



April 29, 2020

Dear Mayor Steinberg,

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Sacramentans are increasingly turning to active modes of transportation to report to essential jobs, go to the grocery store, and stay active for physical, social, and emotional well-being. It is no secret that many of our Sacramento neighborhoods lack adequate infrastructure for safe walking and biking, especially in light of our current public health crisis. Sidewalks are too narrow to support safe social distancing, and significant infrastructure gaps in sidewalk and bike networks further reduce the ability of residents to walk and bike safely, especially in the North and South areas of Sacramento where residents are less likely to own vehicles and more likely to rely on active transportation to access essential jobs and services.

The increase of active travel combined with the dramatic reduction of vehicle traffic¹ provides an immediate opportunity to re-prioritize our streets for people, not cars. Sidewalks and bike lanes are more crowded than ever, often forcing residents to move into traffic lanes just to maintain a 6-foot distance. Additionally, while we are pleased to see that parks and green spaces have remained open to provide valuable physical and mental health benefits, it is clear that there is an overwhelming demand for safe spaces to exercise while obeying stay at home orders. The current capacities of our parks and trails are not enough to uphold public health and safety standards.

Now is the time to take action and join cities around the world that are designating open streets. We are calling upon the City of Sacramento to implement a “Slow Streets for Sacramento” policy to partially or fully close streets in order to keep residents safe from COVID-19 and create more public space for recreation while, continuing to provide safe access to essential businesses and services.

Benefits of closing streets:

Public and Personal Health

The Sacramento County Department of Health has deemed outdoor recreation activity, including, walking, hiking, biking, and running as an “essential activity” as long as social distancing can be practiced.² Sacramento residents are using parks and trails as a way to maintain physical and mental well-being, however the crowding of these critical community assets put public health at risk. Closing streets will lessen the burden on parks and trails while creating more public space for residents to safely exercise for physical and mental health benefits.

¹ https://www.tomtom.com/en_gb/traffic-index/sacramento-traffic/

² https://www.saccounty.net/COVID-19/Documents/April7_UpdatedHealthOrderStayatHome.pdf

Economic Benefits and Support for Local Businesses

Fully or partially closing streets encourages active travel along those routes due to reduced vehicle traffic and speeds. With more people walking and biking now than ever before, closing streets along corridors to essential businesses such as grocery stores and restaurants not only provides safe access to these destinations, but also encourages residents to support these businesses by buying takeout during recreational trips. Once social distancing eases and people can return to patronizing local shops, restaurants, and cafés in person, patrons who walk and bike to destinations are more likely to spend up to three times more than vehicle drivers, providing much needed economic stimulus to the city.³ Research has shown that communities with cycling infrastructure is correlated with strong retail sales.⁴

Progress Toward Planned Complete Streets Projects and the City's Vision Zero Action Plan

To date, the City has made progress on several critical multimodal planning efforts such as the Broadway Complete Streets Project, Stockton Boulevard Corridor Study, and Central City Mobility Project. These projects, consistent with the [Vision Zero Action Plan](#)⁵, support the City's long-term goals to reduce traffic injuries and fatalities. While overall traffic volume has decreased by approximately 35% as a result of COVID-19, excessive speeding citations have spiked by as much as 87%⁶ statewide on freeways. Implementing simple, low cost traffic calming measures such as temporary street closures will slow the speed of traffic in neighborhoods and improve safety for all road users. Additionally, these temporary closures can maintain momentum on planning projects by allowing communities to envision longer-term infrastructure improvements and strengthen grant applications for future implementation.

Progress Toward the Mayors' Commission on Climate Change Goals

One of the few “silver linings” of COVID-19 shelter in place orders are “cleaner pandemic skies”. Currently, the Sierra peaks are visible from our downtown. Photos of cities like Milan, Beijing and New York before and after sheltering in place orders were enforced present a clear opportunity on the importance of capitalizing on our lowered carbon emissions and moving forward with the goals put forth by the Mayors' Commission on Climate Change, calling for “enhanced accessibility to low stress, connected infrastructure for walking and rolling”. Now is the time to jumpstart supporting the goal for 30% of all trips by active transportation by 2030.⁷

Policy Recommendations

We recommend that any action taken by the City around “Slow Streets for Sacramento” incorporate the following priorities:

1. Expedite multimodal projects already in place such as

³ https://www.wri.org/blog/2020/04/coronavirus-biking-critical-in-cities?utm_source=twitter&utm_medium=worldresources&utm_campaign=socialmedia&utm_term=80176966-4fae-4177-b693-557ba3381a67

⁴ https://www.bizjournals.com/boston/blog/mass_roundup/2013/05/bike-lanes-increase-retail-sales.html

⁵ <https://www.cityofsacramento.org/-/media/Corporate/Files/Public-Works/Transportation/VisionZero/Vision-Zero-Action-Plan-Adopted-August-2018.pdf?la=en>

⁶ <https://dot.ca.gov/news-releases/news-release-2020-009>

⁷ https://www.lgc.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/MCCC-Report_Public-Draft_April_21_2020.pdf

- a. Stockton Boulevard Corridor Study
 - b. Broadway Complete Streets
 - c. Freeport Commercial Corridor Safety Study
 - d. Vision Zero Corridors
2. Implement “Slow Street” routes to parks and essential businesses to support health and the local economy
 3. Identify and establish low-volume, low stress alternatives to major arterial streets for walking and biking
 4. Restrict through traffic on neighborhood streets to allow for residential and emergency vehicle traffic only, and
 5. Align with the goals and recommendations of the Mayors’ Commission on Climate Change.

SABA and WALKSacramento stand ready to support the City in this effort by reaching out to our members and constituencies to get the word out and help communities engage in making these ideas a reality. We can also lead public engagement to help identify streets in locations around the city, if needed.

We realize this is a challenging time of disruption, and that while everyone is pondering and planning for the “new normal” our hope is to encourage the City to expedite many of the plans it already has in place to create a cleaner, safer Sacramento for all ages and abilities, now and in the future. We urge the City to join over 750 people who have signed this [petition](#)⁸ in support of slowing Sacramento’s streets.

Sincerely,



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Sacramento Area Bicycle Advocates



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WALKSacramento



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Freeport Boulevard Traffic Safety
Committee



<https://bit.ly/slowstreetssacramento>

⁸ <https://www.change.org/p/sacramento-city-council-safe-streets-for-sacramento-e0e33580-383c-44de-bff2-ba61d7989b3a>

CC:

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