Table of Contents

Chapter One: Introduction  6
Chapter Two: Background on Pedestrian Streets  8
Benefits of Pedestrian Streets  8
Bikeway Classifications  8
Chapter Three: Case Study of San Francisco  10
Motives/Origins  10
The Great Highway  10
Slow Streets Initiative  11
Post-Pandemic Slow Streets  13
JFK Promenade  13
Issues  14
Community Response/Backlash  14
Chapter Four: Case Study of Santa Barbara  15
Introduction  15
Motives For Conversion  15
Background to the Closure  16
Implementation  16
Vision For State Street Going Forward  17
Traffic Impacts  18
Public Perception and Involvement  19
Key Takeaways  21
Chapter Five: Pedestrian Promenade Proposal  22
Objective  22
Site Selection  22
Project Size  23
Conclusions/Recommendations  29
References  30
Appendix A – Interviews  31
Title: An Analysis and Application of Pedestrian Streets  
Authors: Austin Paul Lucero, Ellie Krantz  
Date: June 2022  

Keith Woodcock, MCRP AICP CEP CUD  
Senior Project Advisor  

Mike Boswell, Ph.D.  
Department Chair
Acknowledgments

We thank our staff advisor, Keith Woodcock, and our masters student advisor, Vyshnavi Shetty, for their continual guidance over the course of this project.

In addition, we would like to thank our interview subjects, Tess Harris of the Santa Barbara Planning Department and Timothy Doherty of SFMTA. These two working professionals generously shared their time and expertise to improve our project and increase our understanding of relevant planning issues.

We offer our sincere appreciation to the many professors who have prepared us for this project and all future professional endeavors over the past four years. These individuals have set aside their own professional careers to ensure the success of ours, and have been exemplar stewards of the planning profession. We thank them for passing down their invaluable wisdom and experience to us.

Finally, we offer our thanks to our friends and families, who have served as role models, inspirations, and support systems as we work towards our bachelors degrees.
Executive Summary

The following chapters present the process in researching and designing a proposal for a pedestrian promenade in Downtown San Luis Obispo.

Chapter One introduces street conversions and their recent rise in popularity since the COVID-19 pandemic. Chapter One also outlines the purpose and content of the project.

Chapter Two presents a background on complete streets, including its benefits as well as a detailed outline of the various bikeway classifications.

Chapter Three features a case study of San Francisco, California, and the ways in which the city has implemented pedestrian-oriented spaces at the Great Highway, JFK Promenade, and through their recent Slow Streets Initiative.

Chapter Four features the second case study for our project; State Street in Santa Barbara, California. This chapter includes a background on State Street, the implantation process, traffic impacts, public perception, and the future of State Street.

Chapter Five showcases the design proposal for a pedestrian-oriented promenade on Higuera Street in San Luis Obispo, California. This design proposal gathers ideas from the research and case studies presented in the previous chapters.
Chapter One: Introduction

The conversion of streets from centered around the needs for cars, to exclusively serving the needs of pedestrians, signals a restructuring of how a community views its public spaces, and a fundamental shift of values. Closing a street to cars can improves the pedestrian experience by removing the constant hazard of traffic and allowing for free movement throughout a given space. This has the power to revitalize the surrounding economy and turn drab outdated corridors into lively pedestrian streets that encourage social interaction, patronage of businesses, and utilization of public spaces.

Despite the promises they offer, the success of pedestrian streets is far from guaranteed. Having come and gone in phases before, there’s a long list of failed pedestrian streets to learn from, such as the State Street Mall in Chicago or the Fulton Mall in Fresno (Wisniewski 2019). In fact, with some studies suggesting that 89% of pedestrian malls in the US have failed, it seems attempting this type of strategy is quite bold, to say the least (Judge 2015). Nonetheless, in the past several years we have seen a resurgence in communities attempting to convert streets to be exclusively used by pedestrians. This has been in part due to the need to accommodate commercial activity through the COVID-19 pandemic but is also reflective of a continual interest in improving the experience and safety of pedestrians.

Project Purpose and Content

The purpose of this project is to conduct two detailed case studies of pedestrian street projects that have been successful in implementing pedestrian-oriented design strategies. This report also proposes a similar design concept onto Higuera Street in Downtown San Luis Obispo. Details of the proposal can be found in Chapter Five. Two major cities in California that have adopted active transportation strategies include San Francisco and Santa Barbara. These cities vary in numerous ways such as size, population, connectivity, etc. Although, since the start
of the COVID-19 pandemic, both cities have similarly prioritized active transportation for their residents and have taken measures to implement projects within the community to foster spaces where active transportation users can thrive. There are three major projects that the City of San Francisco has taken on to increase active transportation use within the city: The Great Highway, JFK Promenade, and the Slow Streets Initiative. For the case studies section of this project, we will present these three projects being implemented within the city currently and share the background, implementation, current issues, and the future planned improvements for each project. The second case study will examine State Street in Santa Barbara and share the motives for conversion, background, implementation, traffic impacts, and the future of the project going forward. The second section of An Analysis and Application of Pedestrian Streets is to apply the key takeaways of the presented case studies and design a conceptual plan for the conversion of Higuera Street in San Luis Obispo into an active transportation promenade, that incorporates the best elements retrieved from our case studies.
Chapter Two: Background on Pedestrian Streets

Pedestrian Streets are designed and operated to enable safe use and support mobility for all users without a vehicle. Traditional street design prioritizes safety and efficiency for only vehicles, while pedestrian streets balance the needs of bicyclists, pedestrians, and other active transportation users to enable safe, convenient, and comfortable travel.

Benefits of Pedestrian Streets

According to Sisman (2012), the following benefits were observed using pedestrian streets:

- **Low atmospheric emissions:** Pedestrian streets encourage the use of active transportation such as walking and biking while discouraging the use of vehicles that contribute greatly to rising atmospheric emissions.
- **Economic Revitalization:** Pedestrian streets can create a sense of place within commercial areas, encouraging shopping and increasing revenue for surrounding business.
- **Quality of Place:** Increased bicycling and walking are indicative of vibrant and livable communities.
- **Improved Safety:** Design and accommodation for bicyclists and pedestrians reduces the incidence of crashes.

- **More Walking and Bicycling:** Public health experts are encouraging walking and bicycling as a response to the obesity epidemic. Streets that provide room for bicycling and walking help children get physical activity and gain independence.

Bikeway Classifications

According to CalTrans, the following definitions outline the different bikeway classifications:

**Class I:** Class 1 Bikeways are shared use paths that offer the greatest level of protection from vehicular traffic. Class 1 Bikeways have a minimum travel width of 8 feet and are usually used in areas not served by streets or highways. Class I bikeways are the only bikeway facilities that also accommodate pedestrian travel.
Class II: Class II Bikeways are bike lanes located adjacent to vehicular travel lanes. These facilities designate space for bicycle travel but do not provide a physical barrier between cyclists and motorists. Class II Bikeways are marked using standard bike lane markings and separated from vehicular traffic by a solid white line.

Class III: Class III Bikeways are shared facilities that provide signage and markings to calm vehicular traffic. Signage and markings used to designate a Class III facility include sharrows, and “Share the Road” signs. Class III facilities do not physically separate cyclists from vehicular traffic; however, signage can increase awareness of non-motorist road users.

Class IV: Class IV Bikeways are protected bike lanes. They are very similar to Class II facilities in that they are located directly adjacent to vehicular travel lanes. However, Class IV Bikeways provide additional protection from motorists using buffers and physical barriers.
Chapter Three: Case Study of San Francisco, California

Motives/Origins

San Francisco, California is a vibrant city full of pockets of neighborhoods and communities filled with residents who are passionate about active transportation. Whether you are walking, biking, driving, or taking public transport, the San Francisco Municipal Transportation Agency (SFMTA) gets residents where they need to go. San Francisco thrives off urban connectivity to create the sustainable, livable, and accessible city it is today. Within the Sunset District, Ocean Beach, and Golden Gate Park, there are numerous community spaces that are used by thousands daily for recreation, transport, and gathering. From an interview with SFMTA planner Timothy Doherty, Doherty shared current goals and visions of the city being to create safer spaces and to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Since the pandemic, there has been more of a mission to “create spaces for people to get outside to gather, to connect with neighbors, to play music and also build a network that connects neighborhoods so that people could move more seamlessly” (Doherty 2022). To reduce greenhouse gas emissions, the city is encouraging all people to use bikes more, a low carbon way to move around. As Doherty stated, design matters and a focus on redesigning public spaces focused on moving fossil fuel intensive cars around and really reuse it for people for help, recreation safety, clean air music and community gatherings.

The Great Highway

The Great Highway stretches 3.8 miles starting at Point Lobos Ave at the Cliff House to the north of Skyline Boulevard at Fort Funston and Lake Merced in the south. Currently, on weekends, this area becomes a 17-acre park with a 2-mile promenade, while on weekdays it is a roadway with an adjacent trail (SF Parks and Rec). The Upper Great Highway is a four-lane roadway and coastal trail under the management of the Recreation and Park Department and maintained by Public Works (SFMTA). A longstanding issue with the Great Highway is the buildup of sand on the public roadways (Doherty 2022). The configuration of the Great Highway including the width of the road has been considered for future mitigation.

As of April 2020, San Francisco temporarily repurposed the Upper Great Highway to be a car-free street that prioritizes families, people on bicycles and pedestrians (SFMTA 2022). This conversion has allowed for a more accessible promenade and gave the option to physically distance during the COVID-19 pandemic.
More recently, the Great Highway has reopened to cars on the weekdays but remains pedestrian-friendly on weekends. This has created backlash from community members who believe that the Great Highway should remain car-free because of the benefits it has brought to the community over the past two years since the pandemic started in 2020 (Kids Safe SF 2022).

**Slow Streets Initiative**

Since the beginning of the pandemic in 2020, the City of San Francisco wanted to design a way to limit through traffic on certain residential streets and allow them to be used as a shared space for people traveling by foot and by bicycle (SFMTA 2022). The idea behind this initiative was that SF residents would be more inclined to exercise during the pandemic and to provide spaces where residents could socially distance during essential travel. According to SFMTA planner, Timothy Doherty, the goals of the Slow Streets Initiative was to make sure that there was safe recreation space for people to get outside and get fresh air during the pandemic. The closing of certain residential streets creates small corridors within the city and is much more cost-effective for the SFMTA than a highly engineered or capital-intensive bike lane project (Doherty 2022). Those projects can cost millions of dollars versus doing some traffic calming measure which builds connectivity. Slow Streets have been placed strategically to enhance connectivity in ways that might connect schools or hospitals or other essential places that people needed to get to during the pandemic.
Figure 3.3: Map of Slow Streets in San Francisco as of July 31, 2021 (Source: SFMTA)
Post-Pandemic Slow Streets

The Slow Streets initiative has received positive feedback from the community with a strong response from residents for corridors to remain Slow Streets beyond the pandemic. In August of 2021, the SFMTA Board of Directors voted on four corridors to remain as Slow Streets beyond the pandemic (SFMTA 2022). These corridors include Golden Gate Avenue, Lake Street, Sanchez Street, and Shotwell Street.

JFK Promenade

The fight for a safe JFK was started in the 1970s by a diverse group of roller skaters (Kids Safe SF 2022). Museum directors and donors fought them for decades, eventually allowing one day per week of safe space. These original leaders are still involved in the fight for JFK Promenade today (Kids Safe SF 2022). The current JFK Promenade (vehicle-free) was put in place as part of the COVID pandemic emergency health order. The JFK Promenade is not formally a part of the Slow Streets Initiative but has adopted similar concepts from the initiative. The emergency health order requires the city to turn the promenade back into a dangerous, car-oriented street within 120 days of the order’s expiration unless the Board of Supervisors make the change permanent (Kids Safe SF 2022).

Figure 3.4: Golden Gate Park Mobility Map (Source: SFMTA)
Issues

With a decrease in vehicle-only streets, issues start to arise surrounding the shifting of traffic from one street to another. Additionally, merchants are concerned with a lack of parking or difficulties for customers to reach their business.

For the Great Highway, the issue of sand building up on the road during the spring windy season is something that arises frequently. The Great Highway can become covered in sand because of the sand dunes, creating road closures 30 to 40 times a year just under normal circumstances (Doherty 2022). With the increase in road closures on the Great Highway comes an increase in spillover traffic into the surrounding residential neighborhoods in the Outer Sunset district. An increased volume of traffic in residential neighborhoods led to increased speeding on smaller roads and residents becoming increasingly concerned (Doherty 2022).

Community Response/Backlash

Since the slowing of the pandemic, there has been a push from officials to change these pedestrian promenades back to their previous state, which allows vehicles. There has been a significant amount of backlash from the public due to these decisions. Multiple initiatives have been formed to urge community members to get involved in the push to keep The Great Highway and JFK Promenade car-free. The most popular movement named “Kids Safe SF,” is an initiative made up of “parents, families, walkers, stroller-users, runners, skaters, seniors, people with disabilities, and users of active transportation who believe that San Francisco needs more Kid Safe spaces and that everyone should have Kid Safe spaces nearby and accessible to them” (Kids Safe SF 2022). Kids Safe SF breaks down their initiative into two major areas in the city including The Great Highway and JFK Promenade. As of February 2022, the initiative to turn JFK promenade into a pedestrian only street, was passed.
Chapter Four: Case Study of State Street, Santa Barbara

Introduction

The purpose of the research portion of this project is to gain a stronger understanding of how successful street conversion programs have been implemented in the past and apply those lessons to our own project. Perhaps no example is more relevant to our project in San Luis Obispo than the conversion of State Street, in Santa Barbara. Santa Barbara is a coastal community in the central coast of California with a large public college, a lively downtown, a healthy tourism economy, and a steady growth rate. State Street is the main road that the downtown corridor is centered around. Until recently, State Street allowed for vehicular travel through downtown with a roughly 30 foot right of way, restricting pedestrians to the generous sidewalks, of up to 20 feet in width (Harris 2022).

Motives For Conversion

During the 2020 Covid-19 Pandemic, downtown Santa Barbara saw a troubling decline in business as restaurants and other businesses had to withstand constantly changing rules about how they could accommodate guests. To address this problem, the city closed a large portion of the street to cars and made it pedestrian only. From Haley Street to Sola Street, vehicles could no longer drive on State, but were allowed to cross through on perpendicular roads at intersections (Clarke 2020). Restaurants were then allowed to expand operation onto the sidewalk and street to enable safer patronage of business. Due to the quickly changing circumstances, the city had to act swiftly, using the emergency status to bypass traditional planning and implementation methods.

City Economic Development Manager Jason Harris commented on the situation saying, “It’s saddening to envision the possibility of a greater amount of business closures and vacancies. This pandemic is really forcing the issue, and really expediting the need to expand our thinking” (Clarke 2020).

Figure 4.1: State Street shortly after its initial closure (Source: History of State Street)
Background to the Closure

To the outside spectator, the closure of State Street may have seemed sudden, but it was an idea that had been debated in the community for decades prior to the pandemic (Magnoli 2017).

Since the city’s general plan of 1964, there have been consistent efforts to prioritize the pedestrians in the downtown. The general plan of this era led to the creation of parking facilities still in use today, narrowed streets significantly, and called for the closure of several blocks of roadways. While some efforts, such as the creation of better parking and the narrowed streets were broadly successful at improving the atmosphere, the road closure plans were never implemented due to political pressure (Magnoli 2017).

Again, in the 1980’s, Mayor Sheila Lodge attempted to launch a pilot program for road closures along State St., but this also never occurred due to the same issue, lack of political support (Magnoli 2017).

Implementation

The initial closure happened as an emergency response that was introduced as a pilot program intended to run from Memorial Day to Labor Day of 2020. When September rolled around, the city had seen some success with the project, and Covid was still a major concern. This resulted in an extension until March 9 of 2022 (Council Agenda Report 2021).
In July of 2021, the city formed a State Street Advisory Committee to initiate and direct the process of creating a State Street Master Plan (Council Agenda Report 2021). The committee consists of 15 members with special knowledge of the area and the planning process (State Street Advisory n.d.). Once the March 9, 2022 date was reached, the city was ready to take more permanent steps and created what they called an “Economic Recovery Extension and Transition Ordinance” or “ERETO”. This new ordinance served as a more medium-term solution, replacing the original emergency ordinance, and extending the date to December 31 of 2023 (Harris 2022). This new phase continued to allow for a pedestrian only State Street with outdoor business operation, but most importantly coincides with the council’s adoption of the advisory committee’s recommendations suggesting the creation of a long-term master plan for State Street as a primarily pedestrian exclusive area.

The ERETO formed a soft deadline for the adoption of a State Street specific master plan. With the new, formal decision to pursue this vision for State Street long term, Santa Barbara made several steps towards the creation of this plan. They hired a full-time planner to spearhead the project, as well as an economic development manager to serve as a liaison between business and government (Harris 2022). Then in January of 2022 the city issued a request for proposal seeking a consultant to prepare the State Street Master Plan (RFP State Street Master Plan 2022).

**Vision For State Street Going Forward**

The State Street Master Plan RFP states in the introduction that this plan should, “focus on innovative design, flexibility, and adaptability with an emphasis in fostering a thriving mixed-use community, including a vibrant retail shopping experience, and dining experience, while creating an activated, safe and accessible public space for Santa Barbara residents and visitors alike. The SSMP should create an environment that encourages curiosity and exploration within the project area” (RFP State Street Master Plan 2022).
The intention for this plan is that it will serve as the area’s guiding vision for the next 30 to 50 years. With long term sustainability in mind, the RFP specifies that the following elements must be included, at a minimum:

- Streetscape Design and Amenities
- Transportation, Circulation, and Parking
- Economic Development
- Historic Resources
- View Corridors
- Stormwater Management
- Sustainability and Resiliency
- Equity and Accessibility
- Homeless Engagement
- Housing
- Public Art
- Implementation and Phasing
- Funding Strategies
- Ongoing Maintenance and Safety
- Ongoing Operations

In an interview with Tess Harris, the city’s full time State Street Master Planner, she suggested that overall, the city is open to a range of options, and it is unlikely the final product will remain exactly as is in its current status, where restaurants and retailers have largely taken over the street. Harris suggested the final product may shrink or modify the total area that is closed, saying “There will be a closure...but we don’t know whether it will still be the same 8-9 blocks that exist today” (Harris 2022).

Harris explained that they are seeking an end result that will serve a greater variety of uses than the street currently offers and expect the end result to offer more permanent accommodations such as new landscape and hardscape features. The city is currently examining a large variety of approaches to this project as they continue along the process of selecting a consultant. Harris specifically floated ideas such as structuring the closed area as a park or pathway, and including features tailored to the needs of youth in the area.

Traffic Impacts

At the current phase of the project, the city is taking several steps to assess how these changes have impacted vehicular circulation in the surrounding area. Internally, the city is conducting a study on traffic impacts in the immediate surroundings of a block in the downtown core (Harris 2022). Additionally, the RFP states that among other technical studies, the consultant is expected to complete a “Transportation study for downtown that analyzes various circulation patterns (vehicular, bicycles, pedestrian, etc.) and potential circulation constraints” (RFP State St Master Plan...
Although neither of these initiatives are currently available to provide a clear picture of how the changes are affecting traffic, anecdotal evidence, and analysis of the surroundings suggest that the impact has been manageable and likely worth the compromise.

As Harris pointed out, even when State Street was open to cars, it still was used primarily in a social way. People may have chosen this route if they wanted to see people, or be seen themselves, but the parallel streets provide much more efficient transportation. Unlike the streets on either side of it, State has traffic signals at every intersection, travels in both directions, and is slowed further by the presence of pedestrians. All running parallel to State, Chapala St, Anacapa St, and Vera Cruz Ave all allow for a faster rate of travel. Without the hard data provided from the ongoing studies, we cannot say definitively, but it seems reasonable that the conversion of State Street will not come at an unbearable cost, in terms of traffic impacts.

Public Perception and Involvement

As discussed in the previous section, at this phase, we are still waiting on a lot of information to fully understand all impacts of this project. Similarly, we cannot yet conclusively say how the public feels about this project, as the outreach and public involvement portion of the plan will be conducted by the yet to be hired consultant. The RFP explains in detail that the city is seeking a partner who has a detailed plan for how to involve everyone in the community in the planning process. The chosen consultant is expected to host a large number of public meetings, in a variety of formats that are designed to reach across all present demographics and include all community stakeholders. Presumably, the comments gathered in this process will guide decision making for the project and help us gain insight into how the public feels about the current iteration of State Street.

In the absence of this information, past efforts can help inform us of how the public felt about the idea, before it had ever been tried. In 2020, The American Institute of Architects (AIA) Santa Barbara Chapter conducted a design charrette to understand what people wanted from State Street and come up with a concept based on this input. This project involved a community survey of nearly 5,000 people living in the area. The survey specifically asked respondents how they would feel about State Street being closed entirely to cars. 93% of respondents expressed support for this idea. Similarly, over 70% stated that there was a need to address the economic health of restaurants and retail establishments along the street (Design Charette 2020). The city is aware of these findings, and in lieu of their own outreach efforts, specifically included them in the City Council Agenda Report from March of 2022 that adopted the
Figure 4.3: Street Section proposal from Design Charrette
recommendation to create a formal state street master plan and enact the ERETO (Council Agenda Report 2021).

Key Takeaways

The ongoing conversion process taking place on State Street provided a variety of important lessons that will aid in our creation of a similar project in San Luis Obispo. In this project, site selection proved a key component in its success. By understanding the uses of the effected streets, and the public perception of these streets, the city was able to select a project area that had little impact on vehicular circulation. The selected street was already minimally used for vehicular transportation and was primarily an area of commercial activity and social interaction. Surrounding roads sufficiently served the areas circulation needs, and by maintaining vehicular travel on intersecting roads, connectivity was not lost. This design approach can be directly applied to our concept plan, as our central downtown street is also in the center of a grid system. This case study also demonstrated the importance of considering emergency services in the absence of a automotive route. Our project can learn from this by maintaining a 20 foot minimum path for fire safety. A final takeaway, relating to the implementation process, is to slowly introduce any permanent changes, and allow for public input to impact how the project changes as it is introduced.
Chapter Five: Pedestrian Promenade Proposal - Higuera Street, Downtown San Luis Obispo

Objective

The following section applies the key takeaways from the case studies presented to the locality of San Luis Obispo. This brief conceptual plan will focus on the selection of a site that is well suited to the project objectives and will propose a general design approach to create a more vibrant, commercially viable, accessible, and engaging downtown experience.

Our idealized vision of a pedestrian promenade is a project that fulfills the needs of local government, local businesses, citizens, and tourists. This means the project must be affordable to build and attractive to visitors while managing to promote commercial activity in the area. Through careful site selection, and potentially through further traffic mitigation, the objective of the project is to minimally interfere with vehicular circulation in the peripheral area to avoid harming adjacent businesses and to maintain a high level of circulation.

Site Selection

Our analysis suggests that Higuera Street is the most suitable location for this project for several reasons. Higuera already exists as the core of San Luis Obispo’s downtown, meaning it is already teaming with commercial activity that is well suited to pedestrian interaction. This means that instead of dramatically reshaping a street in a potentially harmful way, we are improving an already pedestrian friendly environment to make the design better suited to its core purpose. Selecting Higuera allows us to minimize the need for existing land uses to change and will also have little impact on the trip generation experienced in the area. Under this plan, there will still be a similar number of stores and restaurants attracting guests, the overall experience will be more enjoyable and safer.

Higuera is also well equipped to handle the parking volumes required to facilitate a pedestrian only street. Although there hasn’t been a strong attempt to make the street pedestrian only, the city has made consistent efforts to make the downtown experience pedestrian friendly. One of the key tools in this effort has been to create a network of parking garages in the surrounding blocks to encourage visitors to park and experience the area on foot. The jump to pedestrian only is an extension of this goal and benefits from the already existing infrastructure. Finally, Higuera is the safest and most conservative choice for
this project because it has already proven its ability to function without cars through the extremely successful farmer’s market. Higuera sits at the center of a small grid system, meaning that vehicles can navigate through downtown via several parallel streets, just as was the case with State Street. Additionally, cross town trips are typically served more efficiently by highway 101, which has convenient on and off ramps on either side of downtown.

**Project Size**

The proposed closure of Higuera St. would span from the cross streets of Osos St to Broad St. This four-block long closure equates to about a third of a mile. Free of interruptions, this would be a 5-to-7-minute walk. Our research of successful and failed projects suggests that one of the key considerations is to create a project that is big enough to create a sense of exploration, but small enough that businesses are not isolated from customers, and do not become inconvenient to access. This closure is along the same streets that farmers market occupies, giving evidence that this project would not significantly hinder vehicular circulation, and is the right size for most people to be able to explore the whole site, while maintaining a lively concentration of activity.

Figure 5.1 shows specifically which street portions will be converted to pedestrian only, and how vehicular circulation will be maintained throughout the surrounding streets. Similar to State Street, vehicular circulation has been maintained at roads that intersect perpendicularly with Higuera. By maintaining these intersections, we minimize the negative impact these changes would have on vehicular traffic traveling across the downtown area along the North-South axis. This map also illustrates how even for relatively short distance trips, Highway 101 is often the most efficient way to get across this part of town.

Figures 5.2 – 5.4 illustrate the design and intended use for this street in the absence of cars. The largest portion of the street would be a central path that remains open for pedestrian movement. At a width of 21 feet, this large space allows people to stop and talk, for groups to walk side by side, and showcases how pedestrians are the priority in the downtown. Avoiding the fire safety issue experienced on State Street, this width also allows for emergency vehicles access the site and complies with fire safety code. Although this high-level design concept does not aim to go in depth to the level of logistics, for some businesses in the area, this may also provide the best option for commercial delivery.
Figure 5.1: Pedestrian Higuera: Project Area Circulation
Figure 5.3: Higuera Street Cross Section
The large pedestrian path in the center of the street allows for sidewalks to be reduced to 6 feet, as they now only serve as access to businesses, rather than being the primary form of pedestrian circulation.

An 8-foot bike lane is included to allow cyclists to travel in either direction. This bike lane is directly adjacent to the parklets to minimize scenarios where pedestrians would be crossing in front of moving cyclists.

Parklets have been added to either side of the road at a maximum width of 12 feet. This allows businesses to reach out into the street to create a livelier space and to benefit the local economy.

Since the proposed design area is within the public right of way, we do not feel it appropriate to simply give this space to the owners of commercial buildings and stores. Instead, we propose a system that allows for these spaces to be leased at a market rate, with the owner of the most directly adjacent business having first priority to purchase them. This means that street vendors could lease a lot from the city to operate on the street, without having a brick-and-mortar location. In the likely event that some parklet lots are perpetually vacant, such as those in front of art galleries or jewelers, inexpensive capital improvements can be placed in these locations. These may include landscaping, seating, or informational booths. These additions ensure the downtown is enjoyable and usable even to those who aren’t making a purchase. Such projects could easily be funded by the revenue created by the parklet leasing system.
Conclusions/Recommendations

Our research and design process has pushed us to think of streets not simply as a way to move through a city, but as a point of public gathering that can be energetic, engaging, and social. The various examples studied in San Francisco, as well as State Street in Santa Barbara demonstrated to us that across a variety of scenarios, pedestrian streets can reshape the way people interact with a space. When done correctly, this can bring benefits ranging from the physical health of the nearby population, to the economic health of surrounding businesses.

When the surrounding environment allows for it, streets that serve pedestrians exclusively create an especially interactive and engaging environment. For this reason, we chose to go this route with our conceptual plan for Higuera Street.

Across all examples studied, we found a few elements to be key to winning the public’s approval, and to achieving an economically sustainable project. First, pedestrian only and pedestrian focused streets must maintain vehicular circulation in the peripheral area and minimize the impact of displaced traffic on nearby streets. Second, careful design must be used to ensure areas that are currently easy to access do not become isolated and hard to reach. Finally, municipalities should not expect that the first idea or attempt will be perfect and should anticipate that some changes will be made over time. The most successful projects we’ve studied all went through design changes in real time, carefully responding to public input, and reacting accordingly.

Many of the cases we observed were galvanized through the chaos of the COVID-19 pandemic, but have proven to be valuable in their own right since implementation. We hope that pedestrian streets continue to gain in popularity, and continue to improve communities.
References
Doherty, T. (2022, May 11). Research Interview conducted by Ellie Krantz. Appendix A.
Harris, T. (2022, April 28). Research Interview conducted by Austin Lucero. Appendix A.
Appendix A – Interviews

Tess Harris, City of Santa Barbara
Zoom Interview conducted by Austin Lucero
April 28, 2022

- Tess started August 2021 as Manager in community development department for special projects division focused on state street master plan
- Created economic development manager role at the same time
- Initial closure: May 2020, plan to be closed from Memorial Day to Labor Day weekend as a pilot program. Continual extension to March 9 2022. Economic recovery extension and transition ordinance. This replaced original ordinance. This is in place until Dec 31 2023, forming a soft deadline for the new master plan.
- “There will be a closure...but we don’t know whether it will still be the same 8-9 blocks that exist today”

- On of the longest permanent road closures
- 30 – 50 year plan
- May not continue to be primarily parklets/outdoor dining. Trying to involve entire community, creating opportunities beyond shopping and dining.
- Plan will include design element – hardscape and landscape changes. Park? Pathway? Youth specific areas?
- Looking to be more sustainable long term solution than the covid quick fix. Also considering costs
- Hiring consultant to have more people on technical study, urban design, and implementation, long term maintenance and operation
- 70’s and 80’s had wave of similar projects. Some success but roughly 80% failed because they were not economically viable. Don’t want to go back in 10 years.
- Businesses have been allowed to encroach on the promenade without permits and without payment. Most are willing to pay going forward. Businesses can have the space in front of their building, need written permission from neighbors to occupy their “front yard”. Some said ok to be a good neighbor but later regret it because it blocks visibility and entrance to their business.
- Initially allowed businesses to go too far out on street, fire dept made them move it back to create 20 foot fire lane. Some made to rebuild in smaller area, was a whole big thing.
- 24:30 timestamp - Consultant will do long term separate study on entire promenade. City is doing study on specific area. Not generally seeing major changes in traffic circulation. Some concern in 400 block of state street that if they close this they will need to turn 1 way streets into 2 way.
- State was not a real transportation route. It was driven on more socially. Lights on every block made it very slow compared to adjacent streets.
- Tess went door to door with many
businesses. Majority very supportive and have seen increase of foot traffic compared to pre covid. Some retailers, like furniture, don’t like the change because it makes things like loading to cars more difficult. People want improved signage since you can’t just drive by anymore.

- Businesses directly adjacent (zero blocks) that did not get closed feel they had their foot traffic redirected to the main street. Side blocks became less interesting. They can have parklets on the street but that’s not as nice.
- Could have waited to create advisory committee until they had consultant but it’s still going well.

Ellie Krantz
So I guess first you start off. I just was curious what your role is in SFMTA and your title, if you could tell me a little bit more about it?

Doherty, Timothy
Sure. So my name is Tim Doherty and I’m the planner at the SF MTA overseas, all of San Francisco’s multimodal transportation systems, of transit, paratransit. We manage the taxi fleet on. Also we build out all the pedestrian and bike infrastructure and all the roadways as well. So we basically have full multimodal transportation agency handle all the parking as well. Within the agency, I’m in a division called the Streets Division, and within the streets, which is the second largest division after the transit division and then? There’s a there’s a group of about 40 staff that are in the planning team, so I’m in the planning group and I manage the policy and long range planning team as well as the agencies, climate action and resiliency program.

Ellie Krantz
How long have you worked at for the city?

Doherty, Timothy
Since 2015 and before that I worked for.

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration doing coastal planning, and then I also worked as a regional planner here in the Bay Area doing regional planning. And which I so I’ve been planning for about 20 years. Worked at regional, Federal and now local levels.

So I did a little bit of research on like the Slow streets initiative and I feel like that’s kind of intertwined with like the Great Highway JFK. You know all those projects you guys are working on. So can you tell me a little bit more about this those streets initiative, I was curious if it was.
Because I read that it was created when the pandemic started, but I was wondering if it was.

If before the pandemic started, it was something that was, like, talked about within the city, or if you know, the pandemic really kind of kick started it or what's the history of like that whole initiative?

Doherty, Timothy

It’s a great question and I don’t know if I have all the answers for you because I know like there’s a street called Page Street in particular it. It runs kind of through the hash Berry kind of parallels to the Panhandle of Golden Gate Park, and that has had different.

Treatments on it like they’re used to be. These roundabouts that were meant to kind of slow traffic and really create more of a bike Blvd or a bike friendly route.

And those roundabouts got removed, though, due to concerns from the fire department. Probably about 10 or 15 years ago.

So there’s definitely been desires to repurpose the right of way to create like safe space for bicyclists and pedestrians. But I think prior to the pandemic to varying levels of success, mainly what we see in San Francisco is like more like protected bike lanes.

Where we move the parking into the roadway and kind of create like a safer bike lane parking protected or. Through like Road diets where we try and.

Really create safe space for pedestrians or bicyclists, but nothing has say, transformative is actually the slow streets network, which really was more of a COVID reaction to making sure that there was safe recreation space for people to get outside and get fresh air during the pandemic. And also traffic volume was way, way down obviously because everything was shut down. It felt like the right time to try. Kind of try and repurpose the public right away. I mean, it’s a huge resource for cities and governments. It’s also where we see a lot of.

Collisions and fatalities. And does the city has been really focused on like Vision Zero and creating safer spaces. Cities also is really focused on trying to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and obviously like I said during the pandemic, there was this real desire. So like Createspace for people to get outside to gather, to connect with neighbors, to play music and also build a network that connects neighborhoods so that people could move more seamlessly.

Umm on their bikes. And so the the slow street network basically kind of popped up right around COVID and they’ve done a really good job on great highway and JFK aren’t really like formally part of the
Slow Streets network. They’re definitely like informally part of that network and we apply some of the same thinking and principles. But there is a formal network of different corridors throughout the city, and they’ve done a really great job of like monitoring kind of. What happens to traffic speed and volume? Also what the community is saying, what the merchants are saying done a really good job on like community engagement. So I’m happy to connect you with Shannon, who’s the PM for the slow streets networks? You might be a good resource or someone you might want to interview for like a deep dive into slow streets. And she might know some of the history as well. I do a lot of climate action work and really we’re trying to.

You know that that’s one of our kind of pillars is that like if we want to see people and and all people use bikes more, which is a really low carbon way to move around, we have to really redesign the space and we can’t expect moms and.

Different people have, you know, different backgrounds and different skills and different ages and different like. With different types of bikes go into like speed like roadways with high speed traffic, it’s really scary. And it’s really unsettling. And so there is definitely design matters. I think that’s probably the easiest way to put it. Like if we really wanna see low carbon forms of mobility be more approachable and accessible.

On that, we need to repurpose the public right away from just being so focused on like moving fossil fuel intensive cars around and really reuse it for people for help, recreation safety, clean air music. And community gatherings. And so this, that’s, I would say that’s sort of a underpinning.

Kind of driving motivation of trying to do this and various cities. I mean, Berkeley, I don’t know if you’re looking at Berkeley. They actually were much more successful early, like in the 60s. They did a whole kind of St closure.

And they were kind of a leading city back in like 30 years ago. And they’ve closed a bunch of streets and those St closures are still in place.

But it brings up, you know, issues. Obviously you can potentially be shifting traffic from one St to another. So there’s impacts. Merchants aren’t really always keen of their clienteles maybe not coming to visit or losing. Parking is often a challenge. And so it’s not like they’re. They are a one stop shop solution. They definitely come with their own complications, both political, operational and then sometimes even financial.

Ellie Krantz

Totally thank you. I was just gonna ask. So the slow streets initiative, it sounds like it’s more so in residential neighborhoods that at least that’s what I’ve seen when I’ve
been to San Francisco versus, you know, the great highway isn’t necessarily like on a residential. I mean there are, there are houses, but it’s a little bit removed. So that initiative is more so for like neighborhood, you know, people stepping right outside of their houses and wanting to be in those safer streets.

Yep, and really meant to also create like. And corridors, it’s much more cost effective for MTA to do a slow St than like a highly engineered. Or capital like capital intensive bike lane project. Those those costs millions of dollars and so like doing some like traffic calming and slow streets is really a.

It it builds a connectivity, so that’s why they were. They were kind of strategically placed. We also tried to place them in ways like that, might connect schools or hospitals or places that people needed to go in the pandemic.

Umm, So what would what would you say with with the closing of JFK Promenade in in Golden Gate and the Great Highway? What would you say was like the initial public reaction from your perspective when that when that happened?

That’s another good question. It seems like a really long time ago and I’m not sure like so the great highway, that’s where I’d been the project manager, so that great highway closes.

During the spring windy season, pretty regularly like I was out there actually on a bike ride this morning and it’s like half of it. It’s covered in sand because of the sand dunes. And so it closes 30 to 40 times a year just under normal circumstances. So I think.

There wasn’t. You know, a big outcry initially when it was was left closed. But I think when people started to realize it was.

Gotta stay closed and potentially like for an undefined amount of time and. There started to be some spillover traffic in some of the residential neighborhoods in the outer sunset. That there was a lot more neighborhood opposition.

Umm. And a lot of people who were really not happy with like increased volume of traffic, increased speeding. Also like during the pandemic, there were issues of like.

More speeding, more kind of unsafe driving, and so some of these residential neighborhoods were really concerned and legitimately, like, no one wants to have a bunch more traffic. And seniors don’t wanna have. They wanna be able to get parking. They wanna be able to easily get out of their driveway. And so there was a change, right? It’s we call it a circulation system for a reason. If you move water from one place to another, it shows up in another place and.
I think like half $1,000,000 on a traffic calming program pretty quickly, like within a year in the Great Highway and the outer sunset and the web page I can share you share with you like we did speed bumps and stop signs and.

Signage and the different traffic calming mechanisms to really slow the traffic and try to push it to other corridors that had more capacity. So we can kind of really tried to like from a design perspective like get it out of the neighborhood and put it on.

Larger arterials, and we’ve had pretty good success like we’ve been monitoring that and we’ve seen speed, speed and volume go down.

And and so that’s been successful, but it costs you know, it cost money and it wasn’t without you know, a lot of like neighborhood opposition.

JFK is a little bit different because it’s a, you know it’s in Golden Gate Park and that has a longer history like on weekends it was always closed on Sundays and then they also did a Saturday thing and the summer and it’s had.

That kind of closure since like the 70s, I think it’s quite some goes back sometime but then when that closed full time, I think you know people were enjoying it. But then I think people similarly were like is this gonna be forever and then obviously some of the museums that are in Golden Gate Park began began to become concerned with like visitor access and changes in parking. And that’s really like any time you change parking you really.

You really are like poking, poking like the Hornets nest because.

You run into all sorts of issues around. You know you can run into economic interests like businesses can be concerned about losing revenue. You also need to be careful about not complicating access for like people with disabilities or seniors or people with kids and strollers and so It’s really can be a challenge, but luckily. You know, within Golden Gate Park, there’s still a lot of. Parking. It’s only one street and there’s a couple maps that I don’t know if you’ve seen, but there were. There were showing that like. It’s not like we were. Removing parking from the whole park. It was just in a certain corridor that luckily connects with the Great Highway. So now you have this like.

On weekends are very nice car free space from like Fort Funston along Ocean Beach into the park all the way to like Page Street and then Page Street goes to Market Street and Market Street has you know what’s called better Market Street, which is really meant to kind of prioritize transit and bikes. And that goes all the way to the Bay. So you’ve got this really potentially like Bay to Breakers kind of like car free space
right down the middle of the city. And so a lot of like transformational potential to really. You know, walk the walk around like low carbon mobility. Since it’s important that the city’s lead in that space, given the kind of climate issues we’re facing.

So so now the Great highway is from what I saw online, it’s during the week vehicles can access it right now, right. But during the weekends, it’s only no vehicles. So do you see that? Because I, I know there’s been like also I think I was reading maybe an article or something that said people are interested in having vehicles like all the time you know or or there’s other side of. Yep.

Residents who are like, no, we we want it to be pedestrians and bike only all week. So what do you see as from the city’s perspective? Like do you, do you see it remaining the way it is right now for years or are you looking to like change it at all change, you know, the weekdays and how? Who has access?

Yeah, it’s great. Great question. I also just want to recognize it’s 925 and I only grabbed half an hour, but I if we need to find more time, I’m happy to find like time on Friday and we can do.

Yeah, currently it’s just at noon on Fridays. It’s closed to cars. And then Monday morning at like, 6:00 AM at reopens.

Umm, the one thing that’s probably good for you to take a look at it as a resource as what’s called the Ocean Beach Master plan. This had a lot of the early kind of framework for connectivity bikes and PEDs and managing coastal resources. It’s a pretty good plan also.

And South of Slope Blvd. Kind of near the zoo is actually proposed. The great highways proposed to be permanently closed in about 2024 because of chronic coastal erosion, and there are some buried wastewater infrastructure that needs to be protected in the coastal Commission. Basically pretty clear that they don’t want us pouring more concrete on the beach to shore up the great highway. And so we’re basically moving pretty close to.

Decommissioning that stretch of the roadway and as a result, the great highways kind of north South function long term is kind of diminished to be totally frank because we’re taking a big chunk of it out.

Think what will happen is we will probably have this kind of temporary arrangement that’s like the weekend only until about 2024 we might do a pilot period where we kind of like study it, do community engagement data, collect talk to the businesses and then like in 2024 after we’ve seen how traffic conditions kind of evolve with after the closure South of slow, we’ll have a better sense of like
have motorists kind of started to use like. Gundan parallel routes like Sunset Blvd and 19th Ave in such a way that the Great Highway doesn’t. It’s not as critical as a north South corridor, and that’s really important. In closing streets is that you have some functional. Kind of redundancy like. On State Street, like, they’ve got a grid, so that makes it way easier to do that because people can just drive on either side and it’s not like a huge issue. So when thinking about your San Luis Obispo, like trying to think through and I’m happy to like, if you want to talk later about design or something like that or even get a consultation with some of our traffic engineers, I’m they probably love to be able to help you be successful with getting something started, but really thinking through making sure there’s a grid.

Umm, kind of trying to forecast like where there might be impacts and trying to like minimize those impacts and also trying to create benefits like can more people from neighborhoods who might not historically have come here?

And can they access this new place? And so I think the Great Highway has a pretty good chance. There’s some very active, there’s a group of it’s called kidsafe.

And I think that’s also really important that there be strong advocates. Multi generational. And diverse and that they have, like the ear of politicians because.

You need. You need a strong kind of team to make this change happen because people are gonna people don’t like change. So it’s like it’s our job as planners to help navigate towards through change and try and find like a path to a better future for communities, for businesses, for the environment.

So I think the Great Highway has a good chance, especially after we just saw like what I think is a pretty. Good sign around Golden Gate Park being, like, permanently. That stretch of JFK being carefree. I think it’s it’s it’s we’ve got some some political will. We’ve got some like. Political supporter, you got some community support, but things change. So I and I.

My sense is one of the supervisors will move some legislation in the near term that really tries to codify the current arrangement.

It’s definitely have you seen the great highway? It’s called the Great Highway outer Sunset Traffic Management project page.

On page 2, you can see some change over time where we basically had like there’s some up and down arrows at 7 locations. If you wanted the raw data, I could try and get it, but I think that’s probably the easiest way for your report to just like synthesize it and share a map and say we’ve done basically collected like volume, speed, volume, traffic, volume and traffic.
The other thing that's useful if you're on that page, if you scroll up on the right hand side, there's it's called like a transportation or West side traffic analysis summary. If you can't find it, let me know. It's a PDF, it's got some really good.

Train Transportation Network analysis we paid a consultant to do it. Good maps. Good background on.

How to redesign intersections and corridors to accommodate traffic so? Yeah, I think I see it. It's just the West side circulation set. It has like some straight like green and orange stripes at the top. Yeah, I see that.