

DATE: April 14, 2025
TO: Azalea Mitch
FROM: Zach Troncoso
SUBJECT: Middle Avenue Improvements Memo

Background

Middle Avenue underwent a comprehensive planning and community outreach effort, which included traffic studies, surveys, and public meetings. One of the key components of this effort was a community survey that asked residents how often they use Middle Avenue, how they travel along it, and where they live in relation to the corridor.

- The majority of respondents indicated they drive Middle Avenue daily.
- Nearly 60% of respondents live either on or directly adjacent to Middle Avenue, with 14% living on the corridor itself.

This feedback directly informed our initial design, which focused on improving safety through traffic calming while maintaining access for all users. The original plan included:

- Three raised crosswalks
- Several speed feedback signs
- One speed hump
- Bicycle and pedestrian striping improvements

Prior to this project, a pilot striping project introduced buffered bike lanes and additional pedestrian markings along the corridor. This project allowed us to collect before-and-after data:

- Traffic volumes: Stayed consistent, around +/-7,500 vehicles per day
- Bicycle usage: Increased (190 to 200)
- Pedestrian activity: Increased (230 to 240)
- Vehicle speeds: 85th percentile speed increased slightly post-pilot, reinforcing the need for calming measures

Project Goals

The goals of the project are to:

- Improve safety, comfort, and access for all users
- Support a sustainable and equitable transportation system
- Enhance pedestrian and bicycle connectivity



Key Changes from Planning to Design: Raised Crosswalk Relocation

One of the few changes made between planning and final design was the relocation of a raised crosswalk originally planned near Blake Street. During final design and field evaluations, several concerns made this location unfeasible:

- The existing grades created challenges in meeting ADA compliance
- Proximity to recent parking modifications at Nealon Park
- Drainage complications

Rather than eliminate this traffic-calming feature, we relocated the element to Yale Road, which was determined to be a suitable location based on:

- High pedestrian and bicycle crossing activity
- Frequent crossing patterns between residential parking and nearby apartments
- A documented pedestrian/bicycle collision at the intersection
- Field evaluations confirming physical feasibility and safety benefit

This adjustment preserves the intent of the original design and ensures that traffic calming benefits are distributed effectively along the corridor.

Addressing Cut-Through Traffic Concerns

We understand and acknowledge community concerns about the potential for increased cut-through traffic on adjacent side streets as a result of added traffic calming on Middle Avenue. However, our analysis and understanding of the corridor suggest that this is unlikely for several reasons:

1. **Primary Goal Is Safety, Not Deterrence**
The traffic-calming measures —in particular the raised crosswalks — are designed to slow vehicles and make the corridor more pedestrian- and bike-friendly, not to divert traffic altogether. Middle Avenue is home to several parks, churches, and destinations that naturally generate cross-street pedestrian activity, which these measures are intended to support and protect.
2. **Limited Parallel Route Options**
Middle Avenue is bounded by a dead end at Olive Street on one end and has only one true adjacent, parallel route: Santa Cruz Avenue. Using alternate routes would often require out-of-direction travel through less direct, more winding local streets — a tradeoff most drivers are unlikely to make.
3. **No Clear “Perceived Easier Route”**
From a planning perspective, traffic tends to shift only when there’s a clearly perceived faster or easier alternative. In this case, no such route exists adjacent to Middle Avenue that offers the same convenience or direct connection, particularly to El Camino Real. Additionally, motorists diverting to parallel routes to avoid traffic calming speed humps and raised crosswalks would encounter 2 to 4 additional 4-way stop intersections, narrower roadways with parking which would further reduce the perceived alternate route efficiency and reliability.
4. **Community Demographics Support Local Use**
As shown in the survey and planning data, the majority of Middle Avenue users live directly



on or nearby the corridor. For these residents, Middle Avenue remains the most logical and convenient route for travel, and traffic is not expected to divert significantly.

In short, while it's valid to consider the possibility of cut-through traffic, we do not anticipate a measurable increase in neighborhood side street volumes as a result of these improvements. The project remains focused on enhancing safety and livability for residents who rely on Middle Avenue as a key route for travel, access, and recreation.

Conclusion

The changes made from planning to construction reflect responsible engineering, safety prioritization, and a continued commitment to the community's vision for Middle Avenue. We remain confident that the final design will improve mobility, safety, and accessibility for all users while maintaining the integrity of neighborhood traffic patterns.

