

# FootNotes

*A Regional Coalition Promoting Walkable Communities*

## SANDAG adopts model pedestrian design guidelines

Is it a coincidence that both traffic and walking conditions are so bad in San Diego?

Definitely not. As one prescription, the San Diego

### Manual shows ways to slow speeding traffic

This fall, WalkSanDiego will release "Slow Down! Taming Neighborhood Traffic."

Every month we receive desperate pleas for help from residents tired of speeding traffic. The 36-page manual covers residential, collector,

and arterial streets, and provides numerous photos of examples within the region.

One chapter deals with traditional Main Street commercial districts – a favorite destination of many walkers we encounter.

The manual will be offered for sale beginning this fall with a discount for members. So get your copy and stop screaming "slow down!" at passing cars.

Association of Governments (SANDAG) has just released "Planning and Designing for Pedestrians: Model Guidelines for the San Diego Region."

The Guidelines show how to build sidewalks, intersections, and communities to increase walking. They cover everything from the way buildings are arranged, to calming residential traffic, to providing disabled access.

WalkSanDiego was involved every step of the way in producing the document.

We have one question for the region's cities: How do you plan to incorporate the Guidelines in your local standards and guidelines?

To obtain a copy, contact WalkSanDiego at (619) 557-4565 or SANDAG at (619) 595-5300 or [sva@SANDAG.org](mailto:sva@SANDAG.org).

## 'Next Step' gets underway, seeks executive director

To handle more of the growing demands for our services, WalkSanDiego is launching the "Next Step" Campaign, with a goal of hiring an Executive Director next year.

The campaign will consist of increasing membership, attracting corporate members, winning grants, providing contracted services, and offering items for sale. Our goal is to raise \$80,000 by December 2003.

If you have acquaintances or an employer that may be good candidates for membership, we'll send them an appeal letter, with or without identifying you. Just e-mail us at [mail@walksandiego.org](mailto:mail@walksandiego.org) their contact information (and we never share addresses).

Our goals are not only to hire an ED, but to have fun in the process – so watch for walks, training sessions, and exciting fundraising events throughout the next year.



# WSD helps Valley Center tame the 'big road'

What do you do when a \$20 million road widening is planned through the middle of your rural village, and no one believes it will change community character?

In April, residents of the rural hamlet of Valley Center discovered the County was set to widen Valley Center Road from a winding two-

lane road to a virtual 4-lane freeway. Two roadside commercial districts would have traffic whizzing by at 70 mph design speeds, and hundreds of mature oak trees would be sacrificed.

Fearful they'd missed the chance to scale the project more appropriately, a residents group called WalkSanDiego.

WSD Boardmember Dave Schumacher went into action, delivering two presentations on more pedestrian-friendly versions other communities have undertaken for similar projects.

The local pro-widening planning group gave the residents two months to suggest alternatives but warned the road alignment could not change, nor would they risk a delay redesigning it.

Working with the residents, Schumacher recommended lane width reductions, safer bike and pedestrian accommodations, and intersection design changes, several of which the County Department of Public Works accepted. In fact, the DPW has recognized its road standards need revisiting in light of the safety concerns raised.

The idea of pedestrian-friendly commercial areas – and lower speed roads in their vicinity – was actually a harder sell within the town than with the DPW. After first ridiculing the idea, local merchants now favor a more pedestrian-friendly road.

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*This typical section of Valley Center Road reflects the rural nature of the North County community.*



*Roadside open space or future development opportunity? Once widening occurs, development pressure will speed the conversion of pastures to subdivisions.*



*Currently, auto-oriented commercial areas line either side of Valley Center Road at two nodes.*

# Report fattens argument for walking

A new National Governors Association (NGA) report describes the current obesity epidemic in the United States, and focuses on programs and policies that states can implement to address obesity and its causes. The report is available at [www.nga.org](http://www.nga.org).

The leading causes of obesity are poor nutrition and physical inactivity. The report notes communities that are designed for car use are often unsuitable and unsafe for activities such as walking, biking and running.

But advocacy groups (like WalkSanDiego) are encouraging healthy community designs, challenging planners and growth management agencies to provide alternatives to the automobile for commuter and recreational trips by developing safe and inviting passageways for bicycles, wheelchairs and pedestrians.



*This passage around a University Avenue homeowner's wall measures just 39", well below disabled access standards.*

## Walk audit uncovers hazards

A walk audit of Washington Street and University Avenue in San Diego's Mission Hills neighborhood culminated a series of Feet First walking events August 1. Led by WalkSanDiego's Andy Hamilton, this was not the usual walking tour but rather a brief study of deficiencies

and hazards in the walking environment.

Neighborhood activists showed up to point out buckled, blocked, or missing sidewalks, poor or missing crosswalks, dangerous intersections, and opportunities for new development to make improvements.

Along the way, we learned how a street's history has translated into its current look. For example, the western end of University Avenue was once a narrow neighborhood cul de sac that was joined in the 1950's to Washington Avenue and now carries 100 times its intended volume.

All of the problem spots were recorded and will be presented to the city in WalkSanDiego's September report to the Uptown Partnership. Thanks to all who participated.

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## Taming the big road...

*(continued from page 2)*

Now many in the town want to conduct a planning process to determine how the two commercial districts will look in the future, and feed this information back into the road design process.

This will be an uphill battle for sure. As we've seen in so many places, it takes time for citizens to understand that

the design of a road can forever dictate community character and the viability of roadside uses.

Without more design changes, Valley Center may be turning their budding commercial nodes into vacant lots — or perhaps worse, an ugly commercial strip fraught with danger to motorists, pedestrians, and other users of the road.

# Crosswalks



## The Great Debate Is Over – Or Should Be

Ever wonder why more unsignalized intersections don't have marked crosswalks?

In fact, it's intentional, thanks to a 1970 study by City of San Diego traffic engineer Bruce Herms. Herms theorized that marking crosswalks gives pedestrians a "false sense of security," causing them to be less vigilant of vehicles. Engineers have been removing markings – and failing to install new ones – ever since. It remains the policy locally.

The problem? Herms' hypothesis isn't true.

Herms examined pedestrian crashes in marked and unmarked intersections and unexpectedly found that, even accounting for differences in the number of users, pedestrians were hit more often in marked than in unmarked crosswalks. He hypothesized that this was due to careless pedestrian behavior in marked crosswalks but did not perform further research to determine if this was indeed the case.

Nonetheless, traffic engineers across the country began insisting "studies prove" pedestrians are more careless in marked crosswalks. As it turns out, studies show the opposite is true.

Researcher Richard Knoblauch analyzed pedestrian reactions to marked crosswalks and found that markings seem to have a positive effect on both pedestrian and motorist behavior. Drivers tend to be more aware of marked crosswalks and drive slightly slower.

Knoblauch concluded, "there appears to be absolutely no evidence that the installation of crosswalk markings causes pedestrians to be less vigilant during their crossing." He offers the seatbelt argument to illustrate his

point: a seatbelt is a safety device, but it doesn't induce drivers to be more careless when they're wearing one. The same is true for crosswalks.

It is true that slapping a marked crosswalk across a dangerous street will not necessarily improve crossing safety. In some cases, additional treatments such as raised islands, lighting, in-pavement flashers and flashing countdown signs are needed to ensure pedestrians can navigate the intersection safely.

Crosswalks also should be avoided at unsignalized intersections on high-speed, multi-lane streets. But no evidence supports the idea that pedestrians act more carelessly in a marked crosswalk.

How can Herms's results be explained? There are different theories, but the most compelling is that marked crosswalks are marked for a reason – the location is dangerous. Thus, the study was biased from the start.

Others hypothesize that at-risk pedestrians such as children, the elderly, and disabled, are naturally drawn to the crosswalk and are also more likely to be hit. The real reason awaits further research.

Why so much fuss about crosswalks? In addition to improving safety, marking a crosswalk communicates to pedestrians that the street environment should serve them too. It also signals motorists to share space with other users. At *WalkSanDiego*, we think this matters a lot.

Another question is, why do traffic engineers continue to zealously remove and refuse to install crosswalks on the basis of a refuted theory?



## Feet First forum

# *Just for the health of it'*

More than 50 walking enthusiasts filled the Joyce Beers Community Center in Hillcrest June 29 to hear about the importance and ways of making walking a habit.

The Saturday morning forum was a key event in WalkSanDiego's "Feet First" collaboration with the Uptown Partnership.

Dr. James Sallis of San Diego State University presented research showing a wide gap in physical activity and body mass between residents of Normal Heights and a demographically similar population in less-walkable Clairemont; and Andy Hamilton, WalkSanDiego's education chair, showed the many ways cities can reduce traffic hazards for pedestrians and encourage walking.

Attendees then offered their ideas to make the Uptown neighborhoods more pedestrian friendly. The results will be included in a report to

the San Diego City Council recommending pedestrian safety improvements in the neighborhoods. The Uptown Partnership also plans a campaign to encourage residents to walk for health, to support local merchants, and to prevent crime by providing "eyes on the street."



*Pictured from left to right, Andy Hamilton of WalkSanDiego, Jeffery Tom of Uptown Partnership, and Dr. James Sallis from San Diego State University conducted the "Feet First" forum.*

## More walk in older neighborhoods



*Broad sidewalks lure walkers in this older Mission Hills neighborhood.*

The American Journal of Preventive Medicine (2002:23) cites research that links older neighborhoods with a greater likelihood of walking by residents.

Houses built prior to 1974 are typically located in somewhat more dense neighborhoods which also tend to include a greater mix of residential and business uses. Not surprisingly, proximity to shopping, plus factors such as the presence of sidewalks and safe streets, encourage residents to walk often and for longer periods of time.

Editor's Note: Bressi Ranch, 4S Ranch, and some others are the rare examples of new San Diego neighborhoods that borrow time-tested features making walking a choice instead of something you do when your car's in the shop.

# Become a Member

Membership in **WalkSanDiego**:

- Entitles you to free membership in the San Diego Coalition for Transportation Choices, our partner organization.
- Allows you free admission to walks, talks, and training events.
- Strengthens the pedestrian voice of the region.
- Gives you a "seat at the table" of agencies allocating the region's transportation funds.
- Provides you the know-how to make changes in your community.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail \_\_\_\_\_

Walking interests \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

- Individual - \$25     Family - \$40
- Benefactor - \$50+
- Student, senior or treading lightly - \$10
- Groups 25+ employees or members of a business or organization - \$250
- Corporate member - \$500

Send to:



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## Bressi Ranch gets the go ahead

On July 9, the Carlsbad City Council voted 4-0 to approve plans for "Bressi Ranch" in southeastern Carlsbad. The 623-home development is the first to follow the city's Livable Streets standards, adopted in 2001.

Consistent with the new standards, Bressi Ranch features narrower streets, traffic calming devices, a modified grid street pattern, and sidewalks separated from the curb by a planting strip. Speeding traffic will be all but impossible thanks to four traffic circles and corner "bulbouts" at most intersections.

The development includes 2 million square feet of light industry/offices, a commercial center, 200 assisted living units, apartments, homes, estate homes, and numerous parks, and a Boys and Girls Club.

WalkSanDiego spoke in support of the development at every juncture in the approval process, and congratulates both the city and developer on a groundbreaking plan.

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