

Frequently Asked Questions

Neighborhood Traffic Safety & Bike Boulevard Project

Phase 1

www.cityofpaloalto.org/bikepedsafety

Q: *What is the goal of this project?*

A: The project is designed to moderate vehicle speeds, enhance pedestrian safety, ease bicycle travel and beautify neighborhoods by adding green space. It is part of the City's overall efforts to double the rate of cycling as a transportation choice by 2020, and to reduce transportation-related greenhouse gas emissions. The project aims to improve residential quality of life by reducing non-local traffic, increasing the City's tree canopy on Ross Road, and encouraging non-motorized transportation. This project is part of a 2014 City Council infrastructure spending plan which allocated \$20 million to advance the implementation of the 2012 Bicycle + Pedestrian Transportation plan. By 2019, the City will have constructed 65% of all major projects identified in the Plan.



Q: *Why does Palo Alto need bicycle boulevards?*

A: Bicycle boulevards were first identified in the [2012 Bicycle + Pedestrian Transportation Plan](#). The Plan went through a robust community outreach process. Palo Alto enjoys the third highest rate of commuter bicycle ridership in the United States with 8.5% of the population getting “behind the handlebars” every morning instead of getting behind the wheel. This has enormous benefits to local air quality, traffic congestion and the health of our residents. The City is continuing to grow its bicycle network to close gaps in the network and connect with growing networks in neighboring communities like Mountain View, Menlo Park, and Stanford University.

Q: *How will these changes make our streets safer?*

A: There is a lot of research on the effects of traffic calming, vehicle speeds and safety. The Federal Highway Agency has a useful [Traffic Calming e-primer](#) that includes data about traffic calming elements, some of which are included in this project. For example, many of the curb extensions will improve sightlines of crossing pedestrians, and improved roadway markings will make the street safer for all roadway users. The entire corridor will contain many different types of traffic calming elements including speed humps, as well as raised crossings and raised intersections. Other traffic calming features will include curb extensions, medians, and chicanes. An example of some of these types of features is available on the [Institute of Transportation Engineers](#)

[website](#), not all features shown are used in the project). All of these features will reduce speeding, improve sightlines, and make the route less desirable to cut through traffic. Signage and roadway markings will be installed throughout to reinforce and bring attention to new street features. Non-safety related project features include wayfinding signs (with local and regional destinations), new landscaping, new street trees, and green infrastructure (biotreatment of storm water runoff into the San Francisco Bay).



Q: *Is it safe to have bicycle and motor vehicle traffic operate in the same space?*

A: While it can seem counter intuitive, research shows that it is safer for cyclists to ride in the center of the roadway on residential streets, in traffic calmed environments where motor vehicles are traveling at lower speeds. A bicycle boulevard is a shared street design where vehicles and bicycles operate in the same space at low speeds. While Ross Road did not previously have a bicycle facility, in the past many chose to ride in the parking lane. Riding in the center of the travel lane allows for better visibility of cyclists when people are backing out of driveways, and it also gives bicyclists a better vantage point of pedestrians crossing the roadway.

Q: *How should children ride in the redesigned roadway?*

A: The construction of the bike boulevard project is on designated school corridors, and was designed with children's safety in mind. Children that are not comfortable riding in the street are able to ride on the sidewalks at pedestrian speeds in Palo Alto, especially young children accompanied by an adult. Many have expressed concerns about the positioning of the planter boxes along Ross Road and their impact on bicycle safety. The planter boxes and speed humps will have depressions spaced so that cyclists and emergency vehicles can easily traverse them. Planter boxes are about as wide as a parked vehicle, and cyclists approaching the speed hump will be positioned in the roadway just as they would when riding alongside parked vehicles. 15 mph speed limit signs will be placed in each planter box as well.

Q: *What are the Rules of the Road?*

A: Whether driving a motor vehicle or riding a bicycle on a bicycle boulevard, the same rules of the road apply as on any residential street in California. Motorists may pass people on bikes so long as a minimum distance of three feet is maintained between the vehicle and cyclist (per California State law). If there is not enough space to comfortably pass a person on a bike, you should wait until more space is available to safely pass. Both motorists and cyclists must follow all rules of the road and come to a complete stop at stop signs, yield when appropriate, etc. In roundabouts, motorists and cyclists must both yield to any vehicle (including bicycles) that is already in the roundabout. Cyclists riding in the center of the roadway will have enhanced

visibility of pedestrians and motorists; however slower moving cyclists should move to the side of the roadway when vehicles are behind them to facilitate passing when it is safe to do so. Cyclists are encouraged to stay out of the door zone of parked vehicles for their safety. People who are parking on streets with rolled curbs are asked to park in the roadway and not on sidewalks for both pedestrian safety and to enhance the traffic calming effects of the project. For additional guidance please consult the Department of Motor Vehicles [California Driver Handbook](#).

Q. *What will some of the impacts be during construction?*

A. In construction barricades and cones are sometimes used for the safety of construction crews. All streets will remain open with no closures or diversions. The project will also not prevent anybody from driving to use the YMCA.



Q. *Did the City conduct a public outreach process for this project?*

A: The City has maintained a lengthy public community engagement process for this project, and has made a concerted effort to engage community members in the planning process and prior to construction. The City held a community-wide open house, sent out regular project updates via email, and provides plans and project updates continuously via the City website. City staff has regularly attended community events to discuss the project, including the California Avenue Farmers Market, and has also hosted project-specific community meetings. Staff has also provided presentations at regularly scheduled public City meetings of the Pedestrian and Bicycle Advisory Committee, Planning and Transportation Commissions, as well as the City Council.

City staff has also collaborated with local Palo Alto schools and parents, the Palo Alto Police Department and the Palo Alto Fire Department. Designs went through several iterations based on community feedback before the final [plans were adopted by City Council](#). Comments gathered at community meetings [are available for public review](#) and can be found in Appendix G of the City Council approval of the project, as well as the final concept plans which begin on Page 199.

Despite our best efforts, we understand that sometimes residents do not hear about our projects until construction is underway. We sincerely apologize if you were caught off guard by the project's construction. We would be happy to discuss the project and help to answer any questions you may have. Feel free to contact the project's Community Relations Manager, Sarah Ratliff, should you have any questions or wish to discuss the project further (Sarah.Ratliff@gcinc.com or (669) 225-1617). We also have a dedicated webpage that we will update with information at www.cityofpaloalto.org/bikepedsafety.

Q. *How can I get more involved in planning Palo Alto's streets and bikeways?*

A: Community input and feedback are vital to the health of the community. We welcome your participation at all of our public meetings, workshops, and ultimately at boards, commissions and City Council meetings where projects are deliberated and approved. Bicycle and pedestrian projects are often discussed at monthly PABAC meetings (Pedestrian & Bicycle Advisory Committee), Planning & Transportation Commission meetings, and at City Council meetings. All meeting agendas are posted on the City's website, where you can view upcoming discussion items and plan accordingly. Also, projects are discussed at the monthly City School Traffic Safety Committee meetings. Please do not hesitate to contact transportation staff if you have any questions at transportation@cityofpaloalto.org.

