including a walk audit and park audit toolkit, community intercept surveys, and general park access strategies. Through decades of all-ages advocacy and a strong network of older adults at the national, state, and regional scale, the Sacramento Chapter of AARP provides valuable insights for safe routes to parks from an all-ages approach.

Current Gaps and Barriers to Access

While the 10-minute walk is becoming a widely accepted approach to park access, a 10-minute walk for an able-bodied person is not the same as a 10-minute walk for a child, an older adult, a parent with a stroller, or someone with a cane, walker, or mobility device. Young children and older adults have different walking speeds and stamina levels than able-bodied adults, which means that the walkshed for accessing a park is smaller for different age groups. Additionally, young children and older adults are more vulnerable to traffic injuries and should have routes with high visibility crossings, longer crossing times, and safer active transportation infrastructure.

In addition to traffic safety concerns, real and perceived safety at park sites is a current barrier to park access, particularly for older adults. Programs and amenities designed for all ages is another barrier, as older adults may not use parks that only have programs and amenities for children, young adults, or highly active individuals. Low stress amenities such as walking paths and benches provide opportunities for older adults to exercise and feel comfortable using parks.

Priorities and Opportunities

On a national level AARP advocates for comprehensive park access for people of all ages and abilities. The Sacramento Chapter can complement this work by adapting national policy to the specific needs of aging communities in the region and by working with local elected and community leaders to align community priorities with advocacy efforts. AARP expressed interest in learning more about how walk audits can be used as a community tool to activate neighborhood spaces and advocate for parks that reflect the community’s needs. Partnerships with park districts to create programs that suit community needs is another opportunity to improve park access and use among people of all ages.



CITY OF SACRAMENTO DEPARTMENT OF YOUTH, PARKS AND COMMUNITY ENRICHMENT

Who They Are

The City of Sacramento Department of Youth, Parks and Community Enrichment, formally the Department of Parks and Recreation, has jurisdiction over the majority of parks within the North and South Sacramento priority census tracts. The Department manages over 200 parks throughout the City including neighborhood, community and regional parks. The Department underwent a strategic planning process in 2018 that resulted in a focus on youth park programs and planning. Because youth are disproportionately more vulnerable to traffic safety injuries while walking or biking, safe active transportation infrastructure to parks is an important component of park access. The Department identifies adequate sidewalk facilities to neighborhood parks, safe alternative transportation infrastructure, and park maintenance as indicators of good access to parks.

Current Gaps and Barriers to Access

The two main gaps and barriers identified by the Department fall under infrastructure and community engagement. First, infrastructure disinvestment has created barriers to access due to the expensive cost of sidewalk infill, resulting in an incomplete sidewalk network to parks. Poorly maintained infrastructure has further limited park access by making it unsafe to walk or bike to parks. However, the Department does not have jurisdiction over street infrastructure and cannot directly impact routes to parks.

Secondly, a lack of guidance in meaningfully engaging communities around parks has created a gap in the provision of services to the community. By not understanding what the community really wants, the Department cannot develop parks that reflect the community they are built in or provide culturally relevant programming. Currently, new parks only require a minimum of one community outreach event which limits opportunities for meaningful input from the community.

Priorities and Opportunities

The Department is uniquely poised to enact policy change with a General Plan update currently underway. Some key opportunities include coordinating with the Department of Public Works to prioritize safe active transportation infrastructure around parks and complete sidewalk gaps, as well as to deepen community engagement efforts through the citywide parks master planning process. The Department used to have shared use agreements with schools, however these agreements have been mostly forgotten. Working with schools and school districts on reinstating shared use agreements can improve access to green space, particularly in areas that currently lack parks. Community engagement resources would help the Department better understand how to work with communities to identify needs and priorities. The Department is also working to collect and inventory amenities at each park which will guide park planning efforts in the future.



FULTON-EL CAMINO RECREATION AND PARK DISTRICT

Who They Are

The Fulton-El Camino Recreation and Park District manages eight parks in the Arden-Arcade community. Two parks, Bellview and Bohemian, are located in the North Sacramento priority census tracts. The District is currently in the process of updating their Park Master Plan, which will address the importance of safe routes to parks. Safe routes to parks is a priority for the District because of the connection to health and because most of the District's park users are seniors, families, and children.

Current Gaps and Barriers to Access

Lack of safe infrastructure along routes to parks is the primary barrier to park access in the Fulton-El Camino Recreation and Park District. Most parks are located along or near major streets such as El Camino Avenue, Howe Avenue, and Cottage Way. These streets are characterized by fast traffic, high volumes of vehicle travel, wide intersections, and unsafe crossings. Additionally, many of the neighborhood streets where parks are located have sidewalk gaps throughout the neighborhood.

Priorities and Opportunities for Improving Access

Overall, the District expressed a desire to coordinate more closely with the County on infrastructure improvements to create safe routes to parks, with sidewalk infill and safe crossings at major intersections and park entrances being the primary priorities. ADA accessible infrastructure and park amenities are priorities as well, particularly for seniors who use parks. Parks in the District are not only important as a destination, but also serve as connections to the broader community. For example, employees at the Kaiser Medical Center on Cottage Way often use the trails through Cottage Park as a route to work. As part of the Master Plan process, the District is considering how to better connect all their parks to one another and to community destinations. The District is also interested in the opportunity to increase biking to and at parks through safer biking infrastructure and programs that educate residents and children on how to ride safely.



HEALTH EDUCATION COUNCIL

Who They Are

The Health Education Council (HEC) is a nonprofit organization that is committed to promoting health and preventing chronic disease in underserved communities. HEC provides a variety of programs and services to educate students and families about wellness and healthy foods, improve neighborhood safety, facilitate social cohesion, and provide access to health education resources.

HEC works in the North Sacramento and South Sacramento priority census tracts on Walk with Friends programs, park revitalization, and healthy food access program and policies. The Walk with Friends program and park revitalization efforts focus on encouraging park use by providing structured group activities and improving park amenities. HEC also works to improve healthy food access for students by educating students and families on nutrition and how to prepare different types of fruits and vegetables. In conjunction with this effort, they work with schools and districts to adopt and implement health and wellness policies.

Current Gaps and Barriers to Access

Through their Walk with Friends program and park revitalization work, HEC has heard from community members that the major barriers to park access are transportation, safety, and lack of programming. Residents who do not live within walking distance of a park are less likely to use parks due to a lack of safe transportation options. Similarly, safety and fear of negative experiences along routes to parks and while at parks is a concern that limits park access. Lastly, many parks do not have programs, affordable structured activities, or fun and healthy things to do that would encourage residents to use their local park.

Priorities and Opportunities for Improving Access

Park activation and implementation of Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design strategies at parks and along routes to parks are some of the key opportunities for improving park access. Policies should prioritize park safety, programming, and addressing park siting in neighborhoods that do not have access to a park within a 10-minute walk. HEC also expressed interest in community engagement strategies around park activation and opportunities to work with law enforcement in positive ways.



SACRAMENTO REGIONAL TRANSIT

Who They Are

Sacramento Regional Transit (SacRT) is a transit system that provides bus and light rail service throughout Sacramento County. SacRT provides access to services and destinations along major commercial corridors, with some connections to larger parks.

SacRT is currently in the process of a route optimization study that is focusing on improving service along commercial corridors. The goal of the study is to increase transit reliability and consistency, making transit more convenient for both commuters and non-commute users. Improving transit service for non-commute trips, such as errands and leisure, can make it easier for people to access park destinations using an active travel mode.

Current Gaps and Barriers to Access

Current barriers for using transit as a transportation mode to park destinations include unsafe walking and biking infrastructure around transit stops and poor user-friendliness. Transit routes are often located along high volume corridors, which are not safe environments for riders traveling to or from transit stops using active modes. Lack of clear schedule information, understanding of how to use the transit system, and knowledge of destinations located near transit stops can discourage transit use, particularly for the first-time or infrequent user.

Priorities and Opportunities for Improving Access

Collaboration between transit agencies and local governments provides an opportunity for developing stronger grant applications, coordinating planning efforts, and implementing infrastructure improvements that increase first mile and last mile connections between transit and daily destinations. Because SacRT does not have jurisdiction over roads and infrastructure on routes to transit stops, partnerships with the City of Sacramento and County of Sacramento are critical for achieving multimodal accessibility. Proactive policies that address system wide design changes, particularly around first mile and last mile connections to transit, is a major priority to ensure that access to and from transit stops is safe for transit users.

Most parks within the North and South Sacramento census tracts are neighborhood parks and therefore are unlikely to be accessed by transit. However, there are opportunities to explore transit connections to larger community parks and trails throughout the County in order to encourage active travel.

A photograph of a woman and two young girls standing in a park-like setting. The woman, wearing sunglasses and a striped shirt, stands behind the girls. The girl on the left wears a colorful helmet and a purple shirt, while the girl on the right wears a pink helmet and a pink shirt. In the background, there are bicycles parked in a rack, a chain-link fence, and a building. The text "SAN JUAN UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT" is overlaid in large, bold, black letters across the middle of the image.

SAN JUAN UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT

Who They Are

San Juan Unified School District serves a 75-square mile area covering the communities of Arden-Arcade, Carmichael, Citrus Heights, Fair Oaks, Gold River and Orangevale. Two of Sacramento County's Priority Census tracts are located within SJUSD's boundary. SJUSD is committed to providing accessible transportation options for all students. The Safe Routes to School program within the District provides staff resources to help schools address transportation and traffic safety needs as well as provide educational opportunities for students.

Current Gaps and Barriers to Access

Through the District's Safe Routes to School program, the District heavily promotes and encourages walking and biking routes to school. However, traveling home after school creates additional barriers. Many students do not have safe places to go between school and home to socialize or participate in after school programs. While some communities have parks that appear to be near schools, lack of safe infrastructure for students to access the park, lack of structured youth programming, and/or lack of community awareness that a park exists in the neighborhood create barriers for students to access and use parks. Students who do not live within walking distance of a park are less likely to use parks due to a lack of safe transportation options. Similarly, safety and fear of negative experiences along routes to parks and while at parks is a concern that limits park access and the promotion of park use by nearby schools. Lastly, the District has shown interest in promoting parks as "active" field trips, however it is difficult to have these field trips approved due to the lack of safe infrastructure to nearby parks and liability concerns.

Priorities and Opportunities for Improving Access

Park activation and implementation of Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design strategies at parks and along routes to parks are some of the key opportunities for improving park access. Policies should prioritize park safety, programming, and addressing joint use agreements between schools and park districts for neighborhoods that do not have access to a park within a 10-minute walk from schools. The SJUSD Safe Routes to School team also expressed interest in community engagement strategies to promote parks and other nearby community amenities as safe spaces for teens and families to access after school hours.



Who They Are

Society for the Blind is a nonprofit that provides resources and programs for low vision and blind people, with a mission to empower individuals to live independently and have choice in their lifestyle. Low vision and blind people rely heavily on walking, transit, paratransit, and mobility services such as Uber and Lyft for transportation, providing unique insights on ways to improve multimodal accessibility to healthy retail destinations for people of all abilities.

In addition to providing resources and services, Society for the Blind advocates for disability rights and works with local agencies and officials to implement programs that benefit low vision and blind people. In the past they have collaborated with the Capitol Area Development Authority (CADA) on braille signage compliance in downtown Sacramento and currently work with local officials to address accessibility gaps and barriers.

Current Gaps and Barriers to Access

Quality of transportation infrastructure, wayfinding signage, and accessible route information and entrances are current barriers to accessing healthy destinations. Because low vision and blind people rely on alternative forms of transportation such as walking and public transit, smooth and unobstructed sidewalks and high quality public transit are critical for safe and convenient access. For parks in particular, some additional barriers include finding out what amenities and programs the park offers, accessible and clearly identifiable park access points, and wayfinding throughout the park. Signage can be a large barrier to access, especially if signs do not have audio cues or Braille.

Priorities and Opportunities

Clear and unobstructed sidewalks, access to public transit, and auditory and tactile wayfinding are the main priorities that Society for the Blind have identified for accessing healthy destinations. Aligning transit stops to park entrances can help make it safer and more convenient to access parks. Parks districts can offer more inclusive programs and amenities such as tactile maps and audio tours that provide for people of all abilities. Continuing to work with local agencies such as CADA around updating signage for Braille compliance is another opportunity to improve access through wayfinding. Society for the Blind's expertise and current work should serve as a resource for creating safe and accessible routes for low vision and blind individuals.



Who They Are

The Southgate Recreation and Park District develops and maintains parks and recreational facilities in unincorporated South Sacramento County. Active transportation access and safe routes to parks are among the District's main priorities, and their current work includes a walkability and connectivity study to assess gaps and needs. When developing new parks, the District assesses sites based on centrality within a neighborhood, pedestrian and bicycle accessibility, and whether at least three sides of the park have houses facing the park. In addition to physical access, the District coordinates programs to encourage physical activity such as the Walk with Ease program. The District's current work around park access provides valuable insights and lessons learned that can be applied at other parks throughout the County.

Current Gaps and Barriers to Access

Infrastructure along routes to parks is one of the main barriers to improving active transportation access. Oftentimes, Sacramento County Department of Transportation standards do not align with the level of infrastructure improvements that the District would like to see near park sites, such as high visibility and pedestrian-actuated crossings. Because the District does not have authority over streetscape infrastructure, there are limitations improving access to existing park sites.

Through the process of updating their Master Plan, the District identified district-wide policy gaps including a lack of unified trail standards and lack of formalized collaboration policies. The District has been successful in partnering with various other agencies and organizations, and formalizing this collaborative approach through policy adoption will allow the District to strengthen existing relationships and seek new partnerships in order to improve park access goals.

Priorities and Opportunities

Partnering work with local agencies on improving infrastructure to existing parks is one of the key opportunities to help the District achieve their goal of encouraging safe, active travel to parks. Currently, the District also works with developers and County staff to provide comments on plans and development projects near parks. This approach has been effective for influencing policy change and aligning development with the District's standards and priorities, and can serve as a model for other agencies and organizations hoping to improve access to parks. Joint use agreements with schools provides greater access to green space in neighborhoods, and the District prioritizes siting parks near schools where possible. The District has also worked to engage communities around programs and placemaking, such as the Jack Davis Mural Project in South Oak Park. Communicating and sharing case studies, best practices, and lessons learned among a network of park districts and program implementers was identified as desirable for advancing park access policies and initiatives throughout the County.