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### **Title**

Assessing Public Outreach About Slow Streets in San Francisco

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# Assessing Public Outreach About Slow Streets in San Francisco



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## Issue

In March 2020, cities across the United States shut down in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Commuting and public transit usage dropped significantly and vehicular traffic decreased dramatically on city streets. However, as a replacement to previous modes of travel, cities saw an increase in bicycling and walking. Almost overnight, cities repurposed many of their streets to make way for micromobility (use of small and slow vehicles like bikes or scooters), outdoor dining, and small gatherings. In April 2020, the San Francisco Municipal Transportation Agency (SFMTA) launched a Slow Streets program, shutting down 24 corridors to thru traffic.

To assess resident perceptions of the program, SFMTA issued an online questionnaire in April 2020. Among the questions, the city asked respondents to recommend future streets to join the Slow Streets network. In addition, SFMTA received more than 1,000 emails from residents providing comments and requests about the program. While this program has received overwhelmingly positive support, with SFMTA citing an 80% approval rating, SFMTA has yet to perform research evaluating the effectiveness of its outreach and communication about the program.

This study set out to analyze the recommendations from the questionnaire and resident emails to extract implications for future Slow Streets and help guide SFMTA's outreach and communication efforts moving forward.

More specifically, this project examined the following questions: What are San Franciscans' perceptions of the program? Do they understand the function of the program and do their suggestions fit the program scope? How are resident responses different based on the sociodemographic characteristics of the neighborhoods they live in?

## Research Findings

- The spatial analysis demonstrated that out of all the criteria that SFMTA laid out for the program, the biggest discrepancy in resident understanding is in land use (Figure 1). The program is designed to be on residential corridors, but many of the Slow Streets recommendations were for primarily commercial corridors, like in Downtown San Francisco, or on the main commercial corridors in residential neighborhoods, like Valencia Street.
- The questionnaire asked for ZIP codes, which provided one piece of sociodemographic data about respondents. When mapping respondents' reported residences on top of their recommendations (Figure 2), it's clear that respondents primarily lived in the center of the city (particularly in ZIP codes 94110 and 94117). There were fewer respondents and recommendations from the southern areas of the city. In additional spatial analyses, the study found that these underrepresented areas of the city are primarily low-income with high representation of communities of color.

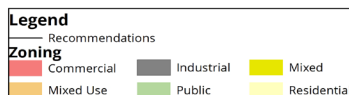
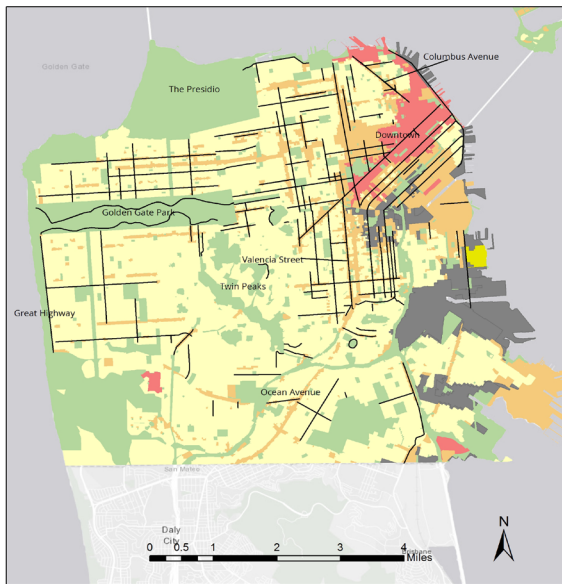


Figure 1: Resident Recommendations for Slow Streets by Zoning

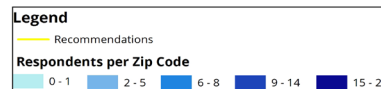
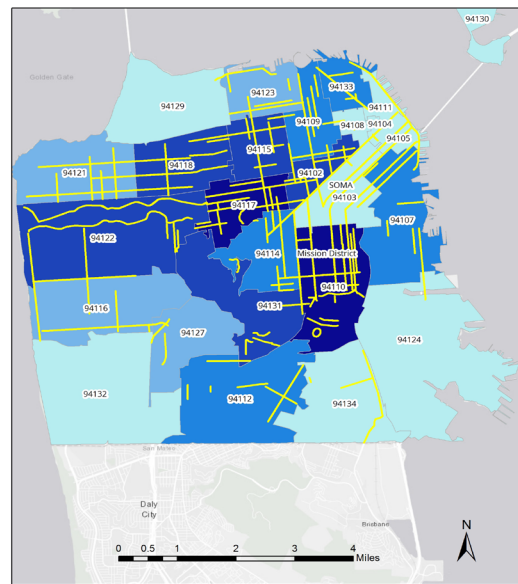


Figure 2: Resident Survey Responses by ZIP Codes

- The majority of the resident emails were in favor of the program. However, the most common complaint was about traffic safety and missing signage (often together). This pattern demonstrates that many San Francisco residents may enjoy the Slow Streets program, but would like to see the city leverage more traffic-calming measures on the Slow Streets corridors.

## Conclusions

Based on these findings, this study recommends that SFMTA:

- Fine-tune its messaging to explain the residential function of the program.** Many recommendations viewed Slow Streets as primarily for commercial corridors. Given that the program is primarily about mobility and not commerce or dining, the city should highlight and emphasize this function in its outreach. Future messaging should underscore this distinction above other criteria like public transit routes.



- Respond to desire for better traffic safety by adding signage and other traffic-calming measures.** Many San Franciscans enjoy the Slow Streets program, but would like to see better control of traffic speeds along the corridors so that pedestrians and cyclists can move more safely. To accommodate these needs, the city should install more permanent signage at every intersection where a Slow Street begins. As the program becomes more permanent, the city can install more long-term traffic-calming measures.
- Prioritize future outreach to communities most absent in the original survey.** The survey left out huge swaths of the population in largely low-income neighborhoods with high percentages of communities of color. In the next phases of the program, the city should prioritize not only reaching out to these neighborhoods, but specifically involving neighborhood groups that work with people of color. Through these collaborations, the city can ask residents what their health, mobility and safety needs are on their streets during the pandemic and beyond.

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