Complete Streets
San Antonio Westside Workshops

December 2010

San Antonio Metropolitan Health District
City of San Antonio Planning & Community Development
City of San Antonio Office of Environmental Policy

Acknowledgments

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Executive Summary

Complete Streets is a movement, supported by the Centers for Disease Control, US Department of Transportation and others, which encourages planners and engineers to design and operate roadways with all users in mind. Completing streets for pedestrians, cyclists and mass transit users is linked to public health benefits, such as obesity and diabetes reduction, which are particular concerns of San Antonio's Westside community. During December 2010, forty-five Westside residents attended one of three Complete Streets workshops developed by the City of San Antonio, participating in a series of exercises including a visual preference survey, map exercise and a slideshow-based questionnaire.

People expressed a desire for streets that were more walkable, citing missing sidewalks, stray dogs, high speed traffic and lack of destinations – such as nearby parks and good grocery stores – as barriers to routine street activity. People want to use the parks more and feel that better lighting and sidewalks, as well as a security presence, would increase use and decrease undesirable activities. A desire for circulator-type transit that would loop around to local destinations was evident from remarks that the current bus system often requires lengthy trips outside the neighborhood.

An important message from the workshops is that implementing Complete Streets can have many positive impacts on the community beyond simply infrastructure improvements. The range of responses generated during the exercises showed people want to be more physically active in their travels, and that it is important to become more engaged with their neighborhoods. Complete Streets can be one way to restore a fuller spectrum of connections and relationships that people once experienced within their communities.

Introduction

The City of San Antonio is pursuing a Complete Streets policy, under a public health initiative sponsored by the Robert Wood Johnson, Healthy Kids Healthy Communities (HKHC) program and the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act 2009, Communities Putting Prevention to Work (CPPW) grant. San Antonio Metropolitan Health District (SAMHD) is a grant recipient, using the funding to reduce and prevent obesity in children and adults by conducting activities in school and community settings across Bexar County in partnership with several local businesses and organizations, school districts and other City of San Antonio departments.

SAMHD is developing programs that address access to healthy food and routine physical activity, including a focus on Complete Streets. Complete Streets is a national program, supported by the Centers for Disease Control, US Department of Transportation and others, which encourages planners and engineers to design and operate roadways with all users in mind, including pedestrians, bicyclists, mass transit riders and drivers (Complete Streets, website).

The Westside community is a target population for the HKHC funding due to prevalence of obesity – especially among children – and diabetes among this local population. The Westside Complete Streets workshops were developed to meet multiple objectives under the Healthy Kids, Healthy Communities initiative. Also, the neighborhood was chosen for Complete Streets activity because of its relatively low car ownership (compared with the rest of San Antonio). Another factor is the predominantly gridded street pattern that allows for extensive local street connectivity, which favors pedestrian and bicycle travel. In addition, the community recently participated in a citizen journalism project developed by NOWCastSA. Several residents created photovoice videos illustrating problems with the neighborhood streets (Galindo 2010).

The Westside – recognized as the heart of San Antonio's Hispanic community – has been a focus of previous planning and development efforts, including a corridor study completed by the Urban Land Institute in 2005. The ULI study identified issues relevant to the Avenida Guadalupe environment, including poor quality streetscapes, flooding and circulation problems as well as a lack of recreational space and economic investment in general. The ULI panel recommended intensifying local business opportunities to create destinations and upgrading infrastructure to support new development. In addition, the study supported a balance of pedestrian and automobile needs with new streetscape elements, focused on bus stops and park linkages, to facilitate local walking trips and a safer, more livable public environment (ULI p. 23).

For the Complete Streets workshops, Metropolitan Health District developed the core program, identified the community venues and led the event outreach. The San Antonio Planning Department assisted with program development, logistics, outreach, and developed the mapping exercise. Three workshops, on December 4th, 7th and 11th 2010 were planned and carried out to meet multiple goals and objectives for the HKHC and CPPW initiatives. In addition, the City wanted to understand how

the local community uses streets in their neighborhoods, how they would like to use them, and what the impediments are to ideal use.

Workshops were all held within San Antonio city limits, at the following times and locations:

- December 4th, 9-10:30am, El Progreso Hall, 1306 Guadalupe
- December 7th, 7-8:30pm, Las Palmas Branch Library, 515 Castroville Rd.
- December 11th, 8:30-10am, The Neighborhood Place, 3014 Rivas Street

Table of Goals, Objectives and Tactics

Goals	***Objectives***	***Tactics***
Maximize community outreach to the Westside	Hold participatory workshops in December	Conduct workshops in accessible locations, on Saturdays and evenings
Assess community responses to various street characteristics	Track people's unfiltered response to categorized photos of streets	Paired photos used in visual preference survey with good/bad indicators
Introduce the concept of complete streets to the community	Make the connection with complete streets and more routine, safer physical activity	Slide presentation on Complete Streets with Spanish translation
Explain the City's purpose in creating a complete streets program	Have attendees understand that Complete Streets is a long term project and that not all streets will be alike	Emphasize in the introduction, throughout the presentation and closing remarks
Understand how the community uses streets now, what the barriers are to ideal use and understand whether complete streets could encourage greater use.	Solicit community input on desirable / undesirable qualities of their own streets through different types of interactive exercises and data collection	Map exercise using markers to indicate routes, destinations and physical impediments or barriers to street use

Workshop Outreach

Four weeks prior to the workshop, SAMHD, Office of Environmental Policy (OEP) and Planning Department staff met with community organizers and a consultant team to plan the workshops and devise an outreach strategy. Local community associations, including the Westside Development Corporation, were enlisted to email workshop notices to their distribution list of members. Five thousand bilingual flyers advertising all three workshops were hand distributed in the two weeks prior to the workshops to neighborhood venues, including neighborhood centers, churches, grocery stores, community facilities and schools.

Flyers being distributed to young people attending a holiday lunch, held at the Frank Garrett Community Center

Workshop Activity and Findings

The workshops were developed as 90 minute active participation sessions, managed by a consulting architect and urban designer. Steve Tillotson of Kell-Muñoz led all workshop sessions, providing an overview, directing the keypad questionnaire exercise and closing with a summary of activities and group interaction.

At the sign-in table, participants were greeted, encouraged to complete a sign in sheet and wear a name tag. Each participant was given a visual preference survey to fill in at some point before leaving the event. Participants at the second two workshops were given the first part of the questionnaire exercise to complete by hand.

Participants were shown a video, Salud America, to acquaint them with the health risks of Hispanic communities in general, such as prevalence of childhood obesity. Some participants also watched a community-made video, provided by the NOWcastSA project, on issues surrounding the built environment on the Westside.

The order of the workshops was generally as follows: 1

15 minutes: Visual Preference Survey using wall photos
Question Input Exercise – Part 1 with questionnaire

15 minutes Introduction

- Salud America Video (5 min)
- Opening Remarks & Ground Rules by Steve Tillotson (5 min)
- NOWCastSA Photovoice Video (5 min)

25 minutes Exercise #1 – Visual Mapping Exercise with Flipcharts

25 minutes Exercise #2 – Question Input Exercise – Part 2 with keypad

10 minutes Closing Remarks, Questions & Answers by Steve Tillotson

Visual Preference Survey

Twenty-eight (28) participants completed the visual preference survey during the workshops. Citizens were presented with six photographs of actual streets in the area. Respondents were asked to rate the street from -10 (worst) to +10 (best) as a street for walking or bicycling. The survey included basic questions as to the person's age and whether they walked or biked frequently in their neighborhood.

The street photographs were selected because of their variation in characteristics in order to gain insight into what residents perceive as desirable features of a roadway. These features lend

themselves to roadways that are appealing for bicycling and/or walking. Street type (e.g. local neighborhood street, arterial with commercial activity), pavement condition, presence or absence of sidewalks and curbs, presence or absence of street trees were variables that differed among the photos. No people appear in any of the photos, since the presence of people is often the most important element in an image, affecting perception either positively or negatively. As little traffic as possible appears in the photographs, since perception of traffic may also influence street desirability for walking or cycling.

Photo 1: Average Score -7.32

Photo 2: Average Score -6.64

Photo 3: Average Score -6.64

Photo 4: Average Score 4.29

Photo 5: Average Score 2.32

Photo 6: Average Score -2.64

Visual Preference Findings

Though no photograph achieved a score above +5.00 on the survey, there was sufficient difference in the ratings to evaluate street characteristics of the six photos. Photos 4 and 5 – showing basic pedestrian and cycling needs such as pavement, curbs and continuous sidewalks - were rated positively. The most negatively perceived image, Photo 1, showed no pedestrian infrastructure and a narrow street in poor condition. Photos 2 and 3, a residential and a rural street, both lacked sidewalks. Photo 6 did have sidewalks but these were interrupted with driveways, utility poles and also lacked street trees.

There is some evidence detached sidewalks – those with landscape strips between the curb and sidewalk - have a noticeable positive impact on ratings of streets for walking and cycling. The shade from trees did not seem to be a factor in the ratings of streets for walking or cycling; however, the condition of the trees may affect the perception of how well the street is maintained or, conversely,

if it is seen as neglected. It should also be noted that all pictures depicted were of West San Antonio streets, none of which can be termed 'complete streets'. Had pictures been placed of other streets from other neighborhoods and other cities, it is reasonable to expect higher average scores.

In terms of activity, slightly less than half the participants, or a total of 13 respondents, said they walked every day or almost every day while 2 noted they rode a bike in their neighborhood on a daily basis. The sample size in this survey is too small to provide statistically significant findings, especially related to frequent bicycle riders. Additional surveys in other parts of the city may be useful in this regard. Securing a larger sample size may help resolve the diversity of opinion that has emerged in this sample of what constitutes a "good" street for walking and cycling.

Map Exercise with Flipcharts

A participatory exercise was carried out in an effort to start residents thinking about streets within the neighborhood, their current activities on those streets (both physical and social), what they would like to see ideally and what they view as impediments to the ideal. Two maps, one at an area scale and one at a neighborhood scale representing a single quadrant of the area map, helped participants to identify where they live and walk to and from. Anecdotal information gathered from each table was recorded on flipcharts, allowing table facilitators to note walk/bicycle patterns, barriers, symptomatic trends, societal/cultural influences and recommendations. The neighborhood scale maps used in the study represented two areas to the north of Commerce Street, St Mary's (NW) and Basilica (NE); and two neighborhoods south of Commerce, Edgewood (SW) and Guadalupe (SE).

Participants sat around one of several tables arranged before a media screen. Each table was staffed by a small group facilitator and note-taker. Spanish translation was available whenever needed from at least one facilitator in the room. Participants marked the locations of their homes or work with a sticky dot, then drew lines on the maps with color markers to indicate streets where they walked or rode bicycles (blue marker); streets where they would like to walk or bike if the streets were more complete (orange marker); and barriers impeding their use of the streets (pink or black marker). Comments from participants during the map exercise were recorded on large flipcharts by the note-taker or facilitator.

Sample map from exercise

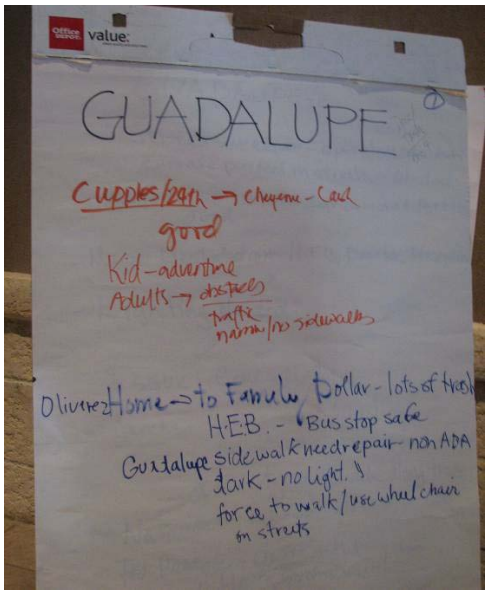
Facilitators sought information about everyday occurrences in the various neighborhoods. Residents were asked where they walk and bike to now and what streets do they use? Each participant indicated their routes on one of the maps with a blue marker. Verbal comments were noted on the flipchart. Destinations tended to be those within a several block radius such as the store, convenience store, church, park and school, with the exception of a family who biked 19 miles and walked weekly for exercise. Streets used tend to be locals and collectors as many residents stated there is too much traffic and too much speed on larger streets (arterials).

Map Findings

The summary map (see appendix) shows although the streets are presently used for walking and bicycling, people would make more use of streets that are complete, with continuous sidewalks, bike facilities and good transit access. During the mapping exercise, participants indicated presently they walk or bike an aggregate total of 14.5 miles within the Westside (not counting bike trips outside of the neighborhood). If the streets were complete, participants would walk or bike an additional aggregate total of 22.5 miles, for a total of 37 miles walked or biked in the neighborhood. Participants identified larger collector streets as well as local, neighborhood streets as candidates for future walking and cycling. Desirable destinations most often marked on the maps were home to school and back, home to the grocery store and back, or home to church and back. These results are also supported in the findings from the questionnaire, as noted in the next section.

Flipchart Findings

When asked where they would like to walk or bike, but haven't, many people drew similar routes, although others added destinations such as school, grocery stores or parks. Participants noted barriers and impediments did not necessarily prevent use of the streets, but added having the barriers addressed would encourage more active physical and social uses. Although several barriers were mentioned, they tended to fall in two categories, facilities and safety. More specific designations are evident in each category. Facilities barriers include sidewalk issues (missing sidewalks, no curb cuts or ramps, phone poles in sidewalks), cars in bike lanes, poor drainage, trash in the street and vacant lots. Safety barriers include the omnipresent stray dogs, high volumes of traffic, automobile speeding, and nuisance activities which ranged from verbal harassment to gangs, prostitution and open use of alcohol/drugs.



Sample flipchart from exercise

People noted that transit stops are not meeting travel desires, sometimes taking them completely out of the neighborhood and in to downtown, when they only need to travel a couple miles. Some residents also mentioned conflicting interests and competing priorities between neighborhood associations and other forms of governance when it comes to getting issues resolved in their neighborhoods.

When residents were asked what else we need to know, some stated impediments are systemic and shouldn't be relegated to one area. They mentioned proper facilities aren't available often, and residents are penalized when they resort to their own devices for lack of provisions. An example is seniors being cited for using wheelchairs and scooters in the street because of sidewalk impediments.

Table of Flipchart Findings

	NE (Basilica)	NW (St.Mary's)	SE (Guadalupe)	SW (Edgewood)
Sidewalk Issues	x	x	x	x
Non ADA Compliant			x	x
Traffic/ High Speed	x	x	x	x
Stray Dogs	x	x	x	x
Poor or No Lighting	x	x	x	
Nuisance Activity	x	x	x	x
Vacant Houses/Lots		x		
Trash			x	
Cars In Bike Lanes			x	x
Narrow Streets			x	
Unpaved Alleys				x
Bad Drainage				x

Workshop participants at tables with maps and flipcharts

Additionally, people noted the lack of diversity of grocery stores in the neighborhood impacts healthy food choices. Neighborhood stores are used increasingly for emergency needs and at a high cost, which impacts the quality of life for seniors and others on fixed incomes, negatively.

Keypad Questionnaire Exercise

The questionnaire exercise presented verbally and with bilingual slides, asked participants to use a digital keypad to answer a set of questions around some common themes:

How do you get to where you are going?
What is the main barrier that keeps you from being able to walk, bike or take a bus from your home to your destination?
If the streets in your neighborhood were more complete, would you walk, bicycle or ride the bus more often?

The first theme "How do you get to where you are going?" had a more detailed set of questions that asked how often participants used a particular mode of travel to get to their destination. Participants were asked to press a number on their keypad to indicate "always/siempre" "most of the time/mayoria de las veces "sometimes/a veces" and "hardly ever or never/casi nunca o nunca" in response to each question.

For the second theme "what is the main barrier", participants identified barriers from a list, which was maintained at the front of the room on flipcharts. Participants pressed their keypads to indicate which of six barriers impeded them from activity.

WHAT IS THE MAIN BARRIER THAT KEEPS YOU FROM BEING ABLE TO WALK, BIKE OR TAKE A BUS FROM YOUR HOME TO YOUR DESTINATION?

DISTANCE	too far to get to what you need
DIVERSITY	not enough choices nearby, or lack of acceptable bus routes
DESIGN	nothing built to accommodate someone who wants to walk, bike or take a bus
CONDITION	something is built, but needs repair or replacement
ACTIVITY	loose dogs, scary people, speeding cars etc.
PERSONAL	health, medical condition, don't own a bicycle

Participants during the keypad exercise

The third set of questions was preceded by a brief slideshow explaining what Complete Streets are, what a policy looks like, and showed local examples of streets having such amenities. Participants pressed the same series of responses as for the first questions to indicate how frequently they would use different modes of travel to reach their destinations, using streets that were more complete.

Keypad Questionnaire Findings <need input from Steve>

Workshop Summary

Conclusive results cannot be inferred from a sampling of 45 people in a Westside community of 116,000 people. The workshops were conducted between the Thanksgiving and Christmas holidays, a factor likely contributing to poor attendance. While a representative sample of senior citizens attended the workshops, it was evident that working mothers and fathers as well as youth attendance was lacking. SAMHD and Planning staff are considering additional options, such as street and home surveys, to increase the number of residents and engage different populations in the sample, such as young mothers and the elderly and the use of television and radio public service announcements.

Complete Streets

Some general conclusions were still evident from the surveys and exercises and reflect common concerns about using sidewalks, bike facilities and transit. In general, systemic barriers to routine physical activity exist and are largely issues of facility and safety. They include but are not limited to improper use of sidewalks, lighting, traffic volume and traffic speed, nuisance activity and stray dogs. Stray dogs are so commonplace residents have named a pack often visible in the community, the" jogging club". These findings are a result of spontaneous dialogue and offer insight into resident concerns about their community. Public health studies have pointed out people simply do not venture into streets perceived as unsafe. A recent literature review noted real and perceived danger and discomfort imposed by traffic discourages walking and biking, thus reducing opportunities for healthier living (Jacobsen 369). Complete Street elements that slow traffic, such as reduced street widths, pedestrian refuges, bike facilities and street trees will not only create a safer walking-biking environment but will support community development goals as well.

People said they would consider walking or biking to the parks, but the parks are often perceived as unsafe. Poor lighting, stray dogs and people conducting illegal activities were often cited as reasons for not visiting the parks more often. On the Westside, with well connected, fairly dense neighborhoods surrounding several of the larger parks, it would appear more consistent security could dramatically increase walking and cycling to and from the parks. One other concern is simply the lack of parkland on the Westside, which has the lowest acreage of parkland per resident in the City of San Antonio. This may have affected the outcome as residents could not indicate they would walk to neighborhood parkland if that neighborhood parkland did not exist. Safety lies in numbers, so more use by residents prompted by the additional security will generate momentum toward both complete streets and well-used parks.

The ULI study cited the need for a well-rounded open space network that included green streets linking the existing neighborhoods to recreational facilities (ULI 23). Detached sidewalks, with a grass or planted strip between curb and sidewalk, can contribute to a green street network by filtering sidewalk runoff and providing area for street trees. A Policy on Geometric Design of Highways and Streets, commonly called the AASHTO Green Book, notes that planted strips can

provide an economical alternative for stormwater management in suburban settings (AASHTO 358). Many communities in the US and internationally are finding that these planted strips can provide significant environmental benefits, such as water and air filtration, which in turn enhance overall public health.

Workshop participants indicated, on the whole, they would walk considerably more than they do at present if the streets were complete – 22 miles more than the 14 identified as their current walking or bicycling patterns, an increase of over 150% in routine physical activity. In particular, those who lived or worked on the far Westside noted they walked very little at present, and they would walk or bike more, particularly around St. Mary's University and the three larger parks, Prospect Hill Park, Madison Square Park and Cuellar Center. Inner Westside residents showed a preference for walking or biking to Apache Creek Park, the community center at Avenida Guadalupe and the major grocery stores in the area. These findings support the recommendations from the ULI study and suggest Complete Street locations ought to prioritize connections to parks, including the Apache Creek Park and new linear greenway, neighborhood parks and employment centers, such as Avenida Guadalupe, St. Mary's University and Our Lady of the Lake University.

Several participants noted transit routes take them out of their way, sometimes completely out of the neighborhood and in to downtown, when they only need to travel a couple miles. Local circulator buses have been found to be popular alternatives in many communities, particularly where car parking is restricted. With a lower percentage of car ownership within the Westside community, it might be a good candidate for a circulator bus with consequent increases in short walking trips to transit stops. A study by the American Journal of Preventive Medicine notes walking to and from public transportation can help people – especially low-income and minority groups – attain the recommended level of daily physical activity. More options for bus routes, especially shorter neighborhood trips, could contribute to active lifestyle maintenance for many Westside residents (Besser 273).

Neighborhood-related issues

One issue that impedes walking may be a lack of "sense of place" or attachment within the community. Although residents hold certain sentimental attachments to their neighborhoods and often have family histories dating back decades and longer, they state people are increasingly out of relationship with each other. There are many vacant houses and vacant lots. Resources are needed for home rehabilitation to improve neighborhoods overall and to offer hope. Residents are vested and would like to see improvements so their families can live and thrive.

Convenience stores are prevalent; negatively impacting the lack of healthy food choices in the neighborhoods. The Westside, unlike many inner-city neighborhoods nationally, does have several large, well stocked grocery stores, typically on streets served by one or more bus routes. However, the local stores that might generate walking trips are more expensive, offering packaged

convenience foods. In this situation, incentives might be needed to persuade local stores to stock fruits, nuts and other healthy, convenient food options.

The Westside residents offered recommendations as to how they felt their neighborhood could be best improved:

- Be creative w/shade materials/canopy
- Distance markers in parks are motivating – create streets w/ distance markers
- Include public (maintained) water fountains
- Well maintained parks more likely to be used
- Establish park patrol on a regular basis at larger city parks for security
- Parks and streets need more trees for shade/canopy
- Need better drainage on neighborhood streets
- Sidewalks on arterials should be farther removed from the street (by means of detached sidewalks with planting strip)
- Make Streets wider
- More useful and useable walk trails on the Westside
- All sidewalks should be ADA compliant

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Appendices

Workshop Flyer
Visual Preference Summary
Summary Workshop Map
Questionnaire Slides