

UCLA

Policy Briefs

Title

Lessons for Upgrading Los Angeles's Slow Streets: Making Slow Streets Permanent in a Post-COVID City

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/0tw415b8>

Author

Garces, Madeleine

Publication Date

2021-06-21

June 2021

Lessons for Upgrading Los Angeles's Slow Streets: Making Slow Streets Permanent in a Post-COVID City



Madeleine Garces, MURP

Issue

As more Angelenos spent time in limited outdoor space due to COVID-19–related shutdowns, Los Angeles's outdoor spaces experienced overcrowding. In May 2020, Mayor Eric Garcetti announced the launch of the Slow Streets program, which allowed the Department of Transportation (LADOT) to temporarily reallocate street space for outdoor recreation in Los Angeles. On June 24, 2020, Council member David Ryu introduced a motion to make Slow Streets permanent. This report is situated in the context of a wide range of research being conducted by LADOT to study the effectiveness, infrastructure, and public perception of Slow Streets.

Slow Streets programs can improve safety and health for urban communities during and after pandemic-caused closures. The effectiveness of Slow Streets programs depends on how and where they're initiated and how much public engagement is involved in their planning process. Further research is still needed to determine where Slow Streets are placed and how best to engage the public. The findings from this and other research can help to inform L.A.'s vision of a permanent and successful Slow Streets program.

This research aimed to answer two key questions: What are the optimal legal path(s) and strategies for permanent implementation? How can Los Angeles leverage other mobility programs and initiatives in the planning process?

Research Findings

The research on Slow Streets was conducted in three areas: First, a case study analysis of four different cities that have similar

programs to glean lessons learned and best practices. Second, an analysis of Slow Streets corridor alignment with other mobility-focused programs in L.A. and their policies. And third, a policy analysis of the legal feasibility for L.A. to install four infrastructure and policy treatments to Slow Streets corridors.

The first research area, reviewing the operations and history of four other Slow Streets-esque programs, revealed six lessons for L.A. to implement:

1. Install and maintain consistent, official infrastructure. Installing signs throughout the city that are more durable and built into the street infrastructure can help legitimize the programs and traffic regulations. Prioritize the needs of low-income corridors.
2. Residents of low-income neighborhoods typically have less access to private vehicles, so increasing space for recreation and active transportation is especially valuable.
3. Evaluate needs of the city overall. Each of the case studies operated in cities with different built environments, cultures, and economies, and so needed their own unique strategies to succeed.
4. Integrate community-led and -centered programs. Involving the community in planning for Slow Streets strengthens the city's ability to prioritize Slow Street-related infrastructure changes. Comprehensive community input and engagement can make the program stronger and more popular with residents.
5. Support the program with active transportation policies. A city should evaluate how it supports pedestrian and bicycle access to Slow Streets within neighborhoods and across its entire transportation network to create a more effective program.

Figure 1. Matrix of case study cities and lessons for Los Angeles

	Consistent signage and infrastructure	Prioritize needs of low-income corridors	Evaluate needs of the City overall	Community led and centered programs	Traffic laws that support active modes of transportation	Political Support
Oakland, California	⊗	⊗	⊗	⊗		
Delft, Netherlands	⊗		⊗	⊗	⊗	⊗
Minneapolis, Minnesota	⊗		⊗			
Bogotá, Colombia			⊗		⊗	⊗

6. Seek political support. Strong support from politicians at the local and national levels was important for successful programs in Delft, Netherlands, and Bogotá, Colombia.

The second area of research focused on how the goals and physical locations of Slow Streets corridors in L.A. aligned with other programs that aim to improve active mobility and recreation. Alignment with other programs provides many opportunities for city officials to coordinate infrastructure and route planning with programs operated by the city, other agencies, and organizations. Since it may be easier to construct and implement Slow Streets infrastructure than these other programs, the city may find success with targeting corridors that align with or are in close proximity to streets and neighborhoods targeted by Vision Zero, Safe Routes to School, and Fitness Zones®.

Finally, the policy analysis revealed that the city does have the legal authority to install some temporary treatments now, such as roundabout circles with bollards, but some treatments are contingent upon the passage of legislation (Assembly Bill 773) that will grant the city power to formally designate Slow Street corridors as soon as 2022.

Study Approach

The researcher analyzed four case studies with similar programs to Slow Streets — Oakland, Minneapolis, Bogotá, Colombia, and Delft, Netherlands — drawing from a number of sources, including academic literature, project reports and evaluations, media coverage and press releases, and interviews with key staff. She also examined existing mobility and recreation programs in L.A. to determine how the Slow Streets program could best align with them. Finally, she analyzed the feasibility of various policy interventions for infrastructures that would be part of a permanent Slow Streets program.



Garces, M. (2021). Lessons for Upgrading Los Angeles’ Slow Streets: A Feasibility Study for Making the L.A. Slow Streets Program Permanent in a Post-COVID City (Master’s capstone, UCLA). Retrieved from: <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/0fh918m4>

Project ID: UCLA ITS-LA2031 | DOI:10.17610/T6ZP5J

Conclusions

- **Make a strategic plan that considers other mobility projects.** As L.A. focuses on turning the pilot program into a permanent program, it should leverage opportunities to coordinate with other organizations and city programs to achieve a smooth and efficient rollout.
- **Take the entire city’s needs into account.** The city must ensure that the permanent Slow Streets program fits not only the overarching recreational space needs of the city but also the specific needs of each neighborhood.
- **Use the time while legislation is pending to plan strategically.** If AB 773 becomes law, Slow Streets programs in California will be legally recognized and permissible in 2022. This means 2021 will be an important year for L.A. to develop a timeline and strategy for implementation that includes engaging with the public on how they envision their neighborhoods looking post-pandemic.
- **Seek political advocates and allies.** The idea for permanent Slow Streets in L.A. originated in City Council. Advocating for the passage of AB 773 at the state level will be crucial for a permanent Slow Streets program in L.A. Additionally, the city should look for a local political champion(s) who can spearhead awareness and evaluation of Slow Streets going forward.
- **Conduct further analysis on public perception of Slow Streets.** Since the city can treat the corridors as desired to calm traffic and lower speed limits, it should conduct further analysis on effective infrastructure and public perception of these treatments.