

Transportation

Setting and Issues

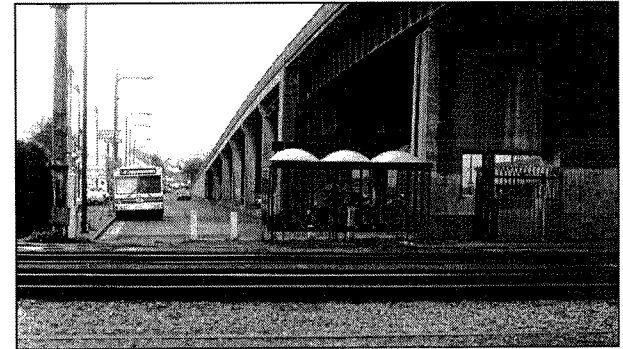
University Avenue is one of Berkeley's most important transportation corridors and one of its most heavily trafficked routes. Over 53,000 cars per day pass along its length, in part because it is one of only three exits from I-80 to Berkeley and it connects the freeway and San Pablo Avenue with Downtown and the U.C. Campus. As with Berkeley's other Avenues – Shattuck, Telegraph, Sacramento, and Martin Luther King Junior Way – University is also an important retail and residential corridor. Though it is well-served by a highly used bus line and is near two BART stations, it is designed more for automobiles than for pedestrians.

University Avenue presents an opportunity to create a truly “multi-modal corridor” – a street where walking is not only safe, but is encouraged; where frequent shuttle buses allow shoppers to easily get from one node to the next; where bicycling is a viable alternative; and where auto traffic is tamed.

In order to achieve this vision, though, a number of issues must be addressed:

Streetscape Design and Pedestrian Amenities– As discussed above under Urban Design, University Avenue is in need of physical street improvements: street trees that narrow the visual travel corridor and thus slow traffic; improved sidewalks and crossings that accommodate pedestrians; lighting that is scaled to people, not cars; a sign program to provide public safety directions and to facilitate pedestrian movement; and other public safety-related amenities such as benches, fountains, newsracks, etc. that help make the street pleasant to be on and outdoor plazas that help bring people onto the street.

Bus shelters are of particular concern to the community, for although University Avenue is well served by buses, bus stop amenities are virtually non-existent. In fact, AC Transit has removed most of its bus shelters city-wide and eliminated its bus shelter maintenance program altogether. The City is pursuing the development of a county-wide bus shelter program that



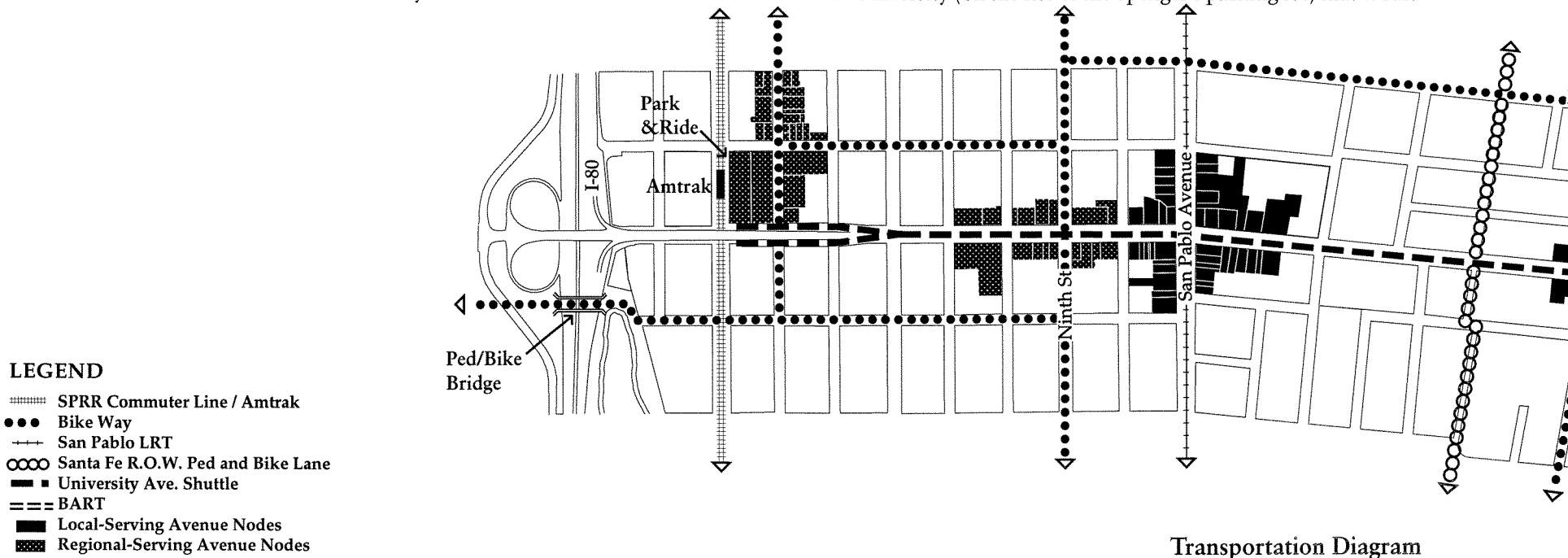
Making transit connections to regional systems such as Amtrak could provide easy connections to other East Bay communities and San Jose in the future.

could be supported through poster-sized advertising. Ideally, the bus shelters along University Avenue would include schedules, maps, emergency information and phones. At a minimum, the City is attempting to secure funding for bus benches.

Transit – Though University Avenue is currently served by the AC Transit bus system, many members of the community see a need for more frequent and attractive service that is dedicated to University Avenue. While light rail would perhaps provide a stabilizing influence, it is probably not feasible for at least 20 to 30 years, given the density of development along the Avenue and the cost of building new alignments. Therefore, some have suggested that a special electric shuttle that augmented the existing AC Transit bus service and linked West Berkeley with Downtown would both

provide additional needed service and help create an amenity that benefited residents and merchants alike. Such service could also potentially benefit U.C. faculty, staff, and students.

In addition to local service, University Avenue provides an important opportunity for making regional transit connections. Three regional transit systems affect the University Avenue area: the North Berkeley and Downtown Berkeley BART Stations, a planned electric trolley system that would follow San Pablo Avenue, and a future commuter rail connection that extends along the current SPRR/Amtrak line and could provide a connection to other East Bay and South Bay communities. The City’s Redevelopment Agency has already considered creating a multi-modal transit hub at the foot of University (on the site of the Spenger’s parking lot) that would

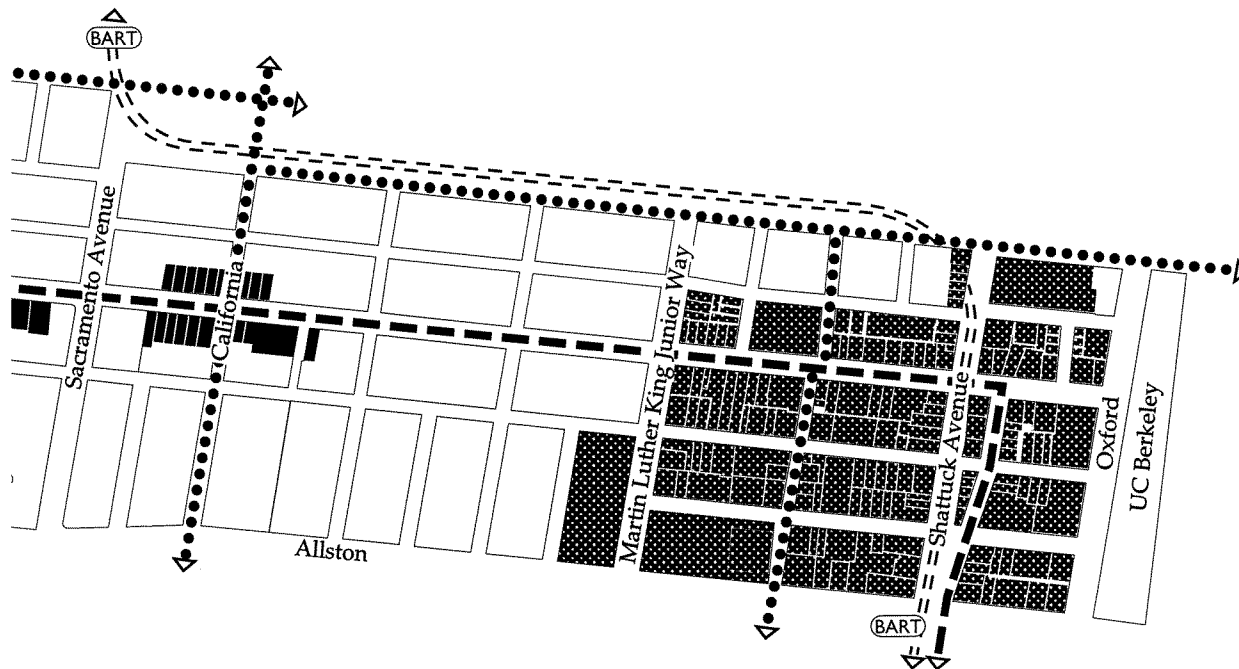


provide a satellite parking facility, a timed transfer connection to AC Transit or a University Avenue Electric Shuttle, Amtrak, and any future regional commuter rail on the SPRR line.

Bicycles - Many Berkeley residents use bicycles as their primary form of transportation and others ride bicycles to do errands in their neighborhood. In 1993, the City began to develop a city-wide bicycle plan. After working with local cyclists, the City's consultants recommended an extensive array of improvements and changes, including designation of bicycle boulevards, designation of new bicycle routes, and construction of a bicycle bridge to the Waterfront. The Bicycle Master Plan has not yet been completed. In the University Avenue Study Area there are too many dangerous intersections, such as at the corner of Milvia and University, and not

enough bicycle routes or bike racks. Hearst has been specifically cited as a street that should have a bicycle lane, even if it means narrowing the existing lanes of automobile traffic. Addison was suggested as an appropriate connection to a bicycle/pedestrian bridge from Aquatic Park to the Waterfront.

Auto Traffic - Several existing conditions exacerbate traffic on University Avenue and, in some cases, push traffic onto adjacent parallel side streets. For example, the existing street lights are timed to encourage speeding traffic; some intersections, notably at Sixth Street, San Pablo, Milvia, and Shattuck, are particularly congested and are in need of turn signals and improved pedestrian access; and the vast number of mid-block curb cuts along the street adds to the congestion and increases the number of pedestrian/auto conflicts.



Parking – Parking is a very complex issue because the University Avenue Study Area must provide for the needs of visitors, as well as accommodating the merchants and residents working and living in the area. Members of the community have expressed a concern that the numerous parking lots that line the street are visually unappealing and only serve to detract from a potential pedestrian-oriented atmosphere; traffic noise from parking lots also tends to filter through to neighborhoods. Most merchants in the University Avenue area, though, perceive a parking shortage and consider it a disadvantage to being located there. The perceived need for more parking was mentioned most frequently by merchants who are located in Sub-Area One along University Avenue, west of San Pablo Avenue. Merchants report that parking enforcement and changes to parking meters on University Avenue have significantly impacted their businesses. Along those lines, it has been suggested that a satellite parking facility located near I-80 could potentially alleviate parking problems in West Berkeley, as well as in Downtown and around the U.C. campus if it was linked with a frequent local shuttle system.

Transportation Policies and Strategies

POLICY 17: IMPLEMENT, OVER TIME, A COMPREHENSIVE STREETScape ENHANCEMENT PROJECT TO REINFORCE AND IMPROVE UNIVERSITY AVENUE AS A MULTI-MODAL CORRIDOR. (SEE ALSO URBAN DESIGN.)

Strategy 17A: Implement, over time, a comprehensive Streetscape Enhancement Project that includes:

- new street tree plantings (both in the median and in the parking lanes);
- gradual removal of the aphid infested trees and recovery of sidewalks where tree-wells are currently located (see typical street section);
- raised, paved, or specially painted crosswalks at key intersections, making sure these are safe and useable by all persons with disabilities;
- sidewalk “bulb-outs” at intersections and key mid-block crossings (see Plan preceding page) to narrow the crossing distance for pedestrians (except where right turns are encouraged) and push button-activated crossing signals;
- curb ramps at intersections that are consistent with ADA and Title 24 standards;
- consider the use of "talking" traffic signals;
- new human-scale street lights;
- electrical conduit for festival lighting in the median;
- irrigation for the median landscaping;
- improved, permanent, and economically self-sufficient transit shelters with easy access to telephones;

- pedestrian amenities, such as benches, drinking fountains, bike racks, self-cleaning public toilets, emergency telephones, and newsracks, ensuring that such amenities are accessible to all;
- sign program designed to provide direction, general information, and emergency assistance; and
- banners to welcome visitors or advertise events.

POLICY 18: IMPROVE TRANSIT SERVICE WITHIN THE UNIVERSITY AVENUE STUDY AREA AND TIE TO EXISTING AND FUTURE REGIONAL TRANSIT FACILITIES.

Strategy 18A: Work with AC Transit and U.C. to study the feasibility of creating a special electric bus service that follows University Avenue to BART and Downtown Berkeley. These new vehicles should be small-scale, accessible, ecologically sensitive, uniquely designed, and if possible, open air. Work to make the service either free or very low cost. In the long term, study the feasibility of accessible trolley service on University.

Strategy 18B: Work with appropriate agencies to, in the long term, implement commuter rail service on the SPRR train tracks and provide timed bus transfers to buses that follow University Avenue.

Strategy 18C: Prepare a Master Plan for the Spenger’s parking lot that creates a multi-modal transportation hub with a satellite parking facility, timed shuttle transfer station, Amtrak/commuter rail station, mixed-use development, and public open space. (See also Sub-Area 1.)

POLICY 19: IMPROVE BICYCLE ACCESS WITHIN THE UNIVERSITY AVENUE STUDY AREA AND MAKE THE AREA “BICYCLE FRIENDLY.”

Strategy 19A: Complete the Bicycle Master Plan and work with local bicycle advocates to resolve which streets shall be identified, signed, and striped as bicycle routes. At a minimum, identify bicycle routes within the University Avenue corridor that place bikes on parallel routes.

Strategy 19B: Continue to implement the current program to provide additional bicycle racks and other bicycle amenities within the University Avenue Corridor.

Strategy 19C: Support the construction of an I-80 pedestrian, wheelchair and bicycle overcrossing.

POLICY 20: IMPLEMENT IMPROVEMENTS TO TAME TRAFFIC ALONG UNIVERSITY AVENUE, BUT PROTECT THE ADJACENT NEIGHBORHOODS FROM EXCESSIVE TRAFFIC.

Strategy 20A: Re-time the signal system along University to encourage slower speeds and to improve the overall flow of traffic.

Strategy 20B: Study problem intersections (Sixth Street, San Pablo, Milvia, McGee, and Shattuck) and identify appropriate improvements to reduce congestion, while ensuring safe pedestrian crossings.

Strategy 20C: Reduce the number of mid-block curb cuts along University Avenue that are not used for wheel chair access; consult with Disability Commission prior to implementation.

POLICY 21: ENCOURAGE USE OF ON-STREET PARKING FOR CUSTOMERS OF LOCAL MERCHANTS, ESPECIALLY ON UNIVERSITY AVENUE.

Strategy 21A: Extend parking meter times to two-hours along the length of University Avenue. Lengthening the time allocated to parking meters would encourage customers to find parking and have ample time to frequent the Avenue’s businesses.

Strategy 21B: Encourage employers to be responsible for their employee’s transportation and parking. Over time, increase the number of employees arriving to work via transit and reduce the number of lots devoted to employee parking.

POLICY 22: ENCOURAGE COMMERCIAL USERS TO CONSIDER PROVIDING CENTRALLY-LOCATED, SHARED PARKING FACILITIES FOR CUSTOMERS AND PROVIDE CITY-SPONSORED PARKING FACILITIES TO MINIMIZE THE NUMBER OF PARKING LOTS AND CURB CUTS ALONG UNIVERSITY AVENUE. ALSO, STRONGLY ENCOURAGE PROPERTY OWNERS WITH EXISTING STREET-EDGE PARKING LOTS TO PROVIDE DESIGN AND LANDSCAPE IMPROVEMENTS WHICH ENHANCE (RATHER THAN BLOCK) THE VIEW OF THE LOTS.

Strategy 22A: Conduct a Comprehensive Parking Study to identify the level of need, appropriate locations and key opportunities for a number of small, strategically located parking facilities, in addition to the large structure under consideration for the Fourth Street area. As part of the study, develop a self-supporting financing plan.

Strategy 22B: Review Zoning Ordinance to remove barriers to providing shared parking, including considering reduced parking requirements for uses with complementary peak parking needs.

Strategy 22C: Require parking lot enhancements (such as low hedges, fences, trees, or trellises) in conjunction with renovations and new buildings.

Strategy 22D: Create safe and visually appealing pedestrian linkages between parking lots/structures and the commercial districts.

Strategy 22E: Provide readily visible signs and other urban design improvements to announce both private and public parking lot locations.