

Community-Based Transportation Planning Grants

Improving Safety and Mobility Across Freeways For All Users in the City of La Mesa

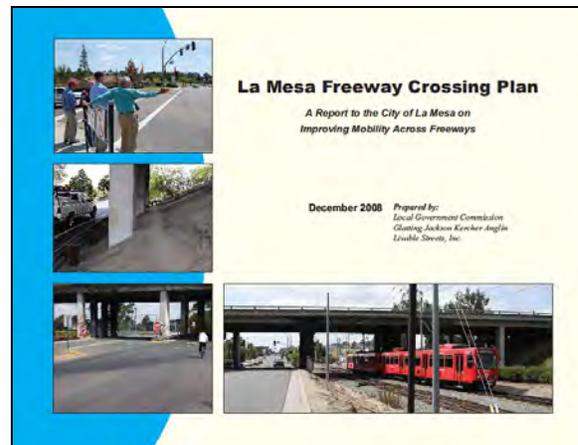
- **Grant Amount:** \$68,448
- **Grant Recipient:** City of La Mesa
- **Sub-recipient:** Local Government Commission
- **County:** San Diego

Project Area – Several key intersections in La Mesa that are bisected by Interstate 8 and State Route 125

Project Focus – Although the freeways passing through La Mesa provide excellent access to the region, they severely restrict access between the City’s neighborhoods. This project is aimed at improving pedestrian, bicycle and motor vehicle connections across the two major freeways, Interstate 8 and State Route 125 that divide the City of La Mesa. The crossings selected for this project are located close to public facilities including schools, transit, parks and shopping centers. These crossings pose a significant barrier to pedestrians, bicyclists and transit users. Some lack sidewalks, the most basic infrastructure required to create a safe and comfortable route for a person walking. Underpasses tend to be dark and scary. While overpasses feel safer, they often lack support for pedestrians or bicyclists.

Project Goals – This project will develop plans to improve the connections across Interstate 8 and State Route 125 freeways. Where appropriate, the City will coordinate this effort with Caltrans staff in order to

identify improvements that are feasible and meet the needs of residents and users of the freeway system. The potential implementation of the plan will help revitalize some of La Mesa’s neighborhoods and will position it to better accommodate increased population in decades to come. By revitalizing and improving the quality of life in La Mesa, this project helps meet some of the goals of regional smart growth planning which emphasize the need to provide housing in infill locations, avoid sprawling, low-density development on the perimeter of urban areas and improve conditions for walking and bicycling.



Community Outreach – On Thursday evening, May 3, 2007, the La Mesa “Improving Mobility Across Freeways” project opened with the first public event. Dan Burden, Executive Director of Walkable Communities then gave the crowd a presentation about design techniques that can convert dysfunctional, unsightly, and dangerous streets into complete streets that work for everyone, not just drivers. The Saturday session began with a refresher course on the tools available to address the priorities identified by participants

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on Thursday evening. These included traffic calming, pedestrian and bicycle facilities, and access requirements and techniques. Following this presentation Public Works staff led charrette participants on a walk and roll (wheelchair users were represented on this tour) through the Civic Center area to the Spring Street light rail station. This location revealed a number of challenges both for existing non-motorized users of Spring Street, and the design team. At the closing session over two dozen residents and project team members were in attendance to view detailed images of the resident and project team recommendations for each of the locations.

Project Outcome The report outlines an ambitious program for a makeover of all the freeway crossings addressed in the workshops. The intersections and freeway crossings addressed in this study are relics of an era when little attention was devoted to people not in motor vehicles. That age has passed. The City of La Mesa and Caltrans both have capable staff committed to this effort. As they work together to implement the vision in this report, some details not clearly stated here will need to be resolved. Residents should take comfort that the people moving forward with this effort will tackle this project with energy.

Challenges

- Most of the freeway overcrossings and undercrossings that were built several decades ago were designed with little thought to pedestrian and bicycle access.

Successes

- An additional benefit from the project was to engage residents of the City's different neighborhoods through the charrette process and events to map out strategies to improve these connections and to identify ways to revitalize adjoining neighborhoods.