



Office of the City Manager

November 18, 2021

To: Honorable Mayor and Members of the City Council

From:  Dee Williams-Ridley, City Manager

Re: Winding Down the Healthy Streets Pilot Program and Next Steps

History and Background

The *Healthy Streets Pilot Program* was initiated in June of 2020 by City Manager Dee Williams-Ridley under emergency powers in her capacity as the Director of Emergency Services. The program was devised in response to the 2020 COVID -19 pandemic as a way for everyone in Berkeley to more safely access our streets for transportation, exercise, sunshine, and fresh air by reducing car traffic and driving speeds on select streets. Other regional Bay Area cities implemented similar programs, commonly referred to as slow streets. The City of Berkeley focused its *Healthy Streets Pilot Program* (pilot program) on street segments along portions of its established bike boulevard network. By advising local traffic to consider other routes, the City sought to support safe walking, biking, and rolling along this low-stress network of existing or planned bicycle boulevards.

Shortly after the pilot program was initiated, City Council affirmed support by adopting a resolution on July 7, 2020 authorizing the City Manager to promptly install the traffic calming/safety measures for the development of the Healthy Streets network and to seek all available fund sources for this work¹. In response to this referral, staff was awarded a COVID-19 Rapid Response Grant administered by the Alameda County Transportation Commission (Alameda CTC). Through this grant, staff was able to receive \$48,526 in matching funds from Alameda CTC for direct use on the Healthy Streets pilot. This grant was essential for funding the purchase of materials and staff time to administer the pilot program. It is mainly through this funding mechanism, as well as the dedicated and essential support of the volunteer network and advocacy group *Walk Bike Berkeley*, that so much was achieved.

¹ <https://bit.ly/3ac35aK>

Since the program launched, over 400 signs, traffic cones, barricades and flexible posts were deployed on approximately ~4.2 miles of Berkeley's bicycle boulevards. These temporary street closures and traffic calming devices were deployed on:

- 9th St from Dwight to Page
- Addison St from Grant to Sacramento St
- Russell St from Adeline to Mabel
- Hillegass St from Woolsey to Dwight
- Virginia St from Shattuck to Sacramento St

The pilot program was conducted in two distinct phases, with the second phase using the matching funds from Alameda CTC. In addition to the expansion of traffic calming devices (signs and barricades), the second phase enabled construction of temporary traffic circles on 9th St. at Channing, Virginia, and Jones.

Reflections on Healthy Streets Pilot

Staff believe that the pilot program successfully improved safety for cyclists and pedestrians by reducing through-traffic volumes and slowing vehicle speeds on the piloted streets. During the pilot program, the City, in coordination with *Walk Bike Berkeley*, issued a citywide survey where staff gathered important feedback on the status of the pilot. By and large, the program feedback was positive, and the survey proved fruitful in understanding how to better meet the community's needs.

The program also experienced challenges. Theft and vandalism of the signs and barricades was persistent. City staff were deployed weekly to clear broken barricades from the roadway and replace vandalized signs. Unfortunately, too often, it was impossible to replace the broken or stolen inventory because we lacked sufficient funding. In addition, lack of staffing resulted in slower than ideal service responses where equipment needed repair, and difficulty in coordinating with residents, local businesses, BUSD, Zero Waste, Traffic Maintenance, and other stakeholders. There was understandable confusion over whether signage meant complete or partial closures. A recent state bill (AB 733), passed in response to the increasingly popular slow streets programs statewide, authorizes local authorities to close streets to through vehicular traffic in implementing a slow streets program,² which should help reduce this confusion. City staff would seek to utilize the provisions set forth in AB 733 in any potential future iterations of a *Healthy Streets* program in Berkeley.

Next Steps

As of September 2021, staff began to wind down the pilot program, not replacing some of the program signage and barricades as they were damaged or removed from the roadway. Staff expect all program materials, except the three temporary traffic circles on 9th Street and concrete bollards on Russell, will be removed from the right-of-way by the end of November 2021. Staff is conducting ongoing analysis of the program, and

² https://leginfo.ca.gov/faces/billTextClient.xhtml?bill_id=202120220AB773

will be incorporating the lessons learned into the forthcoming update to the Bicycle Plan, whose adoption is anticipated in 2023. Through this analysis, staff seeks to identify more long-term solutions to support the City's bicycle boulevard network in ways that may look very similar to the *Healthy Streets Pilot*. Future healthy streets strategies will be more robust and aesthetic, using treatments such as islands, planters, bollards, bioswales and appropriate signage; identifying sustainable funding sources; and deployed after a more robust and thorough community engagement process. Through the Bicycle Plan Update, staff plan on conducting a Healthy Streets survey to expand on the survey administered during the pilot program. This would be done to gain a more detailed understanding of the community's needs when it comes to safe walking, biking, and rolling in the City of Berkeley.

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