

CITY COUNCILMEMBER
RIGEL ROBINSON
 DISTRICT 7

CONSENT CALENDAR
 October 15, 2019

To: Honorable Mayor and Members of the City Council

From: Councilmember Rigel Robinson, Mayor Jesse Arreguin, and
 Councilmember Kate Harrison

Subject: Referral: Telegraph Shared Streets

RECOMMENDATION

Refer to the City Manager to develop and return to Council with a plan to implement the shared streets proposal outlined in the Telegraph Public Realm Plan, including identification of potential regional funding sources for the project.

BACKGROUND

The Telegraph Public Realm Plan (TPRP), approved by the Council in 2016 after extensive input from community members such as vendors, merchants, property owners, and representatives from UC Berkeley and AC Transit, establishes a vision and provides guidance for a shared street on the first four blocks of Telegraph Avenue.

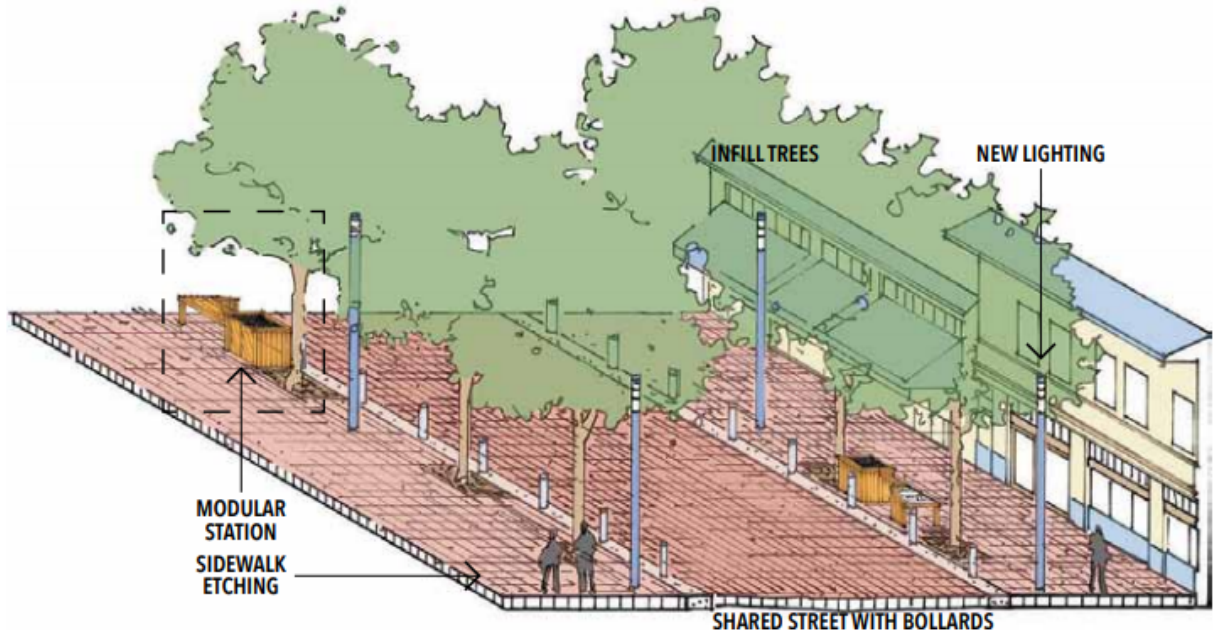
Telegraph Avenue serves as a hub for shopping, dining, music, and nightlife, attracting everyone from students to long-time residents to tourists. Yet, the poor condition of its sidewalks and other public realm elements show that infrastructure improvements have not kept pace. The streetscape has not seen a comprehensive overhaul since the 1970s, demonstrating the need for renewed investment in the area.

The concept of shared streets dates back to before the twentieth century, prior to the invention of modern cars. Most streets were shared between bicycles, carriages, and pedestrians, with minimal delineation between areas for separate transportation modes. As cars became the primary mode of transportation for the majority of Americans, street design standards shifted to prioritize drivers at the expense of bicyclists and pedestrians. Starting in the 1960s, the livable streets movement began to grow as a pushback to auto-centric design. While shared streets are more ubiquitous in European countries, similar projects are becoming more common in the United States. Perhaps most famously, New York City's Times Square was recently transitioned to a pedestrian plaza.¹

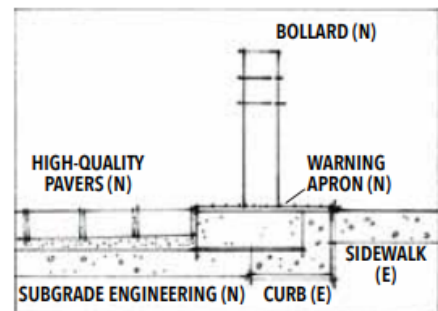
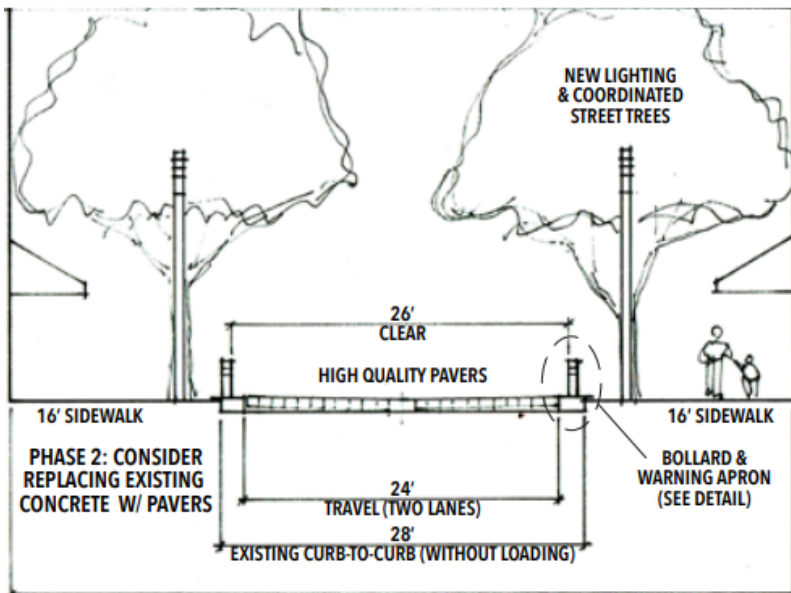
As proposed in the TPRP, the stretch of Telegraph Avenue between Dwight and Bancroft is an ideal location for a shared street because of its high foot traffic. Telegraph serves as both one of the main entrances to the UC Berkeley campus and a major commercial hub, complete with restaurants, retailers, and more. In a May 2016 study,

¹ <https://ny.curbed.com/2017/4/19/15358234/times-square-snohotta-before-after-photos>

UC Berkeley found that only 6 percent of students drive to school, while 77 percent walk and 17 percent bike or use public transit.² Merchants on Telegraph would also benefit from a shared street layout, which encourages foot traffic and emphasizes interactions with local businesses and street vendors over through traffic.



Ultimate Condition. TRPR proposes a plaza-like shared street and new lighting as a final phase. Sidewalk etching may remain or, if necessary, sidewalks can be replaced.



Shared Street Cross Section. Shared streets will be accompanied by bollards to delimit vehicles and tactile warning strips so visually-impaired persons can distinguish where motor vehicles may be present. In phase 2, the existing sidewalk concrete can be replaced with pavers.

² https://opa.berkeley.edu/sites/default/files/where_berkeley_students_live_0.pdf

This shared streets initiative is deeply similar to what the City of Seattle implemented with its Bell Street Park project in 2014. The City of Seattle's Department of Parks and Recreation and Department of Transportation converted Bell Street, one of the busiest avenues in the city, into a shared street, with similar aesthetic and pedestrian-focused changes to those proposed in the TPRP. In order to further incentivize public transit usage, the City does not allow cars to travel more than one block on Bell Street, while buses can travel straight through unhindered.³



Bell Street, during and shortly after construction.

Additionally, the City of Los Angeles' Great Streets initiative has adopted multiple aspects of shared streets into its renovations of major thoroughfares, seeing both fiscal and popular success. One of the most prominent examples of this has been the Venice Boulevard Great Streets project. In 2016, the city refurbished a 0.8 mile stretch of Venice in Mar Vista with bollard-protected bike lanes, restored and decorated sidewalks, commissioned murals, and parklets on the sidewalks and in medians.

In the first year of the Venice Boulevard Great Street, business and popular opinion have improved, with minimal impact on traffic. Economic activity increased by \$3.3 million and transactions in which customers spent ten dollars or more jumped from 50

³ <https://nacto.org/case-study/bell-street-park-seattle/>

percent to 70 percent.⁴ A 2018 survey of the community showed an uptick in public opinion of the neighborhood after the renovation, as the following statistics--which refer to the number of respondents answering "strongly agree" to the statements given--illustrate:

- "The neighborhood is safe" increased from 10% to 46%
- "The neighborhood is active and lively" increased from 6% to 45%
- "The neighborhood is clean and well-maintained" increased from 7% to 35%.⁵

Additionally, the busiest intersection in the Great Streets stretch, Venice Boulevard and Centinela Avenue, saw a 75 percent reduction in collisions since the project's completion.⁶

Converting Telegraph Avenue into a shared street would make the corridor more appealing to consumers and safer for pedestrians. This vision has similarities to other successful projects, such as the Bell Street Park shared street and the Venice Boulevard Great Street. These case studies highlight additional benefits of a shared street, such as improvements in public opinion and increases in economic activity. The City of Berkeley should move forward with the recommendations made in the TPRP and begin securing the funding needed to put this plan into action by assessing potential regional grant opportunities and partnerships with relevant entities such as UC Berkeley.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

\$5,787,150 for all four blocks according to the 2016 Telegraph Public Realm Plan, with adjustments for inflation and rising construction costs. The City should explore all funding options, including and especially regional grant opportunities.

ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY

The Telegraph Public Realm Plan shared streets proposal aligns with the City of Berkeley Climate Action Plan to reduce emissions and make "sustainable mobility modes...the primary means of transportation for Berkeley residents and visitors."⁷ In prioritizing pedestrians, bicyclists, and public transit, this initiative directly works towards these goals.

CONTACT PERSON

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Attachments:

1: Telegraph Public Realm Plan: <https://www.berkeleyside.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/Telegraph-Public-Realm-Plan-Final-Low-Res.pdf>

⁴https://static1.squarespace.com/static/595fd8fa5016e119d794e4b1/t/5c1c0c3fcd836656561d106f/1545342048197/VeniceBlvd_1-Year_Report_FINAL_.pdf

⁵ ibid

⁶ ibid

⁷ <https://www.cityofberkeley.info/climate/>