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Learning from Bike Boulevards in Long Beach, Albuquerque, and Minneapolis



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Issue

A city's bicycle network is composed of many types of facilities, including bike lanes, bike paths, and more. This brief focuses on bike boulevards, also known as neighborhood greenways, which are low-speed, low-volume residential streets that feature traffic-calming measures. The aim is to help pedestrians and less-confident bicyclists feel comfortable sharing the road with vehicles.

Cities and transportation agencies across the country have rolled out initiatives to improve their low-stress bicycle networks. In 2018, the Los Angeles Department of Transportation launched the Stress-Free Connections project in an effort to enhance the bicycle and pedestrian network citywide, with the first project area located in South L.A. By identifying the highest stress locations along neighborhood segments and crossings and addressing the shortcomings, LADOT seeks to create a more comfortable and "stress-free" experience for bicyclists and pedestrians.

This study aims to answer the following research questions:

1. What makes a bike boulevard successful?
2. What best practices from the three case study cities can transportation agencies leverage in their implementation of a stress-free connections network for bicyclists and pedestrians?

Study Approach

This study examined the planning and implementation process of bike boulevards in three case study cities: Long Beach, California; Minneapolis, Minnesota; and Albuquerque, New Mexico. These cities were selected because they were close comparisons to Los Angeles using the thresholds listed in Table 1. The analysis included review of associated plans, city council minutes, and news articles, along with interviews with nine practitioners and community advocates (three for each case study).

Key Findings

- Mini-traffic circles were a popular design feature to lower vehicle speeds on bike boulevards in all three cities. In both Long Beach and Minneapolis, residents maintain the greenery and decorations inside the traffic circles.
- Traffic diverters, or modal filters, that force motorists to turn but allow bicyclists and pedestrians to continue straight through were another common design treatment to lower vehicle volumes, particularly in Albuquerque and Minneapolis (Figure 1).
- All three cities use pedestrian-hybrid beacons and rectangular rapid flashing beacons to facilitate safer crossings for bicyclists and pedestrians at major intersections. These were sometimes used in conjunction with medians and refuge islands.

THRESHOLD	LONG BEACH	MINNEAPOLIS	ALBUQUERQUE
Land area $\geq$ 50 square miles	✓	✓	✓
Population $\geq$ 400,000	✓	✓	✓
Population per square mile $\geq$ 7,000	✓	✓	
Percentage of Black residents $\geq$ 8%	✓	✓	
Percentage of Latino residents $\geq$ 40%	✓		✓
Percentage of residents living in poverty $\geq$ 15%	✓	✓	✓

Table 1. Threshold Criteria for Case Study Cities



Figure 1. Traffic Diverter in Albuquerque, New Mexico

- Interviewees frequently highlighted that the most successful bike boulevards enhance connectivity to the wider bicycle network. These connections allow people to get anywhere they need safely and conveniently, without having to worry about facilities suddenly disappearing.
- Interviewees expressed that evaluation can be a challenge. Outside of specific studies, vehicle speeds and volumes are typically not monitored for residential streets like bike boulevards. Additionally, pedestrian and bicyclist counts are not consistently conducted at recurring locations on bike boulevards.
- Interviewees noted that bike boulevard projects have sometimes received pushback from community members. For instance, some opposed design features that limited vehicular access, while others felt that other road infrastructure issues should take precedence.
- Keep iterating on design treatments.** In all three case study cities, some design elements did not quite work as intended at first. Despite these mishaps, the installations were not removed entirely. Instead, staff in each of the cities made slight adjustments to the design features to help the new iterations of the treatments achieve their intended purpose.
- Evaluate the effectiveness of design treatments at regular intervals.** Anecdotes from interviewees demonstrate the importance of rigorous evaluation to determine which treatments work and do not work and make adjustments accordingly. LADOT can consider collecting data at regular intervals — for example, three months pre-implementation, three months after, and again one year later — to assess if the design treatments are performing well against desired metrics. Additionally, LADOT must ensure that data collection is consistent across all corridors in its Stress-Free Connections project areas.
- Promote design improvements through group bicycle tours.** When construction is substantially complete for improvement projects, consider supporting group bicycle tours or future CicLAvia events in this neighborhood to raise awareness for the design improvements in the project area. These bicycle tours can also help build a strong base of supporters for future projects, promote community participation and bicycle usage, and serve as opportunities to garner informal feedback on design treatments from active transportation users.
- Assess the feasibility of mini-traffic circles, flashing beacons, and diverters.** These three treatments for vehicle speed and volume management were mentioned most frequently during interviews as successful design features on bicycle boulevards.

Conclusions

This research proposes several recommendations for LADOT to consider in its implementation of design treatments aimed at reducing vehicle speeds and volumes. By drawing from the insights found in these case studies, LADOT can work toward creating a bicycle and pedestrian network that can truly be considered “stress-free.”



Chan, A. (2025). Stress-Free Connections: A Best-Practices Analysis (Master’s capstone, UCLA). Retrieved from <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/4nm8f95z>

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