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Community Engagement





Community Engagement Overview

Effective active transportation and Safe Routes to School plans require successful community engagement to understand the City's current state of infrastructure and to address the types of improvements needed for a safe and enjoyable walking and biking network. The following report is a summary of the public outreach events conducted since project initiation in February 2017. The project team worked in tandem with the City and the Imperial County Public Health Department to achieve all community engagement tasks.

The project's kick-off meeting that took place on February 28, 2017, began with discussing the City's previous outreach efforts. The City noted that for previous projects' conventional workshops, to which the public was invited at a specific time and location, had generally not been well attended. Because of this history, City staff cautioned against solely relying on this kind of public engagement. The scope originally asked for three conventional workshops to be held at different points of the planning process, but based on this discussion, it was decided that a variety of outreach methods and materials were needed to engage as many people as possible.

Many other cities have found it increasingly difficult to achieve adequate citizen participation with conventional community meetings, especially when held on weekday evenings. Family and work obligations and travel time are often cited as reasons that make it difficult to attend, especially for members of underserved communities. With fewer people attending conventional meetings, effective public outreach means taking the project to the public instead of expecting the public to come to the project.

It was therefore agreed that a combination of conventional and "pop-up" workshops held at established public events would be likely to yield the best results. "Pop-ups" usually involve having a booth at a scheduled and well-attended local event, which takes the outreach effort to community members that will be attending the event anyway. This outreach method results in more meaningful face-to-face interaction with far more citizens, and generates higher levels of input than would have been possible through conventional weekday evening workshops.

The annual Children's Fair and the Earth Day Fair were chosen as the two city-wide public events at which to hold pop-up workshops. In addition, to address a specific scope requirement to engage City youth in the plan, a pop-up workshop at State Street Coffee House was identified as the prime opportunity to reach out to the student population because it was adjacent to a high school and middle schools and was known to be a popular after-school student destination.

To strengthen the project's community engagement strategies and results, the team coordinated with the Imperial County Public Health Department (ICPHD). The ICPHD was awarded a Safe Routes to School Programs grant project and selected El Centro as the pilot city to establish Safe Routes to Schools programs. The resulting partnership between the City's infrastructure-based ATP/SRTS planning and the County's program-based SRTS is credited with significantly elevating community engagement and education.





Outreach Materials

A variety of outreach materials was designed to maximize public engagement. Because of El Centro’s multi-generational Hispanic population, all outreach materials were designed in both English and Spanish. The City’s diverse age and digital-accessible demographic prompted the team to provide outreach materials in both online and printed forms. Lastly, Spanish-speaking team members were present at all workshops and SRTS events to translate and interpret. This proved particularly valuable at the pop-up events.



Project Logo

Branding

To generate public interest and to create a unique identity, the team branded the project with a logo designed specifically for this project with the colors found in the City’s seal and website, and an easy-to-remember slogan, “Walk Bike El Centro.” This branding was used in all outreach materials, including flyers, postcards, surveys, online map, workshop exhibits and banners.

Survey

A survey was prepared to determine satisfaction levels of current pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure, as well as desired improvements. The survey asked people a variety of walking and bicycling questions and prompted them to provide both general and site-specific comments. The survey also directed people to the online map that allowed them to place comments on streets and intersections.

The survey was first announced at the Children’s Fair pop-up workshop and was available at all workshops. In addition, surveys were distributed to all students that attend a school within El Centro. Over 2,300 paper surveys were collected and digitally processed, providing valuable City-wide feedback from parents and students.

The survey’s data was used to gain a general understanding of existing pedestrian and bicycle issues, and was employed as a factor for GIS analyses, such as project recommendations and subsequent prioritization. A detailed summary of the survey’s results are included in [Appendix XX](#).

Survey

Online Map

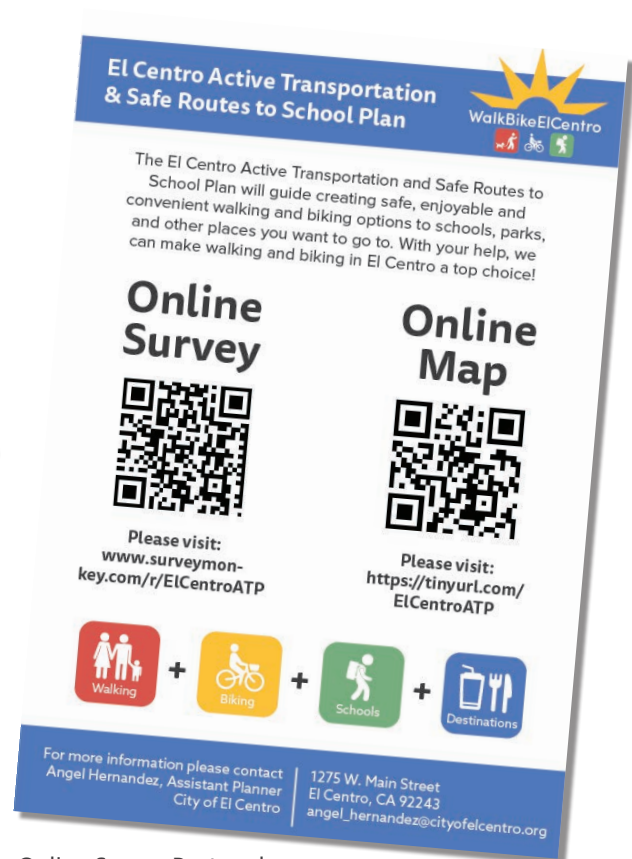
An online comment map provided through the ArcInfo Online platform was created as a supplemental input method that respondents could use to highlight location-specific issues. The online map allowed respondents to provide site-specific comments on infrastructure opportunities and constraints. It also provided the option to attach photos and describe whether the comment was a pedestrian, bicycle, or “other” issue. All points were automatically geo-referenced, and allowed anyone to see exactly where others had similar issues and concerns. This platform is an excellent tool that allowed the team and the City to efficiently document and analyze comments as they relate to specific locations and issues identified by the community.

Flyers, Postcards and Announcements

Public outreach materials for the workshops included fact sheets, flyers, and postcards. These materials were designed using the project’s branding and were printed in both English and Spanish. These materials were distributed prior to and during the workshops to encourage participation and invite people to share their thoughts.



Fact Sheet in Spanish and English



Online Survey Postcard



Public Workshops

Public workshops were designed to best serve El Centro’s diverse community and encourage wide participation. Three pop-up workshops were scheduled at the beginning of the planning process to gather important feedback from community members. These workshops allowed the team to efficiently reach out to large numbers of community members in a setting with guaranteed attendance. A Planning Commission and City Council presentation open to the public will be scheduled in the second half of the planning process to present the draft document and recommended projects.

Pop-Up Workshop #1 – Children’s Fair

The first pop-up workshop took place on Saturday, April 1, 2017 at the annual Children’s Fair at Bucklin Park. This popular event draws people from all over Imperial County for a day of family activities, concerts, and local food. The team set up a project booth that included table maps, fact sheets, surveys, and post-cards. Kid-friendly games such as Giant Jenga and corn hole were available for kids to share and play while their parents provided feedback.

In addition to the City-wide table maps, people provided comments on supplementary exhibits such as bicycle and pedestrian collision data, existing bicycle infrastructure, and a Complete Street Toolbox graphically describing potential streetscape improvements. The ICPHD was also present and coordinated with the team to hand out surveys and fact sheets.



Pop-Up Workshop #2 – Earth Day Fair

The second pop-up workshop took place on April 29, 2017 at the Earth Day Fair at Stark Field. This local event is organized by the Comite Civico del Valle Inc. and other local volunteers. The day's events included a morning neighborhood cleanup, followed by the fair. Exhibitors and activities included DIY composting, recycling, music and art, and environmentally-friendly resources tables. The project booth included the same table maps, surveys and exhibits that were available at the Children's Fair.

At this event, the ICPHD's SRTS program booth was stationed immediately next to the ATP-SRTS project booth, providing a seamless flow of communication between the two projects. The team also had the opportunity to speak with local Border Patrol officers and a fire chief that work and commute by bike throughout the El Centro. They provided valuable feedback about existing conditions, problem areas, and suggestions for potential infrastructure improvements.





Pop-Up Workshop #3 - State Street Coffee House

The third pop-up workshop took place on May 3, 2017 at State Street Coffee House. This venue was selected based on its popularity and geographic location relative to Central Union High School, Wilson Junior High School, and City Hall. In addition, the workshop's time coincided with the high school's early dismissal, which students were known to take advantage of and to socialize at the coffee shop.

The team set up a project booth at the shop entrance and incentivized participation by handing out vouchers for a free iced coffee or tea if they filled out a survey and provided comments on the table map. In addition, the Imperial Valley Press visited the pop-up workshop and interviewed several community members.



El Centro Active Transportation & Safe Routes to School Plan



State Street Coffee House Pop-Up Workshop

May 3, 2017 | 12:00-2:30 pm

1027 W State Street
El Centro, CA 92243

Free Iced Coffee or
Iced Tea! / Café Helado
o Té Helado Gratis!

Free Bike
Lights! / Luces para
Bicicletas Gratis!

Join us at State Street Coffee House and tell us how we can make safe, enjoyable and convenient walking and biking options to schools, parks, and other places you want to go to. With your help, we can make walking and biking in El Centro a top choice!

Acompáñenos en State Street Coffee House y díganos cómo podemos crear opciones para caminar y andar en bicicleta que son seguras, agradables y convenientes a las escuelas, los parques y tus otros destinos. ¡Con su ayuda, podemos hacer caminar y andar en bicicleta en El Centro una mejor opción!



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To stay involved with the project, please visit:
<http://www.cityofelcentro.org>
Para quedarse involucrados con el proyecto,
por favor visite:
<http://www.cityofelcentro.org>

For more information please contact/ Para
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Safe Routes to School Outreach

In addition to the City-wide active transportation workshops, the project team coordinated with local school districts and principals to conduct SRTS outreach. During the month of September, the team traveled to El Centro to administer the project survey to all students among the 14 public schools and one private school in the City, conduct walk audits for each of the schools, and host focused parent outreach at four schools identified by the City. The team conducted walk audits for each of the schools that included surveying infrastructure within a half-mile radius.

Walk Audits

Starting in September 2017, the team conducted walk audits after delivering the surveys to all the schools. A total of 918 entries (issues) were recorded using the Fulcrum mobile application to record field data.

Parent Survey

To administer the parent survey among all the schools, in late August 2017 the team contacted Central Union High School District, El Centro Elementary School District, and St. Mary's Catholic School for permission from the respective superintendents and principals to distribute the surveys.

Based on the principals' feedback and to generate the best possible rate of return, the project team was asked to eliminate the map on the back side of the original separate Spanish and English surveys and instead print the survey on both sides of a single sheet, one side in Spanish and the other side in English. Final survey format was then sent to the corresponding superintendents and principals at each school for approval.

The project team then printed over 9,000 surveys, to be distributed to every class in every school. In addition, the team printed 1,800 project fact sheets and sent them to the focus schools, as well as an instruction letter for every teacher and principal describing steps to take in helping to administer the surveys, including the survey's objectives. The project team also contacted each of the schools to assure them that this project had received approval to disseminate the surveys at their schools and requested a count of students per class.

The project team delivered the survey packages to all schools in early September. In mid-September, the team called the schools to remind them to collect the surveys and then arranged to pick up them up from each school. An estimated 2,100 surveys were collected from the project schools.

Focused SRTS Outreach

The City also identified four schools at which to conduct focused parent outreach:

- » Kennedy Middle School
- » Lincoln Elementary School
- » Washington Elementary School
- » Martin Luther King Elementary School

The team coordinated with the ICPHD and the schools to conduct parent outreach during scheduled Back to School Night (BTSN) events. The team provided a table map for each school, surveys, fact sheets, and other supporting material. The team invited people to approach the table to learn about the project and explain the importance of providing community input. Parents were invited to write on the table size maps and provide verbal feedback. Parents had the option to take a letter-sized map to provide feedback at a later time. Parents also had the option to complete the project survey if they had not done so yet.

The team set up a project booth along with other agency resource booths during BTSN, including the ICPHD SRTS program, the El Centro Elementary School District resource department, as well as other agencies. The project team once again coordinated with the ICPHD to communicate to the public the importance of working on both SRTS' infrastructure and programs components simultaneously.

At Lincoln Elementary, Kennedy Middle and Washington Elementary Schools, gathering input turned out to be challenging, with very few people stopping at the booth to learn about the project. The resource booths were stationed outside and not immediately adjacent to the BTSN venues, so even though they were shaded with canopies, most parents' priority was clearly to get

into the school auditorium where it was cooler. At the September 6 event, for example, the temperature hit 109 degrees. Even having a team member go inside to invite parents outside to visit the booth to learn about the project was not effective. Overall, parent feedback was minimal at these three events.

However, results were much better on September 20 at Martin Luther King Elementary School when the team again set up a project booth during its BTSN. This time the temperature was much more moderate and the resource booths were located at the auditorium entrance. The auditorium doors were opened before the BTSN presentation, which gave the team the op-

portunity to invite people to the project booth. Parents were happy to learn about the project's goals and objectives, as well as to provide feedback.

Draft Recommendations School Principal Meetings

The City scheduled additional meetings with each of the school's principals to discuss the city-wide ATP and SRTS draft recommendations. With each of the meetings, both the City and the school officials were able to discuss in detail the proposed recommendations and make revisions as needed.



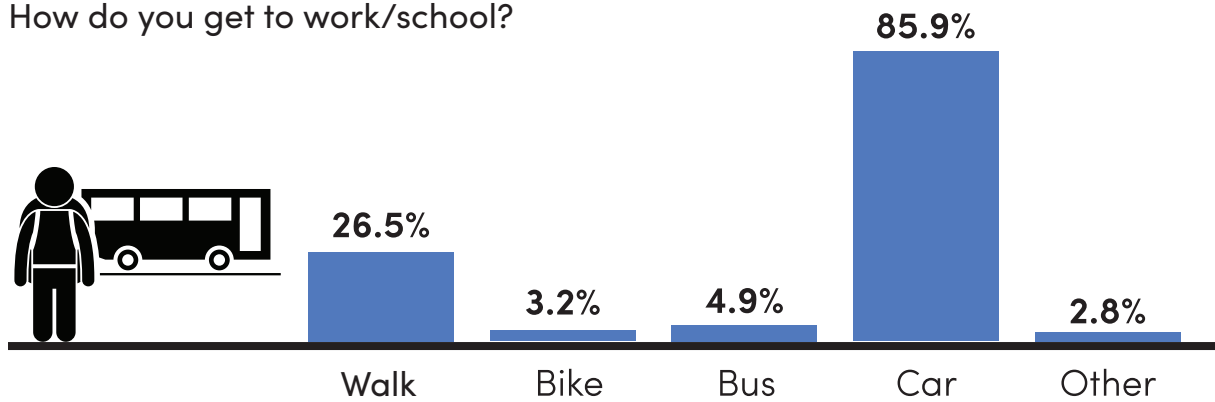


Survey Results

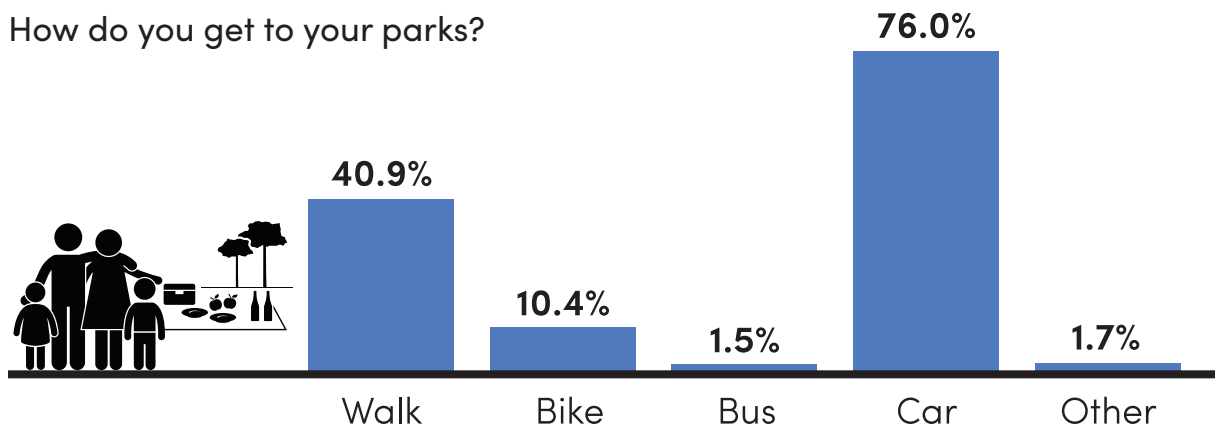
The survey questions were designed to develop a general understanding of the community's current and future state of mind regarding active transportation. A total of twelve questions were asked, many of which included the option to provide additional comments related to the question. Also, most questions allowed respondents to select more than one category, resulting in totals that exceeded 100 percent.

Printed and online surveys were available at local civic spaces and through online platforms. With over **2,300** survey responses, the following results provided helpful insight to important issues that can be used to guide the prioritization process. The entire survey results summary can be found in Appendix A in the final document.

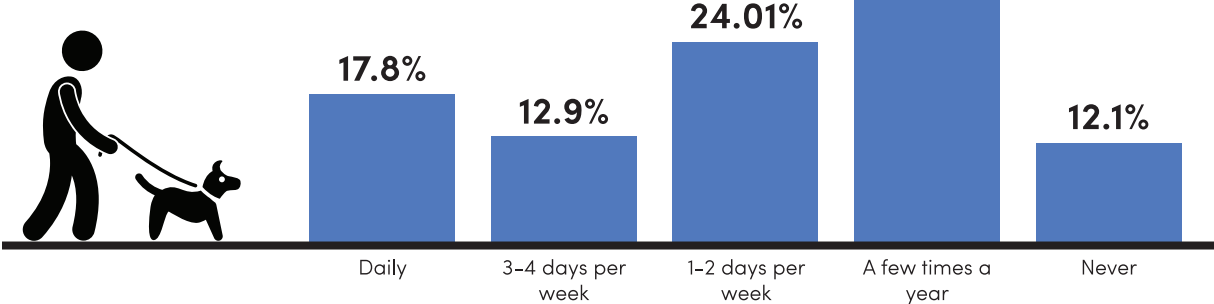
How do you get to work/school?



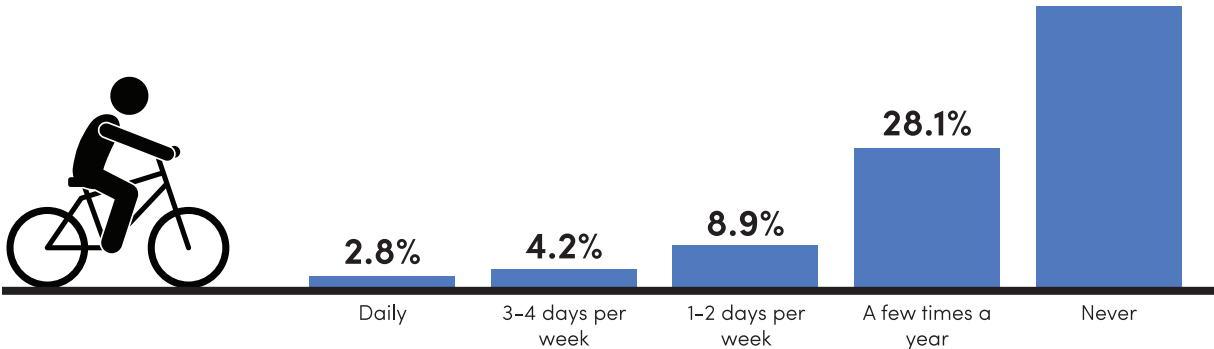
How do you get to your parks?



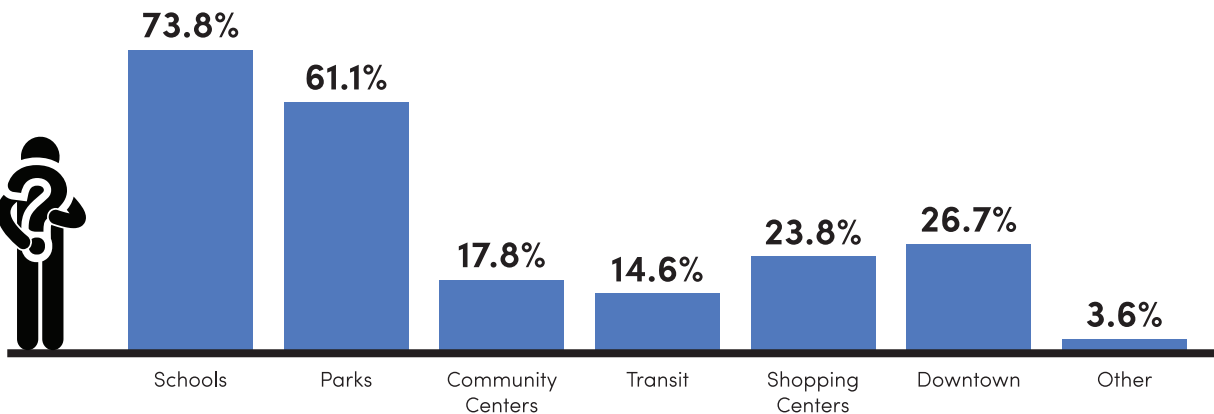
How often do you walk in El Centro?



How often do you bike in El Centro?

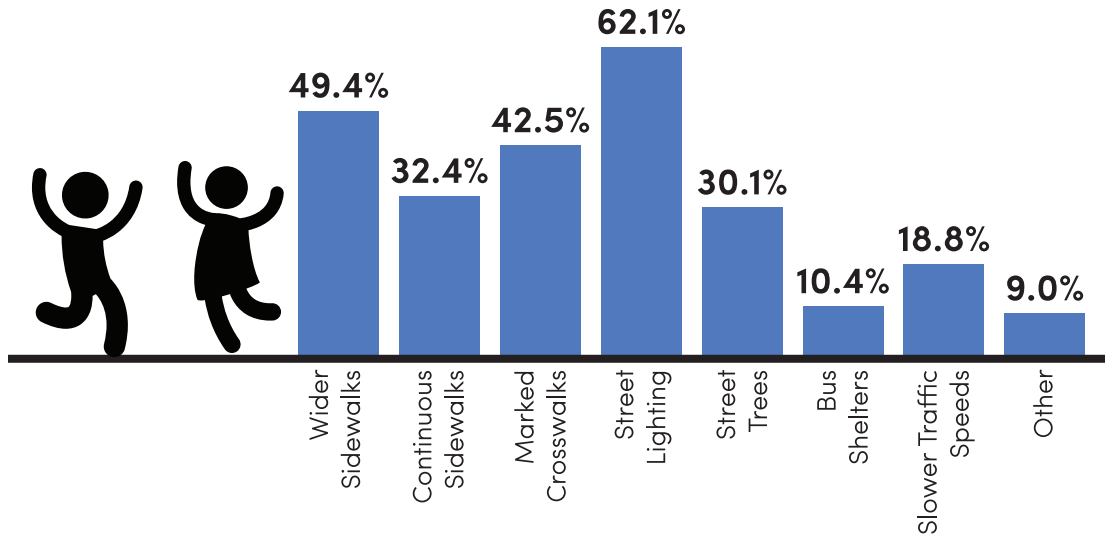


Where would you like to see better pedestrian and bicycling routes to?

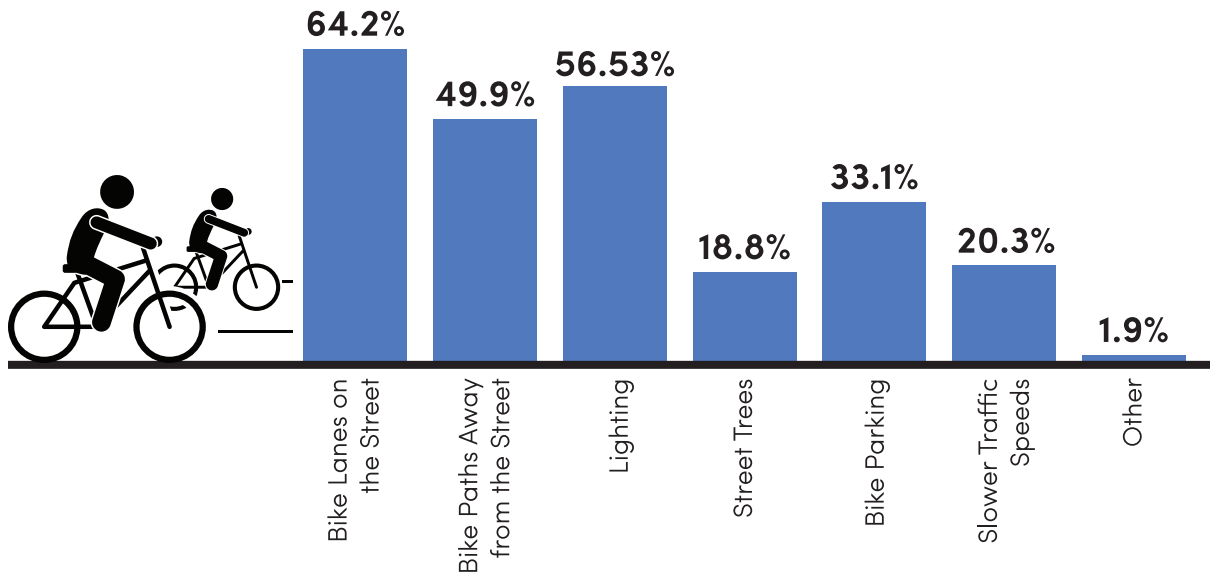




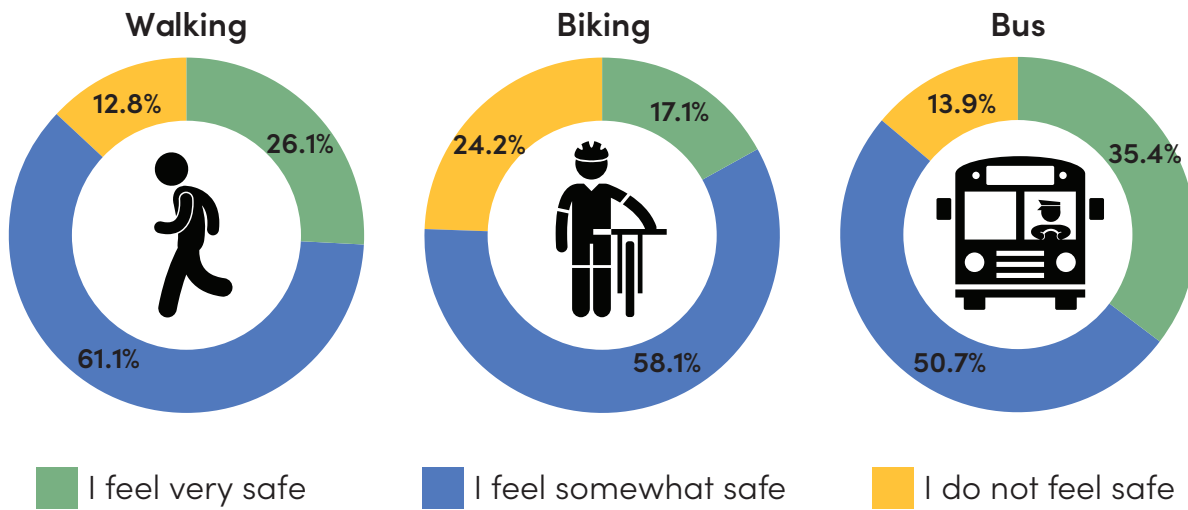
What would make walking better in El Centro?



What would make bicycling better in El Centro?



How safe do you feel when using the following types of transportation?



Public Outreach Summary

The diverse set of public engagement strategies allowed the team to introduce the project to many community members, as well as to collect valuable feedback. People were generally excited about improving pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure and were happy to provide comments on existing infrastructure, issues along specific corridors, and intersections, and to highlight areas that were good examples.

The following key words and messages were commonly noted throughout the various outreach events:

Pedestrian

- » Missing sidewalks and curb ramps
- » Narrow sidewalks
- » Lack of pedestrian lighting
- » Difficult crossings at intersections without traffic controls
- » Homeless/drug use
- » High vehicular speeds
- » Lack of trees throughout City
- » Aggressive/loose dogs
- » Graffiti/vandalism

Bicycle

- » Lack of safe bicycle facilities
- » Homeless/drug use
- » High vehicular speeds
- » Distracted drivers
- » Lack of pedestrian lighting
- » Aggressive/loose dogs
- » Vandalism on the streets

Workshop comments, survey, and walk audit data were used to help guide potential project recommendations and the prioritization process.

