Appendix B: Existing Conditions Summary

Introduction

This document provides an overview of existing conditions for walking and bicycling in Santa Cruz as identified through data, observation, and public input. This information will provide the basis for the infrastructure, program, and policy recommendations and prioritization in the Active Transportation Plan (ATP) Update.

The current edition of the City of Santa Cruz ATP was adopted in 2017. To keep up with the needs of the city and establish a vision for active transportation moving forward, the city is preparing an update to the ATP. At the core of the ATP update is a commitment to fostering a livable city: a place where people of all ages and physical abilities can access safe, convenient, and enjoyable ways of getting around.

This existing conditions summary is based on the following inputs:

City Data

The City of Santa Cruz provided geospatial roadway point and line data to inform existing conditions analyses, including street centerlines, functional class, speed limits, and curb ramp locations. Much of this data was available in the City's Open Data Portal, and City staff provided additional files as needed.

Replica

To supplement any missing data needed to perform analyses, such as traffic volumes, Toole Design used data from Replica. Replica is an activity-based travel demand model that uses big data sources to estimate multimodal travel activity.

Site Visit

The Toole Design consultant team conducted a two-day site visit in January 2025 to confirm findings from the data review, observe infrastructure, and photograph on-the-ground conditions of locations with deficiencies, as well as those that reflect current best practices in active transportation design.

Review of Previous Plans

The project team reviewed past plans produced by the City of Santa Cruz and its regional partners. The most recent and relevant City plans are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1: Previous Plans

Plan Title	Description
Climate Action Plan (2022)	The Climate Action Plan (CAP) promotes active transportation to achieve climate goals. "Accessible people-centric transportation infrastructure" is one of its core values and it sets mode share targets for biking and walking of 23% by 2030, and 30% by 2035, respectively.
Vision Zero Policy (2019) and Local Roadway Safety Plan (2021)	In August of 2019, the City of Santa Cruz adopted a Vision Zero policy to eliminate fatal and serious injury crashes on City streets by 2030. The Local Road Safety Plan (LRSP) analyzed crash data and identified locations for transportation safety improvements to help achieve the Vision Zero goal. It emphasized improving traffic safety for vulnerable roadway users, including the unhoused population, and highlighted funding sources for the Santa Cruz Safe Routes to School program and other active transportation investments.
Active Transportation Plan (2017)	The 2017 Active Transportation Plan (ATP), which replaced the 2008 Bicycle Plan and 2003 Pedestrian Plan, identified an integrated network of walkways and bikeways connecting Santa Cruz to employment, education, commercial, recreational, and tourist destinations. • The ATP assumed a 9.7% bike-to-work rate (based American Community Survey 2010-2014 5-year estimates). • Based on 2009-2013 data, the ATP noted that 66% of all traffic fatalities in the city included bicyclists and pedestrians. • The plan included a long list of project and program recommendations and has been used to secure over $60 million in grant funding for implementation since its adoption.
Santa Cruz City Schools Complete Streets Master Plan (2015)	This two-year community-based planning process identified infrastructure and non-infrastructure active transportation improvements around city schools. Projects implemented from this plan plus ongoing education and encouragement efforts led by the City and its partners have increased walking and bicycling mode share at city schools.

Existing Conditions

Active Transportation Networks

Figures 1 and 2 are maps of the current active transportation networks in Santa Cruz. Figure 1 shows existing bicycle facilities and proposed recommendations from the 2017 Plan that are not yet built out. Figure 2 is a map of missing sidewalks and curb ramps, which create gaps in the pedestrian network.

Bicycle Network

A series of off-street multi-use paths, including along West Cliff Drive, the Westside Rail Trail, and the Riverwalk, form the spines of the Santa Cruz bicycle network, the main cross-town routes that other, more local routes branch off from. There are striped bike lanes on many arterial and collector streets, though most do not have any physical separation from vehicles. Santa Cruz has a network of bike routes or bicycle boulevards on local streets, and only a few streets in the city have posted speed limits above 25 mph.

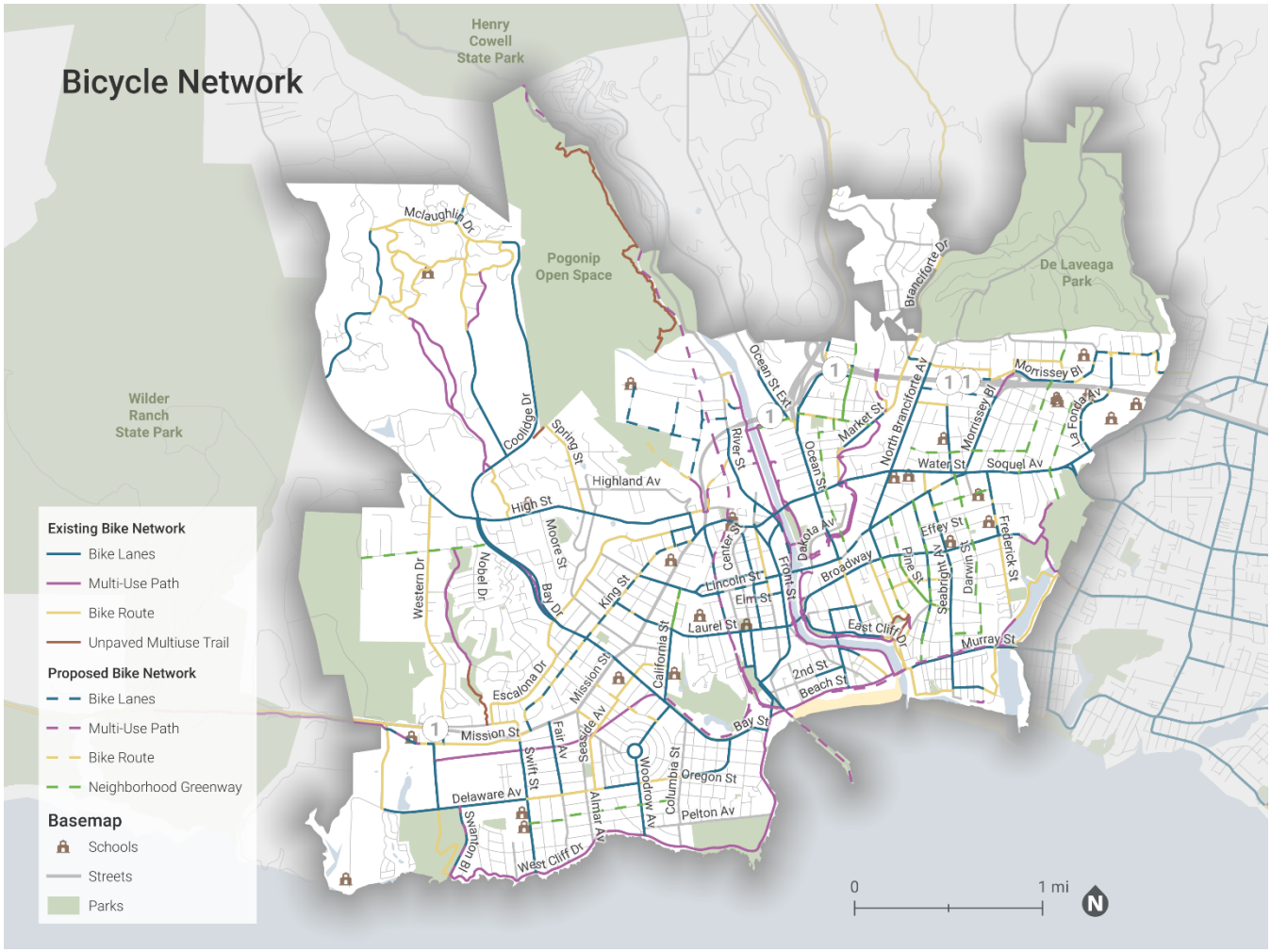

Figure 1: Existing and Proposed (as of 2017 ATP) Bicycle Network

Table 2: Mileage of Existing Bike Facilities

Type of Facility	Bike Lanes*	Bike Routes*	Multi-use Paths
Existing Mileage	101	87	22

** On-street bike facilities are presented in lane miles, i.e., a bike lane on both sides of 1 mile of roadway is 2 miles.*

Pedestrian Network

Sidewalks are present in Downtown and along major streets in Santa Cruz, though the age and uneven surfaces of some sidewalks make them inaccessible. Gaps in the pedestrian network include streets that are missing sidewalks as well as streets with sidewalks that are missing curb ramps. Many of these gaps are concentrated in residential neighborhoods outside of Downtown Santa Cruz, including portions of the Upper and Lower Westside and Upper and Lower Eastside.

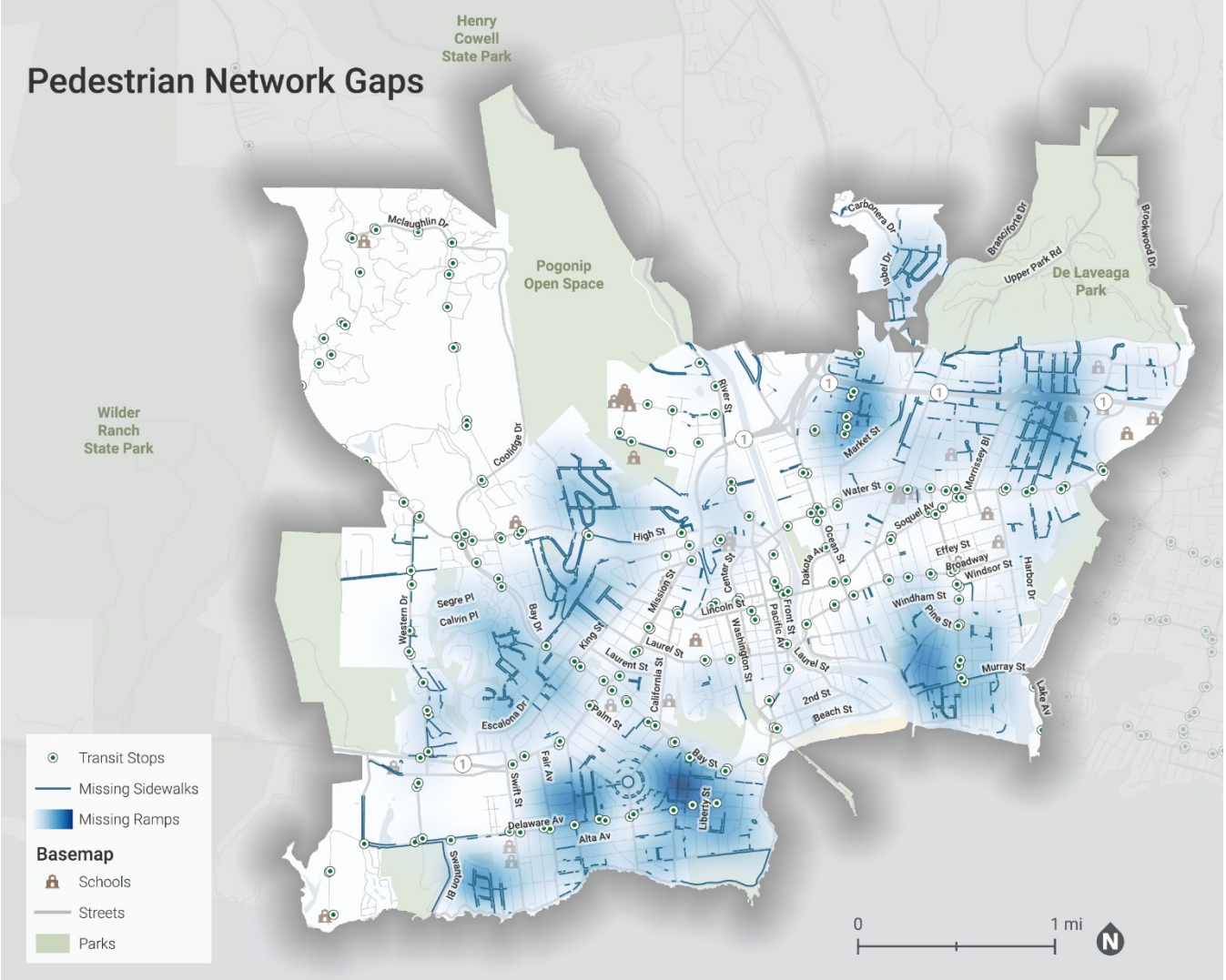

Figure 2: Pedestrian Network Gaps

Table 3: Missing Pedestrian Infrastructure

Missing Sidewalks	Missing Curb Ramps
45 miles	636 curb ramps

Crashes

The 2017 Active Transportation Plan and more recent crash data show that Santa Cruz has disproportionately high crash rates for active transportation users. There were three total active modes fatalities between 2018 and 2022; all were pedestrian fatalities located on Ocean Street.

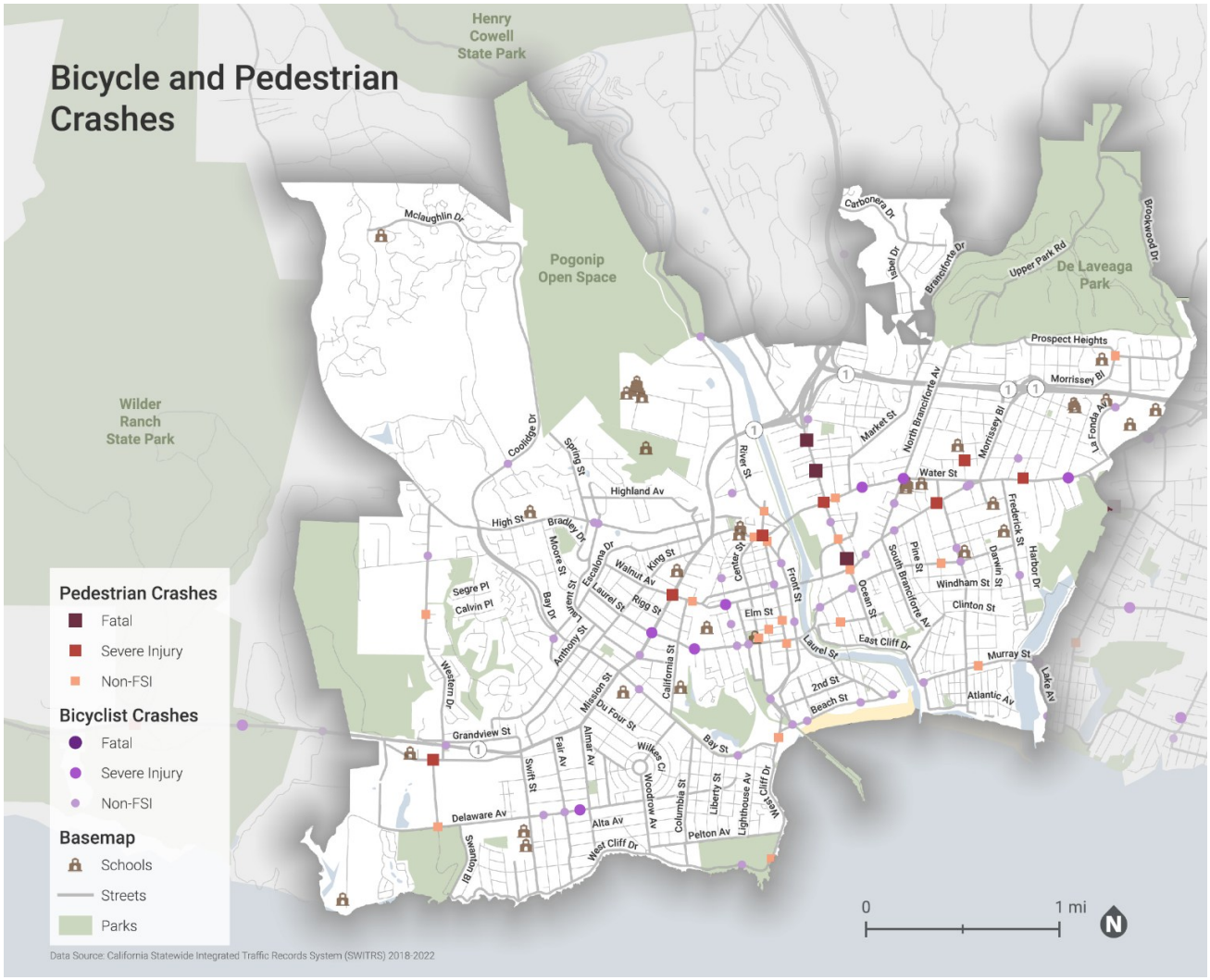

Figure 3: Bicycle and Pedestrian Crashes, 2018-2022

Equity Destinations

One facet of public engagement was to identify destinations that underserved community members frequently access. The Technical Advisory Committee brainstormed a set of initial destinations, and more were added through focus groups with service providers for the unhoused community and youth. This set of equity destinations will inform plan recommendations and the prioritization process to ensure that members of the Santa Cruz community who may face greater transportation challenges can access the places they need to go.

Figure 4, below, shows the destinations for the unhoused community, identified through the focus groups, which include shelters, safe parking lots, food distribution sites, and health centers, as well

as other destinations common to most residents of Santa Cruz, such as schools, parks, libraries, community centers, and grocery stores.

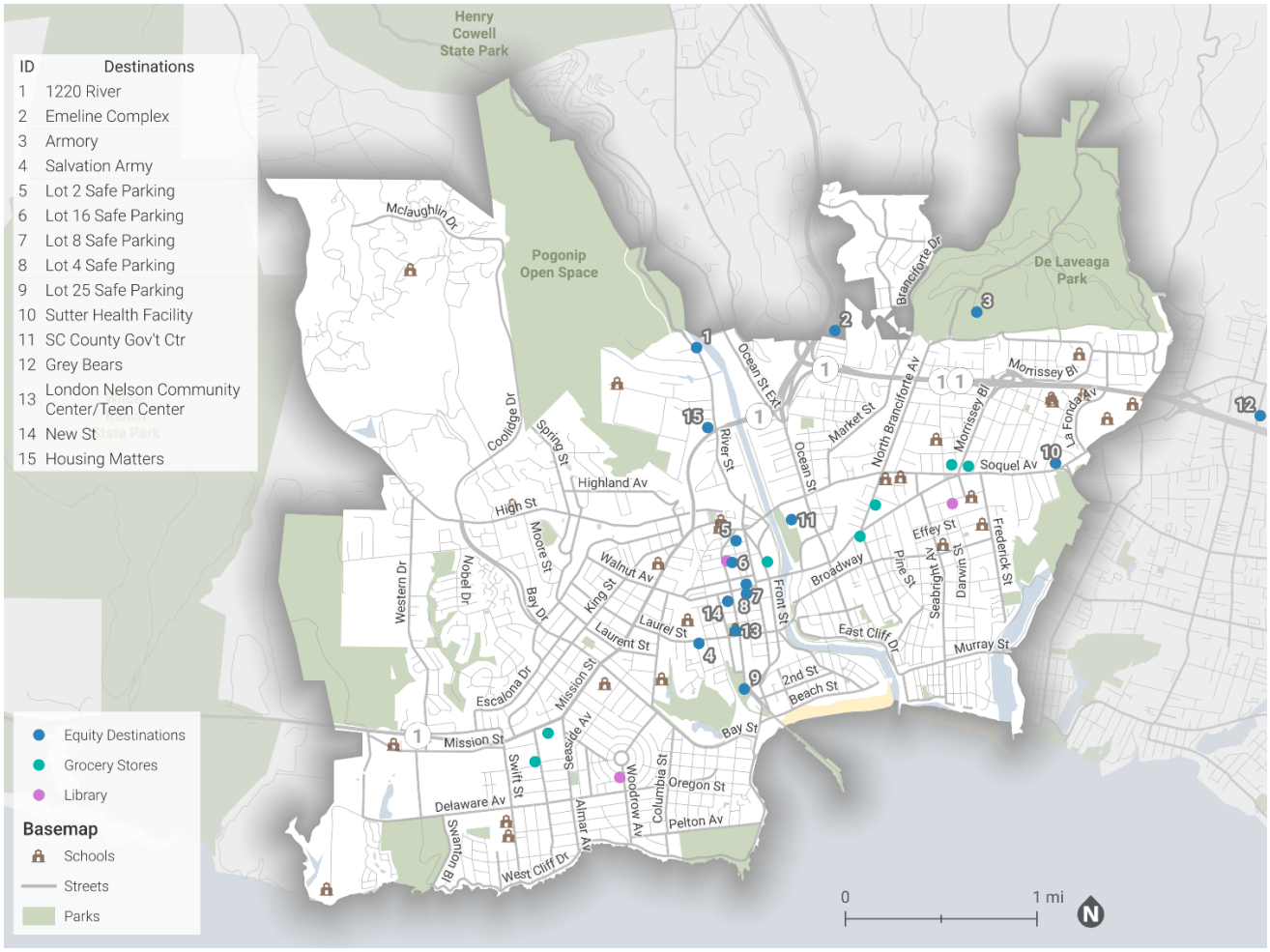

Figure 4: Key Equity Destinations

While many of the key equity destinations are located in the Downtown area, shelters and services for the unhoused population are primarily located on the outskirts of the city, between freeways, without reliable public transit services, and far from safe places to cross the street.

For youth, another challenge, which is described in more detail in the Site Visit Summary below, is the limited connectivity between the De Laveaga neighborhood (north of CA-1) and the rest of the city. When accessing the school from north of the freeway, only La Fonda Avenue connects the high school to this neighborhood; due to the narrow right-of-way, there is a dedicated bike facility only on the northbound (uphill) side and sharrows on the southbound side, making it challenging for high school students to safely and comfortably travel to school by bike.

An additional challenge for youth is accessing employment in the Boardwalk area. While the Riverwalk Trail is a key connection from Downtown to the Boardwalk, youth who participated in the focus group expressed personal safety concerns with this route.

Improving safe and comfortable access via active modes to all these destinations will be part of the recommendations developed in this plan.

Site Visit Summary

Site visits are an invaluable way to see and experience transportation conditions that may not be readily apparent when reviewing maps and data. The Toole Design consultant team conducted a two-day site visit in January 2025 to confirm assumptions gathered from the data review, observe infrastructure, and photograph on-the-ground conditions of places that may need improvement. as well as areas with recent construction. The site visit was centered on a 12-mile bike ride throughout Santa Cruz, led by City staff. Toole Design staff also made an additional site visit in March while in town for public engagement events.

Following the site visit, the project team identified locations with challenges for active modes that the project will address in the recommendations phase. These are listed and described below, followed by locations that inspire walking, rolling, and biking in the city and serve as best practices that City staff can look to as they expand and improve the active transportation network.

Challenges

- Ocean Street is one of two higher-speed (30 mph) corridors in the city and has the highest number of pedestrian crashes. Despite the relatively new Class II buffered bike lanes along the corridor, high traffic volumes make it an uncomfortable place to bike, walk, or roll.
- Bicycle access to the Rail Trail bridge over the San Lorenzo River is a challenge, especially when headed west, requiring bicyclists to get onto the pedestrian-heavy sidewalk at East Cliff Drive and make a sharp turn onto the trail entrance.
- Parts of the street network are not a simple grid, posing crossing challenges for active transportation users. The unsignalized Soquel Avenue/Poplar Avenue/Water Street triangle is a particularly challenging intersection due to high speeds and traffic volumes.
- The Beach Flats neighborhood has many cracked concrete streets and some non-ADA compliant infrastructure. The raised crosswalk shown in Figure 5 is not connected to or flush with the sidewalk, making it difficult for people with mobility challenges to cross the street.
- Neighborhoods north of the CA 1 freeway, such as Prospect Heights, have limited connectivity to the rest of the city, including the high school. Access is especially limited for active modes users who really can only use North Branciforte Avenue or La Fonda Avenue, the latter of which lacks a southbound bike lane, as shown in Figure 6.
- Some of the Westside Rail Trail intersections with streets were skewed (i.e., not 90-degree angles), creating visibility challenges for both trail users and drivers, and confusion about who has the right-of-way at these crossings.

Figure 5: A raised crosswalk that is disconnected from the sidewalk in the Beach Flats neighborhood.

Figure 6: A narrow, curvy portion of La Fonda Avenue without a downhill bike lane.

Opportunities

- As part of redevelopment, developers in Downtown Santa Cruz are required to install “paseos”, or active-modes-only alleys, to create access between larger blocks. This provides comfortable connectivity for bicyclists and pedestrians in the dense Downtown area.
- A new segment of the Rail Trail connecting the Beach Street bikeway to the Westside Rail Trail segment at Bay Street opening in Spring 2025 will close a key gap, providing continuous east-west connectivity for active modes through the west side of Santa Cruz. The Rail Trail will eventually bisect the entire city and connect to nearby towns.
- City Hall features a secure, outdoor bike cage for employees with a fix-it stand and a bike pump. This is a model for long-term bike parking that could be implemented at workplaces and other city offices throughout Santa Cruz.
- While Santa Cruz has well-connected bicycle and pedestrian networks, including active-modes-only overpasses that cross the freeway and the river, there is room to improve visibility and usability, such as on the High Street Pedestrian Overpass which has spiral ramps up and down.

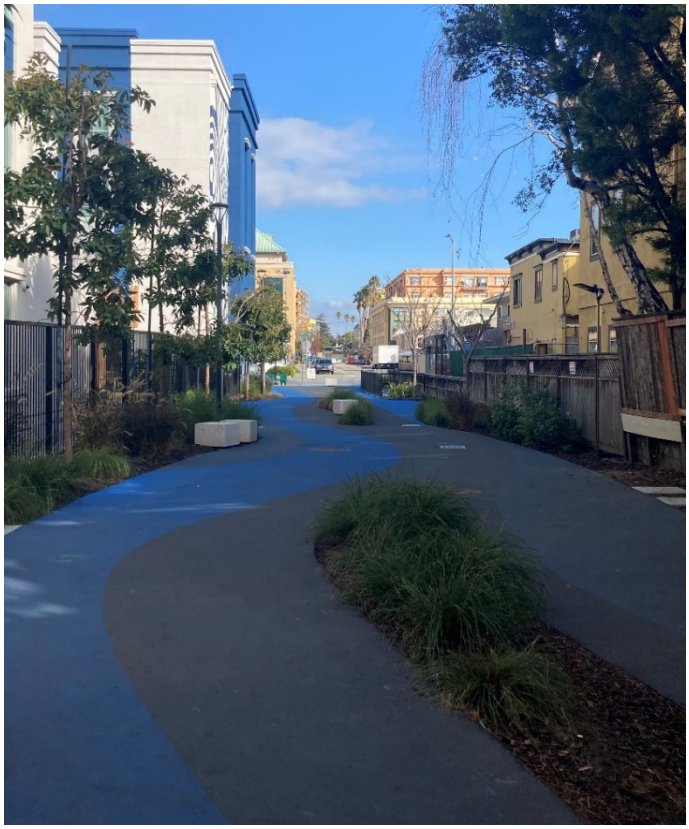

Figure 7: A paseo connects active modes users traveling between Center Street and Cedar Street.

Figure 8: The Rail Trail is a key link in the active modes network, connecting many points of interest in the west side of town.

Goals and Strategies

The 2017 ATP included seven stated objectives. For the ATP Update, the project team presented the objectives to the TAC asked them to rate the City's progress on each one, and to choose three to four objectives to move forward in the ATP Update. Incorporating TAC feedback and best practices from other walk- and bike-friendly communities, the initial goals and strategies for the ATP Update are:

Build and maintain comprehensive bicycle and pedestrian networks.

- Use best practices and design standards, including emerging standards.
- Strengthen development standards.

Enhance safety and security for active transportation users.

- Provide end-of-trip and support facilities.
- Use best practices and design standards, including emerging standards.
- Strengthen development standards.
- Prioritize improvements and select effective countermeasures based on collision history.

Continue progress and investments in active transportation.

- Leverage funding from multiple sources.
- Coordinate with other projects in the public right-of-way.
- Aggressively seek grant funding.

Provide education and encouragement.

- Sponsor classes and incentives for youth and adults.
- Provide professional development opportunities for city staff.