Transformation of Transportation to Livable Streets

Category: Technology Advancements

City of Carlsbad

107,000 residents

John Coates, City Manager

Please consider for an Innovation Award

Yes, please consider the application for a Rapid Fire Session

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*What is the intent of the project/program/service?*

In 2012 the City of Carlsbad Transportation Division of the Public Works Department initiated a transformation to a livable streets concept. This began after the Carlsbad City Council asked department heads during a strategic goals session to discuss the best practices in their respective disciplines. Staff introduced “livable or complete streets,” which stresses that a community’s streets ought to be for everyone — young person or old, a mom pushing a stroller or a man in a wheelchair, a bicyclist or a motorist. This marked a departure from the prevailing transportation philosophy, which stressed designing roadways for the largest possible vehicles and volumes traveling at high speeds. The Carlsbad City Council embraced the complete streets model and adopted it as one of the city’s strategic focus areas in January 2012. Since that time the Transportation Division has applied complete streets solutions to transportation challenges to create opportunities for people on our roadways. The city is aligning its solutions with today’s community values of an active, healthy lifestyle and walking, biking and connectedness. By quickly implementing nearly two dozen small and medium projects, the city has created synergy that has rejuvenated the downtown economy and improved safety, while creating a more thriving, active and healthy community.

*What were the costs, if any?*

Surprisingly, we have accomplished nearly two dozen livable streets projects for minimal cost compared with how much a typical “vehicle capacity enhancing” project would have cost to facilitate moving people solely in vehicles. And the response from the community has been overwhelmingly positive.

*What were the savings, if any?*

As a direct result of the City of Carlsbad livable streets initiative, the city received $1.25 million in “active transportation” grants from the San Diego Association of Governments, the regional transportation and planning agency. The grant will result in direct savings on several fronts. The largest individual grant is $800,000 to construct a roundabout at a Y-shaped intersection that has had chronic access and safety challenges for all forms of transportation. The roundabout will allow motorists to make every possible traffic movement, which is not possible in the existing configuration. It will also improve access and safety for pedestrians by adding a sidewalk, and for bicyclists by adding bicycle lanes. This project will also repurpose two northbound lanes and one southbound lane into one lane in each direction, along with a trail on one side, sidewalk on the other, and bike lanes in both directions across the Buena Vista Lagoon, which connects two cities. The city will pay $700,000 of the project’s total $1.5 million cost.

*Identify innovative characteristics and explain how they improved the organization.*

As part of the adjustment to the livable streets model, the Transportation Division researched and wrote the “Carlsbad Livable Streets Assessment Report.” This multiple-award-winning report identified obstacles to implementing livable streets, studied how other communities had overcome those obstacles, and recommended ways to adapt those practices to Carlsbad’s unique environment. It also facilitated changing the language and conversations with all city departments and, as a result, shifted the culture to make Carlsbad’s streets more livable for the people who live, work and recreate in the city.

*What obstacles, if any, did you encounter when starting or implementing this program?*

The greatest obstacle was clarifying the vision and identifying all roadway users so that the entire team could refocus in a new direction. We used visual simulations and test pilot projects to overcome initial fears and garner support.

*What outcomes — cost savings, for citizens, any performance measures information, etc., did you have?*

It’s hard to quantify a “feeling” statistically, but the number of people, bikes, smiles, and profits for businesses are easy to count. And these solutions cost very little money or time to implement compared with roadway widening projects for vehicles that often negatively impact the experience for people. We still consider vehicles when we design our roadways, but we are creating an interwoven fabric of streets that prioritize people, which will be the focus of our new mobility element in our general plan.

*Please list applicable results and real world practicality.*

The City of Carlsbad has developed several livable streets projects since early 2012, all of which have significantly improved mobility and connectivity in our community. Here are some examples:

* A “scramble”crosswalk at our busiest pedestrian intersection. This allows pedestrians to cross in any direction, including diagonally, on a green walk signal while all traffic stops. The intersection is now more efficient for both pedestrians and motorists.
* “Pedestrian islands” along our main beachfront roadway in downtown Carlsbad. These are raised medians in the middle of the road where pedestrians can pause, enabling them to cope with one traffic direction at a time. We also installed high-visibility signs alerting motorists that they are approaching crosswalks, which improved safety with little or no negative effect on vehicle traffic.
* Narrower travel lanes to slow traffic and improve pedestrian and bicycle safety. The slower speeds also reduced the collision rate, so the overall result was positive for all road users.
* Shared travel lanes on roads where there is insufficient space to accommodate vehicle lanes and a bicycle lane. The lanes are marked with “sharrows,” painted symbols in the travel lane that tell motorists and bicyclists that they are sharing the road. Motorists may pass where it’s legal and safe to do so.
* Buffered bike lanes that provide more space. During routine roadway maintenance we resurface and repurpose the pavement real estate from one mode to another.

*Was a private consultant used? If yes, describe their involvement. Identify the consultant and/or firm, including contact information*

The City of Carlsbad teamed with the San Diego office of Fehr & Peers, Transportation Consultants, 401 West A Street, Suite 900, San Diego, CA 92101. Our main contacts were Jason Pack, Jeremy Klop, and Tamar Fuhrer.

The City of Carlsbad case study presentation would highlight through a PowerPoint presentation how leadership and innovation can change a culture. It will show before and after results of completed projects and highlight “why” we have been so successful implementing projects while many other similar size cities are struggling, discussing policies before attempting solutions. We employed the Simon Sinek “Start with Why” approach rather than solely focusing and debating the “what.”