
Partnership Moves Community Toward Complete Streets

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Background: The Partnership for Active Communities brought together multidisciplinary organizations to create a 5-year project to support increased walking and bicycling in the Sacramento CA area.

Intervention: Using a community action model, the partnership focused on programs and promotions to expand walk- and bike-to-school programs. The partnership focused on policy and physical projects in conducting systematic reviews of development projects to influence land use. A comprehensive communications plan united diverse partnership interests to advocate for Complete Streets policy change and improve transportation infrastructure.

Results: Walk- and bike-to-school programs grew, and community-design workshops helped leverage more than \$12 million in additional support, including Safe Routes to School grants. The partnership delivered more than 150 project reviews to city planners, architects, and developers with recommendations for improved pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure, and many positive changes resulted. Complete Streets is now included as a policy in the region's transportation plan, in the mobility element of the city's updated general plan and the county's draft circulation plan, and in the regional transit master plan.

Lessons learned: The partnership's communications plan linked partners with diverse interests to produce a powerful advocacy network to influence adoption of Complete Streets policies. Project development reviews were most successful in communities that allowed comments at a conceptual stage in the process.

Conclusions: The Partnership for Active Communities produced increased public and agency awareness of pedestrian and bicycle safety issues and influenced considerable changes to policies and the physical environment in the Sacramento area.

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Introduction

The Partnership for Active Communities in Sacramento CA, created a 5-year project to support increased walking and bicycling in the Sacramento area through collaborative actions to strengthen support for walking and bicycling in school programs, in land-use development, and in transportation infrastructure.

At the time the Active Living by Design (ALbD) grant opportunity arose, Sacramento had been named one of the 12 worst cities in the nation for air pollution and smog; motor vehicle emissions accounted for nearly 70% of ground-level ozone.¹ Asthma levels, often

linked to pollution levels, were higher in Sacramento than in most other areas in California.² As in most urban areas, automobiles were the primary source of transport to schools. Sacramento was undergoing a period of vigorous growth, and projections estimated the addition of a million new residents for the coming 20 years.³ Many believed that developing a transportation system that provided for walking and bicycling was key to addressing the region's air quality and transportation problems, as well as for providing "livability" for its citizens. A number of future partners were already working to address the area's lack of pedestrian–bicycle infrastructure. Parent groups were working with local schools to encourage more children to walk and bicycle to school. City and county officials were considering pedestrian master plans. Jurisdictions in Sacramento County had formed the Transportation Air Quality Collaborative to achieve community consensus on transportation and air quality issues, and the Sacramento Area Council of Governments (SACOG) was developing its regional blueprint approach to transpor-

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tation and land-use development emphasizing transit-oriented, mixed-use development.

WALKS Sacramento, lead agency for the partnership, was formed in 1998 to advocate for walkability improvements. It grew out of deliberations by the Lung Association (now Breathe California) Clean Air Committee over the region's transportation planning efforts and the lack of pedestrian infrastructure. Several members of WALKS Sacramento's first board were air quality professionals.

Methods

Sacramento's grant called for the creation of a partnership of organizations dedicated to encouraging physical activity by strengthening and expanding walk- and bike-to-school programs; increasing community walking and bicycling overall; and influencing new development to be walkable and bikeable. With modest grant support of \$200,000 over 5 years, the partnership funded partnership coordination, part-time review of land-use development projects, and modest staff support for school student-parent walk- and bike-to-school programs.

Setting and Participants

The Sacramento metropolitan area has been a rapidly urbanizing area northeast of the San Francisco Bay Area. As the state capital, it is a major government center, and many people work for state or local government. The area is flat, making it ideal for walking and bicycling, except for a suburban development pattern that has favored wide, long, and sometimes curvilinear boulevards and spread-out development that discourages walking and bicycling.

Sacramento has a vital civic life with numerous organizations concerned about community health, education, and the environment. In the late 1990s, the movement in California to encourage children to walk to school began with early efforts by the California Department of Public Health, which provided small incentive grants to organizations to develop programs to encourage walking and bicycling. Some of these projects were underway in Sacramento.

In 2001, Sacramento County had a population of approximately 1.2 million with approximately 420,000 residents in the City of Sacramento. Approximately 10% of the city's residents lived just north of downtown in the rapidly growing, and primarily middle class, suburb of Natomas, the initial focus of this project. In 2002, *Time Magazine* dubbed Sacramento America's Most Integrated City.⁴ The three initial intervention schools in Natomas exemplified this integration, with student populations ranging between 14% and 34% African American, 15% and 43% Hispanic, 22% and 43% Caucasian, 6% and 16% Asian, and 5% and 9% other.⁵

Active Living by Design Community Action Model

Using the ALbD National Program Office 5P model,⁶ the partnership pursued multiple focus areas that allowed it to capitalize on existing work of the core partners (www.activelivingbydesign.org/our-approach/community-action-model); preparation, promotion, programs, policy, and physical

projects) Some focus areas, such as schools, used programs and promotion most intensely, while other work, such as the movement to bring Complete Streets (i.e., streets designed to accommodate all modes of travel) to Sacramento and land-use development review, were primarily focused on change in the arenas of policy and physical projects. Throughout the 5 years of the project, preparation, as exemplified in planning and partnership, was a cornerstone of the effort.

Preparation. Originally formed as the Sacramento Safe Routes Partnership, the project was initiated in 2003 by three individuals interested in increasing walking and bicycling to schools in Sacramento's Natomas Unified School District—a bicycle-pedestrian activist, a parent, and the superintendent of schools. In the process of applying for the grant, the partnership scope expanded to include active involvement in the land-use development review process to gain improved environments for walking and bicycling, and WALKS Sacramento became the project director.

Reflecting its broader agenda, the partnership changed its name in 2005 to Partnership for Active Communities. Its activities gradually focused in three areas: schools, land-use development, and transportation infrastructure.

Initially, the partnership added value to the efforts of member organizations by enhancing and cross-fertilizing partner activities. For example, WALKS Sacramento's review and comment on land-use projects began to include site-specific recommendations to provide safe walking and bicycling connections to schools and parks as a result of interface with the schools community. Later, the partnership would coalesce around an integrated focus on transportation infrastructure—namely, Complete Streets.

The partnership of over 30 organizations included core members who were actively involved in key projects, members who provided resource support, and members who, although not actively involved, wanted to be kept informed of partnership progress and activities (Table 1).

Schools—programs and promotion. Supporting, expanding, and promoting parent-led walk- and bike-to-school programs at elementary schools in Natomas was an initial focus. The Natomas Park Walk-to-School Committee continued their daily, supervised walk-to-school groups and added a Walking Wednesday program. The Bannon Creek School parents formed Traffic Tamers, a student-parent group that organized walking events, including Walking Wednesdays, and also created an annual student-led health and fitness fair. The partnership surveyed parents to determine the level of walking and bicycling to schools, to assess the effectiveness of programs, and to better understand specific factors influencing whether or not children walked or bicycled to school.

A focus on programs, policies, and physical projects converged at a series of community design workshops funded by a community planning grant from the California Department of Transportation. Guided by the Local Government Commission, the workshops held at six schools, including three in Natomas, brought together parents, students, city and county staff, and community leaders. The workshop recommendations provided a blueprint for several successful grants.⁷

Land-use development—physical projects, policy change, and promotion. The partnership worked to influence land-use development design through review of proposed develop-

Table 1. Partnership for Active Communities and partner activities 2003–2008

	Organization	Safe Routes to School	Development Review	Complete Streets
Core partners:	WALKSacramento (Lead)	✓	✓	✓
	AARP California			✓
	Bannon Creek Traffic Tamers	✓		✓
	Breathe California of Sacramento Emigrant Trails		✓	✓
	City of Sacramento, 50+ Wellness			✓
	City of Sacramento, Alternative Modes	✓	✓	✓
	Local Government Commission	✓		✓
	Natomas Park Walk-to-School Committee	✓		✓
	Natomas Unified School District	✓		✓
	N Magazine		✓	
	North Natomas Transportation Management Association		✓	✓
	Sacramento Area Bicycle Advocates (SABA)		✓	✓
	Sacramento County Department of Health and Human Services		✓	✓
	Sacramento Metropolitan Air Quality Management District (SMAQMD)		✓	✓
Resource partners:	California Air Resources Board	✓		
	California Integrated Waste Management Board			
	California Center for Physical Activity	✓		
	City of Sacramento: Neighborhood Services Area 4		✓	
	City of Sacramento City Council	✓		
	City of Sacramento, Public Works	✓	✓	✓
	Creative Communities International	✓		
	Natomas Community Association		✓	
	Natomas Unified School District Board	✓		
	Odyssey			✓
	Sacramento Area Council of Governments			✓
	Sacramento ENRICHES	✓		
	Sacramento Regional Transit		✓	✓
	South Natomas Transportation Management Association		✓	
Support partners:	Adult Aging Commission, American Cancer Society (Sacramento), California Center for Civic Participation and Youth Development, CH2M Hill, Egoscue, Inc Sacramento Clinic, KVIE, Sacramento Pipeworks Climbing and Fitness, Sacramento Walking Sticks, Snell Safety Education Center, UC Davis Health System Center for Injury Prevention			

ment projects and providing recommendations to create more walkable and bikeable neighborhoods. Recognizing the rapid growth underway in Natomas, the partnership, through WALKSacramento, expanded the development review process of the Natomas Community Association. The association's design review committee met monthly with developers and city planning staff to provide early input to development proposals, at a point when it was most feasible for developers to incorporate changes. WALKSacramento built on this process by providing detailed reviews of prospective development projects, including written comments to city staff and occasional testimony to the Sacramento City Planning Commission and city council.

Later, the partnership established its own Design and Development Review Committee, and additional partners joined discussions of proposed projects with city planners and developers. Subsequent written comments from WALKSacramento included recommendations for separated sidewalks; marked crosswalks; street configurations that supported greater connectivity and access to parks, trails, schools, and commercial areas; and layout and housing designs that maximized "eyes on the street."

With a grant augmentation in its third year, the partnership worked to replicate the process in the rapidly urbanizing suburban city of Rancho Cordova.

Transportation infrastructure: complete streets (promotion, policy change, and physical projects). The energy of the partnership's work with schools and land-use development merged in a new focus on Complete Streets^a as the result of a catalyst learning opportunity provided by the ALbD program in 2005. Through strategic communications training, the partnership learned to focus both internal and external communications on key messages to decision makers. The Complete Streets focus was selected as it addressed many objectives of the core partners' individual organization's goals.

For example, representatives of parent groups said "... if we had Complete Streets that included sidewalks and safe crossings, our children could walk safely to school"; school administrators said "... if our children moved their bodies by walking they would show up ready to learn"; transportation representatives said "... traffic would be reduced around schools and elsewhere"; and

^aPrinciples of Complete Streets (www.completestreets.org): (1) Complete streets are designed and operated to enable safe access for all users. Pedestrians, bicyclists, motorists, and transit riders of all ages and abilities must be able to safely move along and across a complete street. (2) Creating complete streets means changing the policies and practices of transportation agencies.

health agency representatives said “. . . walking and bicycling would improve health.”

The partnership's Complete Streets Communication Plan became the road map for the partnership's newly formed Complete Streets Committee.⁸ The plan's vision—streets are safe for all users at all times throughout Sacramento cities and county—spurred new energy. Many partners joined the committee's monthly meetings and took action to support the plan's primary goal: to establish Complete Streets transportation policies and procedures to cover both new and existing streets in all Sacramento County jurisdictions.

The committee evolved into a coalition as it launched its campaign in January 2007. Partners integrated Complete Streets messages into their ongoing work, including comments and testimony on proposed land-use development, transportation projects, and proposed general plans changes.

Results Schools

The walk-to-school ethic has been institutionalized in program, administration, and infrastructure of the school district. Parent-led walk-to-school programs have continued and expanded to include more students. The district is hiring a full-time coordinator to support walk-to-school activities in all elementary schools.

The partnership's surveys of parents conducted in 2004 found higher incidence of walking for students living within 0.5 miles of schools. The results were most striking at Natomas Park Elementary, where 49% of children living within 0.25 miles walked to school daily compared to 32% of children living between 0.25 and 0.5 miles, and 12% of children living between 0.5 and 1.0 miles of school.⁹ This finding influenced the school

district to reconsider its original plans and to build a consolidated K–8 school rather than separate elementary and middle schools. This decision will reduce the walking distances of future students.

The parent-led programs, as well as the experience with and recommendations from the community design workshops, led to successful Safe Routes to School grants for school student programs, for school site assessments and plans, and for infrastructure. The participation of the school district's superintendent and board members, including the chair, in the workshops led the board to include infrastructure recommendations in a school bond measure that ultimately passed (Table 2). The community-design workshops developed school site-assessment expertise and led to successful grant applications for assessments and plans for the surrounding pedestrian and bicyclist environment for four local community colleges (completed)¹⁰; 15 elementary schools in the county's unincorporated area (underway); and 12 schools in the city of Citrus Heights (to begin in 2010).

The partnership's efforts benefited from the leadership of the superintendent of schools, who served as the partnership chair. His enthusiasm, support, and credibility created a bridge between parents, city officials, and other partners.

Land-Use Development

Over the last 5 years, more than 150 reviews of development projects were completed. These recommendations for improvements were communicated to city planners, architects, and developers in early stages and

Table 2. Safe Routes to School funding programs

Funder	Project	Dates	Funding to the region (\$)
California DOT Safe Routes to School	NUSD (development of Safe Routes programs at all K–8 schools for 3 years.	Awarded and will begin soon (2009).	500,000
California DOT Safe Routes to School	Sac City Unified School District (Pacific Elementary School) ^a	2009–2010	800,000
California DOT Safe Routes to School Measure D NUSD bond measure	NUSD—Infrastructure ^b School-site pedestrian and bicycle access improvements	2011–2012 June 2006	996,000 1,500,000
California DOT Safe Routes to School	Sacramento County DOT Safe Routes 5 “E” (school assessments and plans for 15 schools); includes annual countywide Safe Routes Conference	June 2008–June 2011	500,000
California DOT Safe Routes to School	City of Citrus Heights 12 Elementary Schools (school assessments and plans)	2010–2011	496,670
California DOT Safe Routes to School	SACOG—Bike education program to schools in six-county region	2009–2010	180,000

^aFunded through Sacramento County DOT

^bFunded through City of Sacramento DOT

Table 3. Land-use development comment letters and project types and improvements in first year

Project type	Number of projects		Number of projects incorporating major recommendations					
	Comment letters	Projects improved	Pedestrian access	“Eyes on the Street”	Vertical curbs ^a	Sidewalks	Separated sidewalks	Wider walkways
Residential	13	11	6	6	5	3	4	2
Commercial	6	4	3	0	0	1	0	0
Restaurant	3	3	2	0	0	0	0	2
Mixed use	1	1	0	0	0	1	0	0
TOTAL	23	19	11	6	5	5	4	4

^aVertical curbs, perpendicular to the street pavement, provide greater protection to pedestrians from motor vehicles than “rolled curbs” that enable vehicles to drive up on sidewalks.

at later stages to the City Planning Commission. In some cases, the projects had more than one review as a result of project changes in response to earlier reviews. Many recommendations were accepted by developers and incorporated by planning staff as recommended conditions to approval. Table 3 summarizes how developer project plans were amended following submission of recommendations during the first year of the project. An “on-the-ground” assessment of changes incorporated in built projects is underway.

Partnership staff identified potential problems for pedestrians and cyclists and recommended site-specific solutions in reviews. Communications were timely so as not to cause project delay. The approach was critical but positive. Developers and planning staff became supportive of working with partnership reviewers, realizing that the proposed changes would make the projects better and thus more marketable. In the first years, greater emphasis was on written comments. Later, as partners gained credibility, the process relied more heavily on informal verbal and email comments with formal written reviews limited to larger projects. While most reviews focused on projects in Natomas, some focused on projects in Rancho Cordova and other parts of the City and County of Sacramento. The partnership discovered two ingredients critical to the favorable results experienced in Natomas: (1) the presence of community organizations concerned about future development projects and (2) the City of Sacramento’s process for early project review. Sacramento County did not offer early project review, and both ingredients were missing in Rancho Cordova, reducing the magnitude of changes in those jurisdictions.

Transportation Infrastructure: Complete Streets

The goal of establishing Complete Streets transportation policies in Sacramento’s largest jurisdictions has been achieved. The idea of “routine accommodation” for bicyclists and pedestrians has been long advocated by bicycle and pedestrian groups and had gained support in federal, state, and local policy including a provision of Sacramento’s 2004 transportation sales tax measure. The reformulation of the concept of routine accommodation to Complete Streets was an important

and positive reframing. It moved the issue from accommodation to inclusion—from “accommodating **them**” to being “complete for **everyone**.”

After the partnership adopted Complete Streets as a focus, progress accelerated as partners formally incorporated Complete Streets into their organizational messages and activities. Examples appear in Table 4.

Complete Streets entered the news with an article in a neighborhood newspaper (authored by the Sacramento Area Bicycle Advocates’ executive director) followed by the publication in October 2006 of an article by the *Sacramento Bee*, Sacramento’s major daily newspaper. The *Bee* article represented the first Complete Streets article to be published in the United States by a major media outlet. The *Bee* later editorialized in favor of the Complete Streets state legislation with accompanying photos of complete and incomplete streets.

The SACOG created a Complete Streets category in its Community Design funding program. Complete Streets projects were those seeking improvements within transportation corridors and turning them into more pedestrian and transit-friendly environments with associated land-use changes. A total of more than \$19 million has already been awarded by SACOG.

Policy change accelerated in 2008. Sacramento-area Congresswoman Doris Matsui introduced the Safe and Complete Streets Act of 2008. California Assembly Bill 1358, requiring cities and counties to have Complete Streets provisions in their general plans, was supported by many partners and signed by Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger.

Complete Streets is now part of the policy language of transportation leaders in Sacramento. In October 2008, at the urging of partnership members, the California Department of Transportation revised its policy directive for bicyclists’ and pedestrians’ use of state highways, with the new policy, entitled Complete Streets—Integrating the Transportation System.¹¹ Complete Streets is also included as one of the strategies in the California Air Resources Board’s Climate Change Scoping Report.

As 2009 begins, the Sacramento Regional Transit District intends to include Complete Streets as a cornerstone policy of its transit master plan; the City and

Table 4. Partnership for Active Communities “Complete Streets” evolution

	2004-2005	2006	2007	2008
Preparation	—	Partnership selects “Complete Streets” focus for community training	—	—
Promotions and programs	—	Complete Streets Communications Plan	—	—
Policy	Sacramento Transportation and Air Quality Collaboration “Best Practices for Complete Streets” Influenced county ballot measure to require routine accommodation of pedestrian/bike	Seifert article in neighborhood news/article in <i>Sacramento Bee</i> (major news outlet)	Launch of Partnership Communications Campaign; presentations at conferences Resolutions passed by Transportation Management Associations and Natomas School District supporting Complete Streets California Bicycle Coalition and American Association of Retired Persons sponsored Assembly Bill 1358—gains media editorial support Sacramento Area Council of Governments created Complete Streets category of funding	Presentation at national Rails to Trails and media California’s Strategic Highway Safety Plan includes Complete Streets as a measure California governor signs Assembly Bill 1358 and orders guidelines for development of general plan circulation elements Representative Matsui (Sacramento) introduced House Resolution 5951—The Safe and Complete Streets Act California Department of Transportation Revises policy for Complete Streets (DD-64) City and county of Sacramento called for Complete Streets in general plans City of Sacramento incorporated Complete Streets in urban design guidelines
Physical projects	—	—	—	City of Sacramento reduces major one-way couplet from three lanes to two and adds bicycle lanes.

County of Sacramento call for Complete Streets in their general plans; and the City of Sacramento has Complete Streets in its urban-design guidelines. Sacramento County recently adopted a new transportation development fee structure, and, for the first time, it includes pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure funding to support increased transportation capacity.

Discussion

Project Sustainability

Safe Routes to School continues. The Natomas Unified School District is moving forward in incorporating Safe Routes to School programs into its K–8 schools. The North Natomas Transportation Management Association has committed staff resources to this effort as well. WALKSacramento is working with the County of Sacramento to assess and provide recommendations to improve the pedestrian and cycling environment surrounding 15 elementary schools in the unincorporated area. Many partners will be involved in this effort through its countywide Safe Routes to School Committee. The county’s first Safe Routes to School Symposium is scheduled for October 2009.

Development review continues. Funding from the Sacramento Metropolitan Air Quality Management District to both Sacramento Area Bicycle Advocates and WALKSacramento is helping sustain the partnership’s Design and Development Review Committee and its capacity to provide comments and testimony on land-use development projects. WALKSacramento is organizing a corps of “eyes on the street” volunteers to expand development review and advocate for neighborhood pedestrian improvements. Additionally, WALKSacramento will advocate for adoption of early project review procedures in jurisdictions where they do not currently exist.

Complete Streets coalition continues to influence. Several projects are underway, including a Robert Wood Johnson Foundation sustainability grant to accelerate funding for Complete Streets by working with jurisdictions to prepare inventories of complete (and incomplete) streets, and to incorporate Complete Streets implementation into capital improvement programs. Having up-to-date inventories that identify the gaps in pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure will put these facility needs on a more equal footing with other transportation needs. Officials and citizens will be able to compare transportation infrastructure needs for all users and not just drivers, enabling a more thorough review of the tradeoffs between various infrastructure projects. It should accelerate efforts to complete the pedestrian–bicycle network.

The coalition continues work to gain funding for Complete Streets from federal transportation reautho-

rization funds and from economic stimulus funds. Sacramento is considered a national leader on Complete Streets. Its early involvement has changed thinking and changed policies. The coalition continues to work toward implementing the policies through creation of an interconnected system of complete streets.

Lessons Learned

Preparation and dialogue. The deliberation of courses of action through partnership dialogue led to robust strategies, and planning enabled course corrections in response to challenges and opportunities. Some objectives were not achieved, and new objectives arose out of unforeseen opportunities. The coming together of many diverse organizations magnified changes beyond what could be expected from independent action.

Early land-use development review, specifics, and persistence. Commenting at the early conceptual stage maximized the partnership's potential to gain positive changes from land-use developers, as they were more open to changes before making considerable design investments. Identifying specific problems and offering specific recommendations to solve the problems in a professional manner won the respect of the planning and development community. Eventually, both developers and planners sought out the partnership's opinion, particularly on controversial projects. Development reviews influenced future project design as well. Persistent messages to planners, traffic engineers, and development industry professionals resulted in heightened awareness of the needs of pedestrians and cyclists. Gradually, that awareness resulted in improved development designs. Some developers began to market their developments as "walkable" (P. Terry, WALKSacramento, unpublished observations, 2004).

Integrating programs and policies. Integrating work on programs and policy change has been a challenge. Program-oriented partners worked on getting people moving with programs such as the school Walking Wednesday program. Policy-oriented partners analyzed the details of plans and projects and then advocated for recommended changes. These two organizational modes energized the partnership and increased the depth of its learning of how to gain positive change to support active living. Although there was cross-fertilization in the development of partnership projects, the two distinct modes tended to stay within their own areas during implementation. For example, the Complete Streets Coalition of the partnership is largely moved to action by the partners from the policy area. Even so, the real-world experience of the program side provided vital examples that supported advocacy in the policy side.

Communication plan increased partnership focus. The partnership's communications plan provided a framework to bring together many issues into one

focused objective—Complete Streets. Persistence in staying on-message with local government staff and elected officials achieved important policy changes. Two best-practices symposia were effective in reaching transportation staff and elected officials by providing convenient, no-cost training that included top-level officials as presenters. This model continued with a Complete Streets best-practices workshop held July 2009.

Leadership and synergy. A common feature of the partnership's success in schools was the power of combined efforts. Parent volunteers brought time and energy, and the district brought logistical and moral support, which led to strong political support from the community, including a city council member and a county supervisor. Another synergy was made possible by the presence of many government agencies in the state's capitol city, several of which played active roles in the partnership. Current and retired government professionals trained in relevant disciplines proved to be knowledgeable and passionate volunteers. WALKSacramento's executive director, for example, is a retired transportation planner who brought her experience to the partnership.

Five-year partnership. The partnership was the overarching P in the 5P strategy pursued in Sacramento. In the early years, the partnership honed its mission and built trust. Inspiring stories of early accomplishment energized the partners. Its 5-year commitment provided a stable framework for its evolution from ideas to actions to what it is today—a foundation of relationships that continues to stimulate, support, and grow its activities and influence.

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