

Lafayette Elementary 'Walk & Roll' Audit



June 2011

Prepared for
Humboldt County Department of Public Works

Prepared by
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Overview

A community workshop and assessment of the walking and bicycling environment in the neighborhood of Lafayette Elementary was held at on Monday June 6, 2011 to observe the peak student dismissal time at school and identify concerns and solutions to safety issues. Participants included parents, neighbors, the school principal, Eureka City Schools Board President, Eureka police officer, California Highway Patrol officer, County Public Works Department, Fourth District County Supervisor, NRS/RCAA staff, and County Public Health.

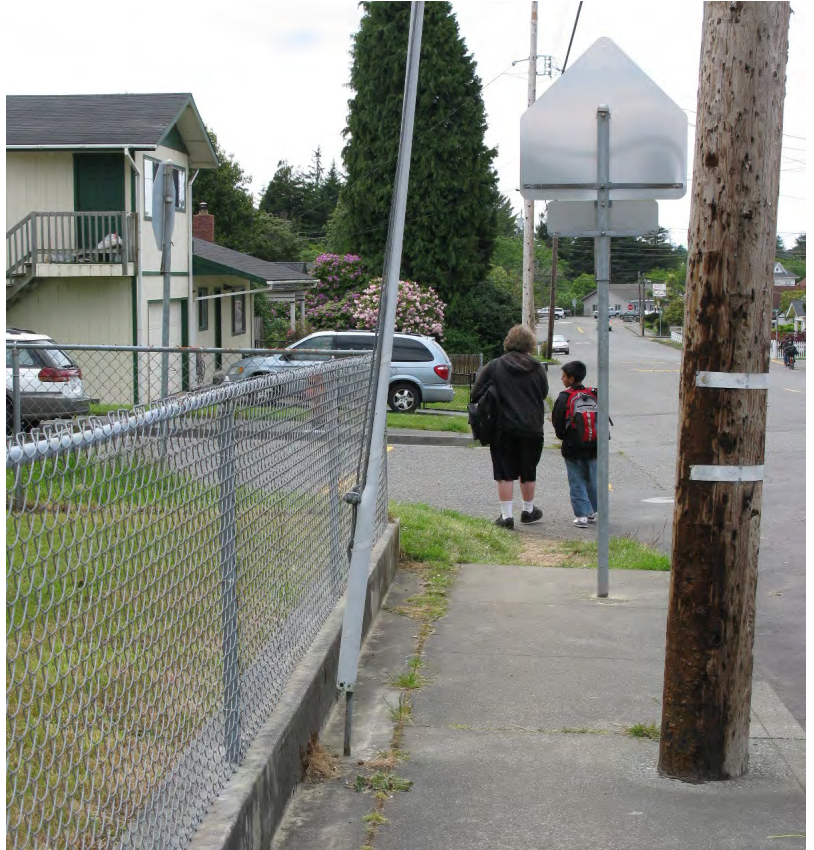
Visioning

At the beginning of the workshop, participants were asked to share their vision for the workshop and the outcomes they would like to see. The most frequently mentioned visions included:

- Slower speeds on Park Street.
- A safer loading/unloading and bus loading environment.
- Improvement of the school parking lot surface and flow, with marked parking and directional signs.

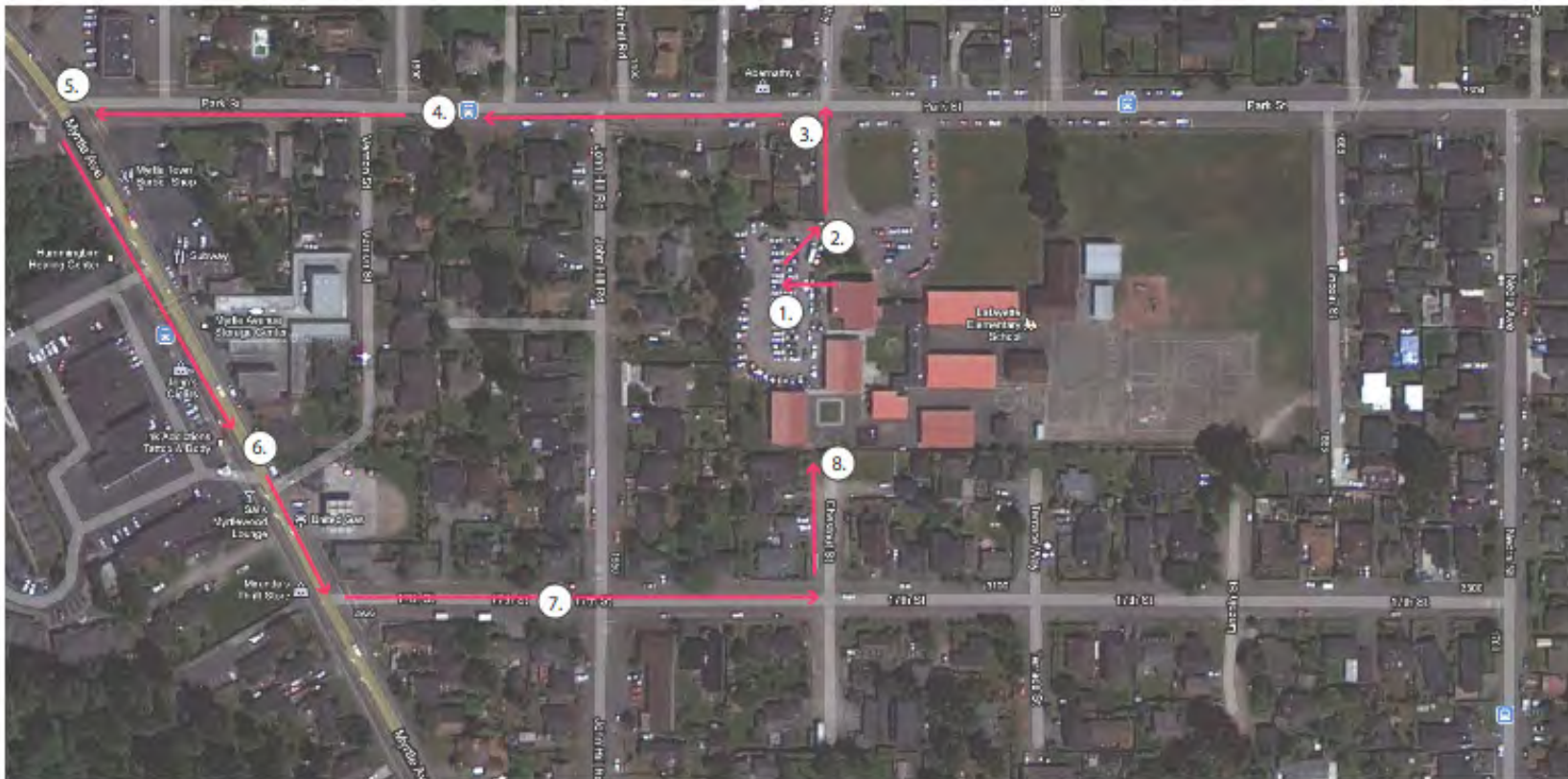
Other participant visions including:

- Create a more inviting walking environment
- Establish crossing guards
- Provide safety education for kids
- Desire more active kids, more walking
- Create alternate drop-off and pick-up sites



Observation of School Environment & Neighborhood

Participants met in the school EAST Lab for an introduction to the 'Safe Routes to Schools' movement and funding programs and some tips from NRS/RCAA staff about what to look for during the field observation. The group then went outside to first observe the Lafayette parking lot. Because the lot is unpaved and there is no contiguous route for pedestrians to the front of the school, there were many challenges identified that affect users, including school staff as well as parents using the lot while they drop off or pick their children up from school. Next, the group observed the environment just in front of the school while children were leaving and being picked up from school. The group walked down Park Street, observing many gaps and obstacles in sidewalks, to the intersection at Myrtle Avenue to identify challenges students might face on these two busy streets as well as the crossing on Myrtle Avenue. After observing conditions on Myrtle, they walked to and along 17th Street to observe walking routes from the south and back to the school via a rear entrance that is normally locked to consider options for managing that route as an improved access.



The following key observations were made:

1. The School parking lot is unpaved and inaccessible for wheelchairs and strollers. There are many potholes that fill with water during the winter. It is difficult for cars to maneuver and there are no marked parking spaces, signs to indicate direction of traffic, or markings along the parking lot driveway/entrance to indicate children are crossing.
2. The loading/unloading zone is small and crowded. Many parents/caregivers disregard the 'No Parking' areas and leave their cars to block use by others; there is no enforcement of recommended behaviors. Signs are not enforceable since they are not white with black lettering.
3. Buses and parents using the same loading/unloading zone results in a great deal of congestion. The organization of this area is problematic in terms of having a few parking/loading spaces and a fence between them and the front of the school.
4. Parked cars immediately adjacent to school entrance and exit driveways reduce the ability of drivers to see traffic and pedestrians. These corners also lack curb cuts.
5. There are high traffic volumes and high speed on Park Street. The crosswalk in front of the school needs to be more visible; this is used by a significant number of children.
6. Many sidewalk gaps exist on both sides of Park Street and on important connecting streets. Vegetation, utility poles, poor pavement condition and other obstacles – even a trash can – block adequate passage, in many cases where there are also sidewalk gaps.
7. The intersection at Myrtle Avenue and Park Street has a high volume and speed of traffic, and is used by many students. There is typically a long line of cars turning on both streets during peak arrival and dismissal times.
8. The Myrtle Avenue mid-block crosswalk between Park Street and 17th Street is not marked in a highly visible manner.
9. There are many sidewalk gaps on 17th Street and the condition of the road is in disrepair. Crosswalks on 17th are lacking that would facilitate student movement from the south toward the school, however location of them is challenging due to sight distance for autos at a hill on the street.
10. There are two rear entrances to the school on Chestnut and Terrace that would greatly reduce the distance traveled by students coming from the south, however these are privately-maintained roads that residents do not want used for school access.

Examples of existing conditions follow.



Traffic calming is needed to slow traffic speeds and make Park Street safer for all modes of travel.



New ladder-style paint is needed to facilitate better visibility for the Park Street crosswalk in front of the school.



The school bus loading and unloading zone could be relocated to Park Street east of the exit driveway in the short-term, with a trail developed from the street to the school to provide an alternative to the sidewalk route between school and buses. In the long-term, the open space east of the school driveway could potentially be used as a bus-only drop-off corridor.



More clarity and better management of traffic flow is needed in loading/unloading zone.



More 'actionable' pick-up and drop-off area rules are needed to communicate to parents it is not appropriate to leave cars unattended, use un-designated parking areas, or park in handicapped-only spaces without a handicap placard.



Crosswalk markings are needed to highlight the pedestrian route across the school parking lot entrance. Consider in the future the possibility of a limited-access parking lot to control traffic volumes and improve safety.



Visibility of pedestrians is limited at the entrance and exit of the crosswalk in front of the school due to the proximity of parked cars. Curbs should be painted red next to crosswalks to designate no parking zones to improve visibility of pedestrians.



Visibility is also limited on both sides of the school entrance and exit driveways. Designating a short No Parking area on both sides of both intersections by painting curbs red would improve visibility for drivers and of pedestrians.



The parking lot is unpaved and presents challenges for all users. Directional signage (e.g. one-way traffic flow, enforced), clear parking spaces, improved surfacing, and a connecting path to the front of the school are needed.



Many sidewalk gaps exist on Park Street and on neighboring streets.



Sidewalk obstructions make walking more challenging, especially for those with strollers, wheelchairs or canes. A number of obstructions need to be removed or sidewalk developed around them.



Vehicles on Myrtle travel at high speeds, and crosswalks are long, making safe crossing of this street a challenge. Creating a left hand turn lane on Myrtle, installing a flashing beacon/ped-activated beacon, and/or shortening the crossing distance by installing a pedestrian median could help make this intersection safer.

Opportunities for Safer Routes to School

After the observation walk, participants viewed a presentation highlighting different engineering, education, and encouragement strategies that could potentially help solve some of the safety concerns encountered on the walk. Participants then broke into three small groups to identify and discuss their concerns and using street view maps, they came up with potential engineering, education, enforcement, and encouragement strategies that they drew onto their maps. The following are lists of the concerns and potential solutions identified by the three groups that each looked at different areas of focus. Bullet points indicate the actions that could be taken to improve each area of concern.

Group 1: Auto and bus loading/unloading zone and parking lot.

1. To slow speeds on Park Street:

- Install more visible signs on Park Street to indicate school crossing.
- Repaint/raise crosswalk on Park Street in front of school.
- Crossing guards are needed.
- Assign volunteers on Park Street to hold 'Drive Slowly, Kids Crossing' signs to raise speed awareness occasionally during the school year.

2. Many parents/drivers disregard the 'No Parking' areas in the loading zone.

- Create an 'enforceable' No Parking/Loading Zone to help reduce the number of unattended cars. Current green and white signage is not enforceable, according to CHP. The signs should be replaced with enforceable white background with black text signage.
- Repaint the yellow curbs white to designate a loading/unloading zone.
- See below for additional 'encouragement' activities to change behaviors.

3. To help alleviate congestion, relocate the bus loading/unloading zone:

- For the short term, move bus zone to Park Street at current ETS bus stop location north of the exit driveway. In the long term, consider developing bus-only load/unload zone east of current loading/unloading zone where there is currently grass.
- Build covered bus shelter.
- Designate monitors to supervise children exiting and entering buses on Park Street.
- Special Education buses will be the exception and still come to the front of the school for loading and unloading of students.
- Create pathway continuing from crosswalk at Coast Guard Street onto school grounds as an alternative to the sidewalk through the loading/unloading zone.

4. Redesign pull-through unloading to create better traffic flow:

- Install covered awning to shield from rain/inclement weather.
- Paint a crosswalk in parking lot from unloading zone north of buses to front of school.

5. Improve school parking lot:

- Pave parking lot. This will require stormwater management and a large budget, consequently, an alternative treatment for surface improvement could include a permeable surface design that allows for stormwater management without a drainage system. A short-term surface improvement, that



would also be permeable, could include compacted crushed granite or shale, however this surface will only serve for a relatively short period of two to four years.

- Designate one-way traffic flow with signage.
- Paint designated parking spaces.
- In the medium term, designate as a Staff Only (and/or Kindergarten Access Only) parking lot. Install gate arm to enforce Staff/Kindergarten Only use.

6. Emphasize education:

- Create strong school policies regarding traffic, parking and drop-off pick-up
- Enforce policies

7. Improve driver/parent behavior:

- Develop a detailed visual and list of guidelines to be printed in pre-school start newsletter that goes to all parents. Repeat delivery of this information to parents several times every school year.
- Initiate 'Volunteer Patrol' with vests that say 'Parking Enforcement'
- Give warning 'parking tickets' to those who disregard posted traffic rules.
- Record license plate numbers of offender, note repeats, and send letters to repeat offenders.

8. Create pedestrian access from back of school on Chestnut Street and/or Terrace Way:

- Carefully communicate with neighbors about potential options that would meet their needs, since they own the streets and have strongly objected to public access in the past, including providing a paved surface for the street/s north of 17th Street and a gate that is only openable by residents and emergency services personnel (benefits to residents are improved street surface and 'gated' neighborhood). Youth would be able to access the route via a pedestrian/bike access adjacent to gate/s.
- Re-surface and improve road condition and develop gate system. The gate will be important to keep parents from driving children to rear school gate in front of private residences on private streets.
- Designate private vehicle use and pedestrian/bike access only zone.
- Designate volunteer monitor/s for this/these site/s.

Group 2: Sidewalks, bike routes and intersections.

1. Create a safer environment and slower speeds on Park Street and neighboring streets:

- Repaint crosswalks in more visible ladder style.
- Install raised crosswalks that both elevate pedestrians and calm traffic.
- Create bulbouts on either side of crosswalks to shorten crossing distances.
- Paint bike lanes or fog lines on Park Street and 17th Street.
- Install speed limit signs.
- Lower speed limits.
- Install speed radar signs.
- Designate 'No Parking' areas by painting curbs red on either side of entrance/exit driveways and crosswalks to improve visibility of traffic and pedestrians.
- Fill in sidewalk gaps and improve curb cuts on both sides of Park Street: participants agreed to prioritize the north side of the street first, since more students use that route and more students who walk along Park Street are coming from the north.
- Fill in sidewalk gaps and improve curb cuts on 17th Street.

- Fill in sidewalk gap on John Hill Street at 17th Street and between 17th and Park Streets, particularly on west side where the gap is shorter.
- Replace mid-block crosswalk on Myrtle across from shopping center with a ladder-style crosswalk.
- Create shorter crossing distance on Park at Myrtle by installing a pedestrian island/median and bulbouts.
- Install flashing pedestrian beacon on Myrtle just west of Park Street to announce crossing zone as vehicles approach up the hill. (See below for recommended traffic improvements at this intersection.)

2. Designate remote drop off location:

- On Park Street before John Hill so cars can turn onto John Hill to exit the neighborhood. Children will be crossing John Hill in front of turning cars at that point; see recommendation to improve crosswalk.
- Redesign school grass area east of current loading/unloading area to create a new drop off area or bus-only zone.
- See above re: recommendations for Chestnut and/or Terrace loading/unloading sites.

Group 3: Sight Distance, pavement markings, signs and signals.

1. Increase visibility of pedestrians crossing Park Street:

- Install raised crosswalks/speed humps on Park Street.
- Repaint crosswalks ladder style.

2. Slow speeds on Park Street and surrounding streets:

- Install stop sign on Park Street in front of school.
- Paint fog lines or bike lanes on Park and 17th Streets.
- Install speed radar signs or temporary speed radar trailer on Park Street.

3. Change unsafe behavior, encourage safe behavior:

- Encourage students walking from the south to use John Hill Street instead of Myrtle Avenue – and, when developed, Chestnut and/or Terrace access points: see recommendations above.
- Create loading/unloading access behind school on Chestnut Street.

4. Improve traffic management at intersection of Myrtle & Park:

- Develop right turn lane on Park Street for traffic turning onto Myrtle. Consider signage that directs bike traffic if bike lanes are added to Park Street.
- See recommendations above about bulbouts at this intersection; they will not only shorten pedestrian crossing distance, but also will tighten up the turning radius for and slow autos turning onto or off of Park Street.

Conclusion

The information above from small group recommendations and discussion has been organized in Tables 1 and 2 according to relative cost and timeline. Very short-term recommendations the group requested to be made of the School Board this summer follow, so that the school can enforce new loading/unloading guidelines with the start of the new school year.

Outcomes & Participant Commitments

The workshop ended with each participant verbalizing what action they intend to do to help move forward with the proposed ideas.

- **Follow through on easiest immediate issues**
- **Have a follow up meeting – invite parents and teachers**
- **Education is part of the solution**
- **Increase awareness/ Slow speeds on Park**
- **Include summary of report in school newsletter**



Table 1. Recommended education and encouragement activities according to relative cost and timeframe.

	Low Cost	Moderate Cost	High Cost
Easier & Short-Term	Distribute parent surveys		
	Establish safe driving campaign through use of "Pace Car" decals that read "I drive 15 mps in school zones"		
	Create "Drive Slowly" signs and hang on school fence		
		More law enforcement presence during arrival and dismissal	
	Encouraging neighbors to clear vegetation and other sidewalk obstructions		
	Create/enforce stronger school policies regarding loading/unloading procedures		
	Create encouragement 'patrol' for good behavior		
	Create child/parent pledge to increase participation (See below tables)		
		Plant vegetation along school grounds	
	Offer safety education to students at beginning of school year		
More Difficult & Longer Term	Establish a monitored drop off site on Park street before John Hill		
			Establish alternate drop off on Chestnut behind the school
		Establish Crossing Guards	
		Create route maps	
	Partner with Myrtle town businesses		

Table 2. Recommended engineering activities according to relative cost and timeframe.

	Low Cost	Moderate Cost	High Cost
Easier & Short-Term	Repaint loading zone white		
		Repaint crosswalks 'ladder-style'	
		Install stop sign in front of school	
		Install speed limit signs	
	Paint red curbs to designate 'No Parking' zone on either side of driveways and crosswalks		
			Install raised crosswalks
			Install bulbouts
			Fill in sidewalk gaps
		Replace green/white loading zone signs with black/white enforceable signs	
		Install ramps/curb cuts on curbs without them	
		Paint bike lanes/fog lines	
		Build ETS bus shelter	
		Bigger school zone signs	
	Relocate bus zone		
			Install speed radar signs
	Install directional signage in parking lot		
More Difficult & Longer-Term		Build covered awning in drop off area	
			Extend Coast Guard Street crosswalk to form a path onto school grounds
			Redesign entrance to Chestnut Street to encourage pedestrian/resident only access. (Based on negotiations with neighbors.)
			Pave parking lot and establish clearer traffic management with signage and pavement markings.
		Install gate arm at parking lot entrance to enforce Staff/Kindergarten Only use.	
		Create sharper turn angles on corners at Myrtle and Park	
			Install flashing LED lights on crosswalks at Myrtle and Park and on Park in front of school.
			Use large grassy area on north side of loading/unloading zone to create new parking lot. (This idea received partial support.)



Washington Elementary

Active Child Pledge



Creating a safe school environment means knowing and following all school loading zone rules, turning off your engine while waiting, and being a good role model as a driver, pedestrian, and bicyclist.

I will encourage my child to get regular physical activity by participating in Walking Wednesdays. I also agree once a month to drop him/her off several blocks from school to walk the rest of the way with me or with friends.



Parent/Guardian: _____

To be healthy and strong, I will use my own power to get to school on Walking Wednesdays. I will also ask my parent/caregiver once a month to drop me off several blocks from school and walk the rest of the way with them or with friends.



Student: _____

Parents and students can sign a pledge together and commit to reaching a common goal. The goal can be to increase walking and/or bicycling to school, modeling good walking, bicycling, and/or driving behavior, or pledging to observe loading/unloading guidelines.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SHORT TERM IMPROVEMENTS TO LAFAYETTE LEADERSHIP & THE EUREKA CITY SCHOOL BOARD

The group, particularly the small group focused on the school site and pick-up/drop-off area improvements, identified the following priorities to reduce congestion and improve traffic flow and the safety of students with a minimal financial investment to be implemented this summer so that a new system can be initiated and enforced at the beginning of the school year.

Engineering (School Board)

- Replace existing green/white signs in loading/unloading zone with enforceable black/white signage
- Repaint yellow curbs white in the loading/unloading zone
- Add 'one-way only' sign just inside parking lot to provide direction and better traffic flow
- Add stop sign at the exit of the parking lot
- Paint a crosswalk across the sidewalk in front of the parking lot
- Relocate bus zone to the curb on Park Street east of the driveway at ETS bus stop. Bus monitors are available according to Jan Schmidt to escort students to and from bus zone. Special Education buses can continue to load/unload in current location

Education (School leadership)

- Engage parents to draft an article for the school newsletter at the beginning of the school year alerting parents to the new signage and reminding parents of traffic speeds on Park Street
- Engage parents to form a volunteer group to act as 'greeters/parking patrol' and a 'traffic calming crew' that could hold 'Slow Down, Children Walking' signs