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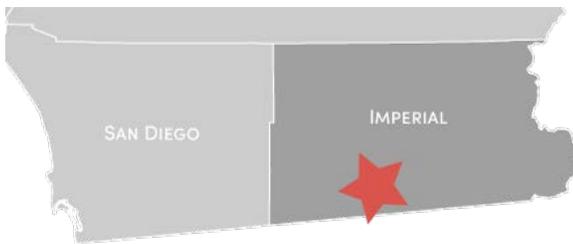
Introduction



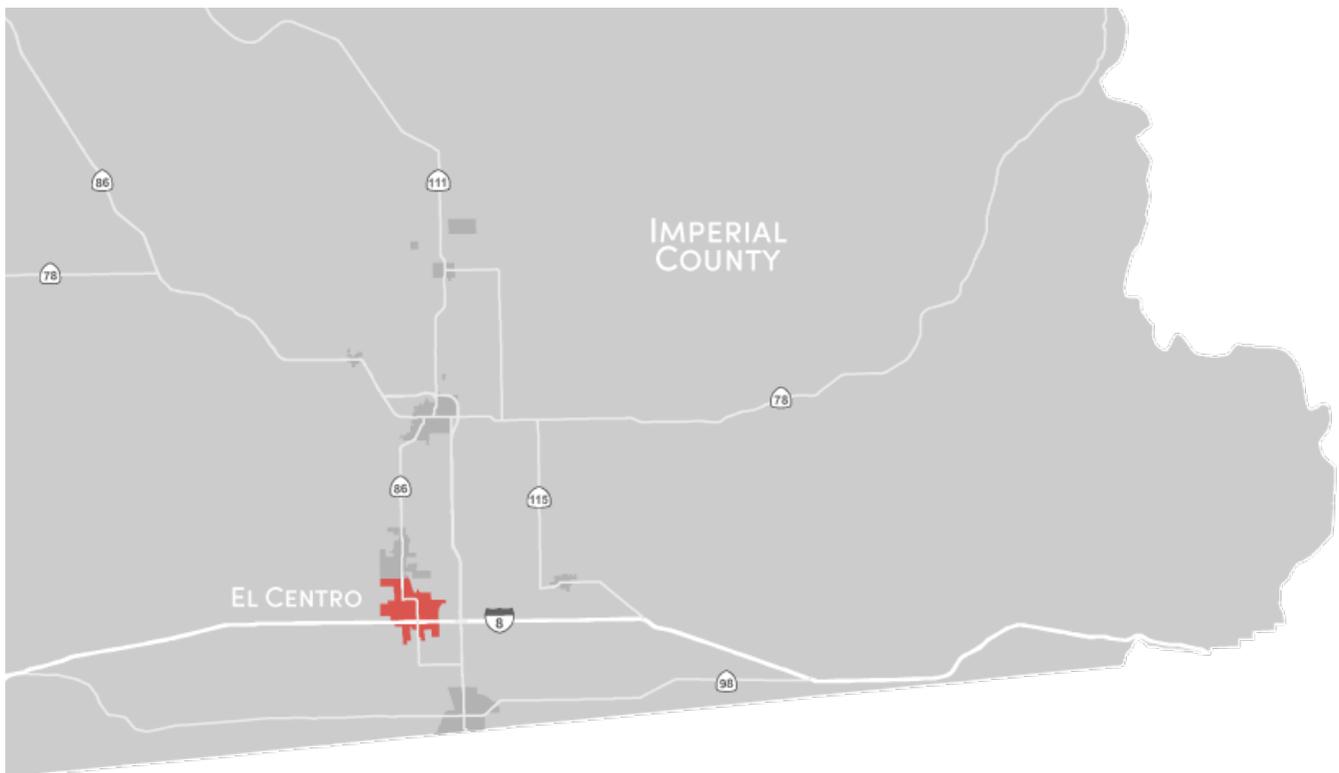


Study Area

The City of El Centro is embarking on the next generation of mobility planning with this combined Active Transportation and Safe Routes to School Plan (ATP-SRTS) funded by the California Department of Transportation 2014 Active Transportation Program. The project's scope addresses the grant's objectives of improving non-motorized transportation, promoting public health, reducing automobile usage, and promoting transportation equity. The ATP-SRTS Plan improves upon the recommendations identified in the 2010 Bicycle Master Plan and will be the official mobility planning document for a better-connected, safer, equitable, and enjoyable El Centro. It lays out a vision where residents can safely and happily get to and from school, their local park, and their many other destinations.



The City of El Centro is located in Imperial County in southern California. It's population of approximately 43,699, according to the 2016 American Community Survey (ACS), makes it the largest city in Imperial County, as well as the county seat. The City is accessible via Interstate 8, and State Highways 86 and 111. Because of its strategic location along the Mexican-American border and two international border crossings for commercial and noncommercial vehicles, there is a strong commercial, industrial, and agricultural economic presence. The City is home to a predominately Hispanic population with a median age of 32.



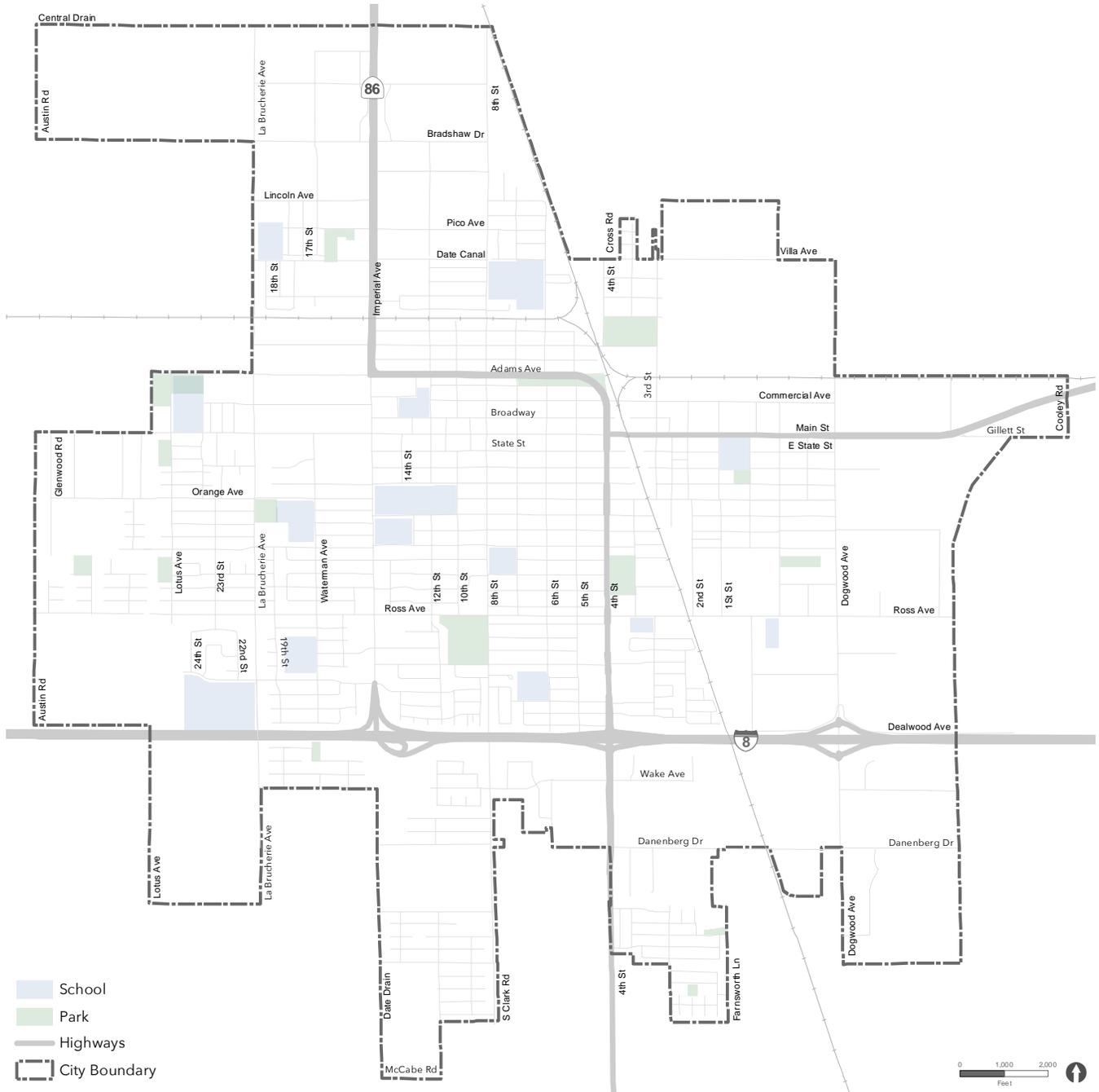


Figure 1-1: City of El Centro Boundary



Scope

The project scope includes developing a comprehensive Active Transportation and Safe Routes to School Plan that addresses the objectives listed below.

1. Identifying gaps and barriers, both perceived and actual, in the existing pedestrian and bicycling network where high priority routes are disconnected;
2. Analyzing the existing infrastructure around all schools to determine appropriate solutions;
3. Developing a methodology for prioritizing projects including family-friendly routes, first and last mile connections to transit, and a tiered network that serves both experienced riders and less experienced riders; and
4. Encouraging walking and bicycling as viable transportation modes.



Vision, Goals, and Objectives

The City has actively pursued opportunities to improve infrastructure that benefit all its community members. The City recognizes that a large portion of the community relies on walking, bicycling, and taking transit for their everyday needs. Noted in the application for the grant funding the ATP-SRTS Plan, *“the combined Plan would allow the City to prioritize improvements to enhance the safety of our community and encourage active modes of transportation.”* Furthermore, *“The students to benefit from the improvements attend schools for which greater than 75 percent of students are eligible for free or reduced lunch.”*

Using the City’s Vision 2050 Strategic Plan as an overarching guide, the ATP-SRTS Plan will help address the vision of creating a more walkable and bikeable city that provides equitable, safe, and convenient access to schools, parks, public transit, and commercial zones.

Vision: El Centro provides multimodal transportation options and an integrated transportation network for all members of the community.

GOAL 1: Improve transportation options and the roadway infrastructure network.

GOAL 2: Support a safe pedestrian and bicycle transportation network for people of all ages and abilities.

This plan also embraces the State of California’s following goal:

“It is the goal of the state to increase the number of trips Californians take by bicycling, walking, and other forms of active transportation in order to help meet the state’s greenhouse gas emissions reduction goals, improve Californians’ health by helping more people be active, and stimulate the economy.” ~ Caltrans Design Information Bulletin (DIB) 89: Class IV Bikeway Guidance (Separated Bikeways/Cycle Tracks)

The State of California’s desire to increase the number of bicycling and walking trips specifically addresses personal health, sustainability, and economic concerns, but being able to safely and conveniently get around without needing to drive a motor vehicle is the result of a community’s quality of life commitment to embrace active transportation. This ATP-SRTS Plan aims to be the basis for the City’s commitment to make El Centro a greener, more pedestrian and bicycle friendly community as part of a comprehensive sustainability strategy by reducing the need for motor vehicle travel and associated emissions.

Especially in a city like El Centro, where the terrain is relatively flat and where three seasons of the year are so favorable, why don’t more people walk or bicycle, or allow their children to do so? The primary barrier to bicycling is widely perceived as the dangers of having to compete with motor vehicle traffic, and for many people, this makes driving simply feel more convenient and safer than walking or bicycling. One of the primary goals is to change these perceptions by developing strategies and solutions that will reduce the dependence of driving and instead encouraging residents to grab their walking shoes or their bicycle.

This Plan provides a framework for El Centro's active transportation network development, as well as supports eligibility for regional, state, and federal active transportation project funding. This resulting document helps to improve safety through identified prioritized bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure projects, associated encouragement programs, and policy recommendations.

Not exclusively focused on new infrastructure construction, this Plan also aims to support walking and bicycling culture through raising awareness for sustainable mobility, especially in support of more bicycling and walking to school, work, and play. It is likely that commuting increases will be primarily via bicycle, and intra-City travel increases will be via both bicycle and walking. Implementation will result in fewer daily vehicle trips within the City and fewer vehicle miles traveled (VMT).

This ATP-SRTS Plan sets the foundation for decisions and identifies a blueprint for future bicycle and walking development by helping to ensure that opportunities are not missed during decision making about related infrastructure, land use, and facility development.

Recommendations include proposed improvements across a range of project types, as well as associated programs to encourage more bicycling and walking in the City. Facility types perceived to be both the safest and most convenient virtually always receive the highest survey approval rates. Recommended improvements are described in Chapter 5, but precise alignments and details will be developed during subsequent implementation phases.

This Plan also considered connections with the larger regional context. Its recommendations support an active transportation system better connected with regional systems connecting El Centro with adjacent areas within Imperial County.

Active Transportation Trends

Many American cities were built on a foundation of auto-centric infrastructure, programs, and policies, but many of those same cities are embracing active transportation as a viable option to driving. Some of them are making minor improvements to support cycling and walking, while others are working hard to undo decades of planning that privileged motor vehicle throughput and speed above all else. Environmental, health, and economic benefits reinforce the task of retrofitting American cities to make them bicycle and pedestrian friendly. The movement to make bicycling and walking viable transportation options is also supported by several recent pieces of California legislation.

Recent active transportation statistics and trends depict steps both forward and backward. For example, the Alliance for Biking and Walking released a *Benchmarking Report* in 2016 that noted an overall increase in walking to and from school. In 2013, the percentage of children walking to school was approximately 15.2 percent nationwide, an increase from 2007 when the approximate percentage was 11.9 percent. The report also found an increase in students that walked from school in the same time frame. In 2013, approximately 18.4 percent students walked from school compared to 15.2 percent in 2007.

Communities with Sidewalks



Bridging the Gap, Income Disparities in Street Features that Encourage Walking, 2012



It is just as important to understand the context of specific communities when describing active transportation trends, opportunities and challenges. Results from the 2009 *National Household Transportation Survey* (NHTS) noted that trips taken by low-income households are more likely to be on foot or by public transit than households of higher income. In addition, the trips low-income households make by walking or bicycling are more likely to be for daily errands, work, school, or church than for social or recreational purposes. Only 36 percent of walking trips made by households with an annual income of less than \$20,000 were reported as social or recreational purposes, compared to 45–52 percent of walking trips by higher income households.

Furthermore, low-income households and communities of color experience disparate accommodations and benefits related to active transportation. According to the Safe Routes to School National Partnership *At the Intersection of Active Transportation and Equity 2015 Report*, almost 90 percent of high-income neighborhoods have sidewalks on one or both sides of the streets, in contrast to only 49 percent in low-income neighborhoods. Furthermore, a 2012 report called *Bridging the Gap, Income Disparities in Street Features that Encourage Walking*, revealed that 75 percent of high-income communities have street lighting installed compared to just 51 percent in low-income communities.

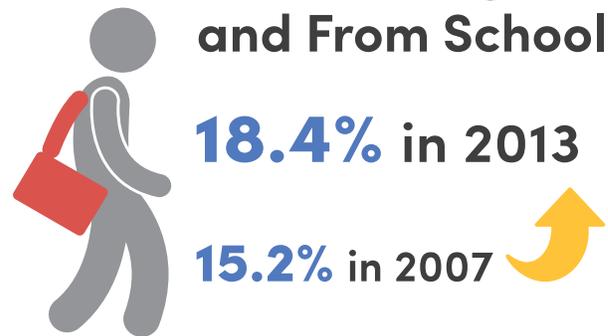
Empty Nesters, particularly as the number of Baby Boomers reaching retirement age accelerates, are also showing a strong preference for communities that support walking. American Association of Retired Persons (AARP) surveys found that 70 percent of respondents age 65 and older agreed that living near where they want to go, such as grocery stores, health care providers, libraries and social or religious organizations, was extremely or very important. Additionally, 51 percent agreed that it was extremely or very important to be able to walk easily in their community. El Centro is a relatively young city, with 70 percent under 45 and 90 percent of its population under 65, but with an estimated 4,556 residents over 65, decision makers should consider their community’s demographic composition when making transportation decisions.

In many California cities, non-motorized bikeway and trail network development have not kept up with de-

mand. Bikeways and trails are often conditions of development, but relying on this can result in disconnected facilities. Many cities are addressing system gaps through re-stripping streets to reallocate space to bicycle facilities, updating bicycle and trails master planning, and securing grants for facility construction.

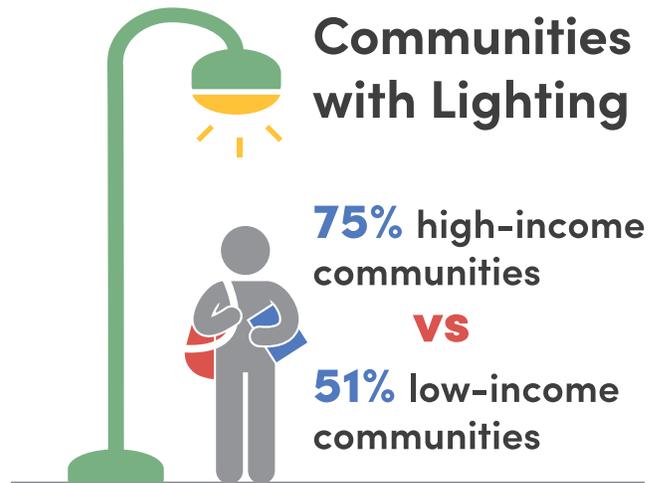
There has also been a growing preference for new facility types that enhance pedestrian and bicyclist safety, particularly protected bicycle lanes physically separated from motor vehicle traffic. In addition, acknowledging that the majority of trips Americans make are less than one mile, it is important to assess the infrastructure and make a genuine effort to entice people to walk or bicycle to their destinations through improved facilities.

Kids Walking To and From School



Alliance for Biking and Walking Benchmarking Report, 2016

Communities with Lighting



Bridging the Gap, Income Disparities in Street Features that Encourage Walking, 2012

Planning Context

The ATP-SRTS Plan takes into consideration the City's previous planning efforts related to active transportation, healthy communities, placemaking, and safety. The following reports provide useful planning context for this Plan's efforts.

Bicycle Master Plan Update, 2010

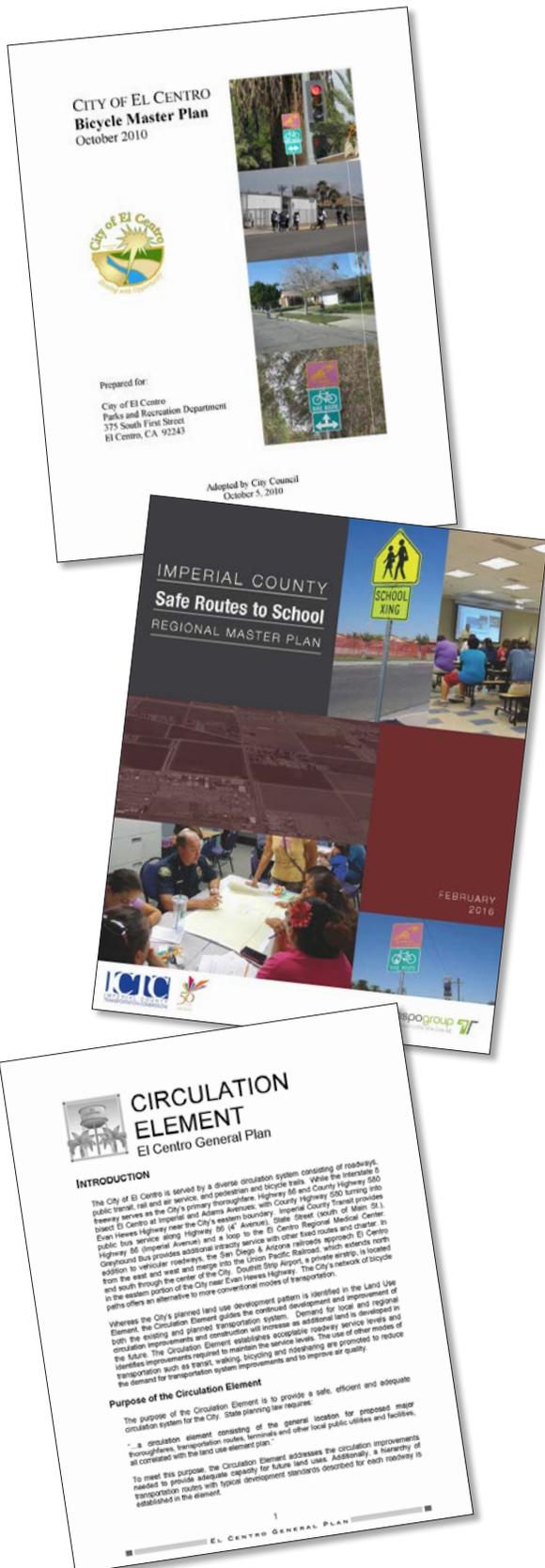
In 2010, the City completed a *Bicycle Master Plan Update* whose primary purpose was to modify the 2000 BMP to address changes in the City's population, infrastructure, and land use. The BMP also addressed increased connections to and from adjacent communities. The BMP was used as the basis for applying for funds from various resources, such as state and federal grants.

Imperial County Safe Routes to School Plan, 2016

The City participated in the *Imperial County Safe Routes to School Plan* in 2016, which was awarded to the Imperial County Transportation Commission and funded by a Caltrans grant through a partnership with SCAG. The Plan includes results obtained from workshops where local stakeholders identified safety issues and barriers that discourage students from walking or bicycling to their schools. It also includes a list of improvements for each school at important locations, such as crosswalk striping, sidewalk infill, and bicycle facilities.

General Plan Circulation Element, 2004

Continuing the promotion of alternative modes of transportation, the Circulation Element promotes and encourages the development and use of a network of pedestrian and bicycle routes. The Circulation Element provides goals and policies to create a continuous bicycle and pedestrian network that links neighborhoods with schools, parks, retail centers, and other major destinations. This element also encourages the identification of areas within the existing community that would benefit from improved pedestrian facilities, and future development and redevelopment will be required to incorporate pedestrian connections with major destinations. Additionally, the Circulation Element promotes a separation between curbs and sidewalks, such as a landscaped planting strip, to reduce safety hazards to pedestrians, to create "walkable" streets, and to provide an aesthetically pleasing environment.





The goal and policies below reflect the City’s vision for a pedestrian and bicycle network that is safe, efficient, and attractive:

Circulation Goal 3:

Provide for adequate bicycle and pedestrian access throughout the community.

Policy 3.1:

Provide and maintain a system of pedestrian and bicycle access-ways that links residential areas with parks, scenic areas, schools, libraries, civic center, major employment and retail centers, and other areas of congregation within El Centro and the surrounding area.

Policy 3.2:

Continue to improve the accessibility of public facilities and commercial centers to improve access and mobility of the elderly and the disabled.

Policy 3.3:

Encourage the incorporation of bicycle facilities, such as bicycle lockers and showers at workplaces, bicycle racks on buses, and bicycle lockers and/or racks in retail areas to facilitate bicycle travel.

Policy 3.4:

Maintain the pedestrian and bicycle system, including improving the road surface and sidewalk, to reduce safety hazards associated with drainage grates, manholes, potholes, and uneven surfaces.

Policy 3.5:

Strive to include a separation between curbs and sidewalks, such as a landscaped planting strip, as well as implementing traffic calming measures in order to reduce safety hazards to pedestrians, create “walkable” streets, and provide an aesthetically pleasing environment.

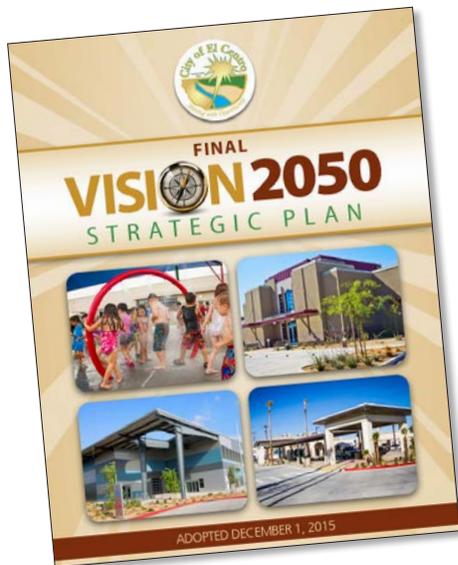
General Plan Conservation/Open Space Element 2004

The Conservation/Open Space Element promotes pedestrian and bicycle linkages to schools, parks, commercial, and employment centers, and other destinations. It aims to develop pedestrian and bicycle trails by connecting existing and new parks, consistent with the City’s Bicycle Master Plan. It also encourages the City to examine new street rights-of-way, utility easements, river banks, and the canal rights-of-way system to create a trail system.

General Plan Public Facilities Element 2004

The City is continuing to promote an extensive pedestrian and bicycle trails network to link major activity centers, parks and recreational facilities, and transit nodes within the City (Figure C-3 in the Circulation Element). This network encourages the use of bicycling and walking for commute, recreational, and other trips. The City seeks to maintain and improve the bicycling and walking environment by providing safe and attractive sidewalks, walkways, and bicycle lanes and paths for both recreational and commuting purposes. The pedestrian and bicycle classification system and requirements are discussed in more detail in the Circulation Element.





Vision 2050 Strategic Plan 2015

The *Vision 2050 Strategic Plan* encourages the City to provide multimodal transportation options to create an integrated transportation network for the community.

Goal 1:

Improve transportation options and the roadway infrastructure network.

Strategies:

Adopt a Complete Streets policy to enable safe street access for pedestrians, bicyclists, and drivers.

Ensure that roadways balance safety and convenience for all users inclusive of pedestrians and bicyclists.

Expand ride-sharing within the community by designating ridesharing locations throughout the City.

Goal 2:

Support a safe pedestrian and bicycle transportation network for people of all ages and abilities.

Strategies:

Establish street typology guidelines that incorporate different modes of transportation such as transit, bicycling, and walking.

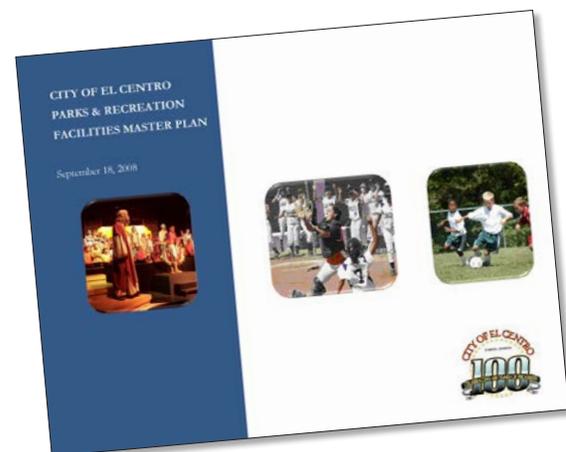
Create bus shelter guidelines to enhance transit services in the City.

Partner and collaborate with schools in ensuring transportation facilities such as sidewalks are adequate for all.

Create a plan that identifies gaps in sidewalks city-wide.

Require new development to increase connectivity through direct and safe pedestrian connections to public amenities, neighborhoods, shopping, and employment destinations within the City.

Enhance pedestrian and bicycle crossing and pathways at key location across physical barriers such as arterial roadways to promote safety.



Parks and Recreation Facilities Master Plan, 2008

The *Parks and Recreation Facilities Master Plan* serves as a guide for future development and improvement of parks and recreational facilities in El Centro. Based on contemporary planning standards, the Master Plan favors larger park designs that provide pedestrian, bicycle, and public transit connections to the neighborhoods. The Master Plan also encourages the creation of linear parks and pedestrian connections in newer neighborhoods, where a tree lined streetscape system can be developed to link the existing parks and these new communities. Additionally, the plan also contemplates open spaces that have been maintained in a natural state and irrigation channels that could potentially be covered, therefore providing corridors for pedestrian and bicyclist use.

