Bicycles and Pedestrians

Bicycles
Bicycle travel is possible on several north-south and east-west streets in the City of El Cerrito. Topography poses a serious challenge to bicycling and walking in the eastern portion of the City, but the majority of El Cerrito streets are flat or have only small grades (5 percent of less). Figure 11 shows the existing bicycle and trail facilities in El Cerrito.

The City of El Cerrito has a number of hiking trails and dedicated public paths, but the Ohlone Greenway, which travels under the BART tracks from the City's southern border to San Pablo Avenue just south of MacDonald Avenue, is the only formal multi-use trail. The El Cerrito Plaza Shopping Center renovation may also include a multi-use trail along Cerrito Creek at the City's southern boundary. Albany proposes a continuation of this trail to Pierce Street along the southern side of Cerrito Creek in its Bicycle Master Plan, but the two cities would likely need to work together on this effort since Cerrito Creek forms the border between the cities.

There are a number of informal trails in the City of El Cerrito that provide hiking and mountain-biking opportunities. These trails are unimproved pathways in many locations but provide high quality recreation experiences.

El Cerrito does not currently have any bike lanes or bike routes, but a number of streets are wide enough to permit easy implementation. The City of Albany Bicycle Master Plan proposes bike lanes on Santa Fe Avenue, which leads to Colusa Avenue, and bike routes on Cornell Avenue, which leads to El Cerrito Plaza and aligns roughly with Liberty Street, and Adams Street, which aligns with Carlson Boulevard. At Adams Street, a bicycle and pedestrian bridge is proposed over the Cerrito Creek.

Both BART stations, El Cerrito Plaza, and many schools currently provide bicycle parking facilities. BART stations have historically been locations where bicycles are stolen or vandalized. The City of El Cerrito is currently considering bicycle enclosures at both BART stations. The City has recently installed bicycle racks at intervals along San Pablo Avenue, with funding from the Bay Area Air Quality Management District.

Pedestrian
A continuous and interconnected system of sidewalks is available throughout most of El Cerrito, although many major intersections lack striped crosswalks or curb cuts. One exception is the segment of Contra Costa Boulevard between Moeser Lane and Devonshire Drive, which lacks sidewalks (see Figure 11). One of the key pedestrian corridors in El Cerrito is San Pablo Avenue. San Pablo Avenue provides 10- to 20-foot sidewalks on both sides of the street throughout most of its length.

Based on the California Vehicle Code, even where no striped crosswalks are provided, pedestrians have the right to cross at all corners of intersections unless pedestrian traffic is explicitly prohibited with barriers and signs such as those installed at the intersection of San Pablo Avenue and Cutting Boulevard. When
intersection approaches are uncontrolled or controlled by stop signs, pedestrians have the right-of-way (i.e., vehicles are required to yield to pedestrians in the crosswalk).

Figure 11 identifies pedestrian obstacles in El Cerrito. Most of the pedestrian obstacles relate to inadequate pedestrian crosswalks. These occur near both BART stations; the primary problem is the lack of a signed and striped crosswalk. Areas lacking crosswalks are San Pablo Avenue between Cutting Boulevard and Hill Street, Hill Street east of San Pablo Avenue, and Fairmount Avenue between Liberty and Richmond Streets.

As is the case elsewhere in the East Bay Hills, the El Cerrito hill neighborhoods contain a number of narrow city-owned rights-of-way, which serve as mid-block paths running between private properties. The rights-of-way generally are five to fifteen feet in width. Some have been improved by the placement of asphalt or concrete pathways or steps. The majority, however, are unimproved. The city has not had the financial resources to improve the pathways that remain unimproved and those that are improved are not maintained on a regular basis. In some cases these open areas have been a subject of complaints from adjacent neighbors about trees and vegetation. On the other hand, improvement and maintenance of these public rights-of-way would enhance pedestrian enjoyment of the City.

Freeway interchanges also tend to provide limited pedestrian facilities, and, where free right turns are provided at on- and off-ramps, pedestrians must cross an uncontrolled stream of traffic. This occurs at the Cutting Boulevard, Potrero Avenue, and Carlson Boulevard interchanges. Although uncontrolled right turns do not exist at the Central Avenue Interchange, the number and length of street crossings required to get from the east side of Interstate 80 to the west side makes pedestrian travel uncomfortable.
B. Trends

Assumptions

Traffic in El Cerrito will continue to be heavily influenced by conditions on Interstate 80 and BART. The influences are particularly marked during periods with incidents on the freeway or delays in BART service. However, on a day-to-day basis, the majority of traffic using El Cerrito’s streets is locally generated, either beginning and/or ending within El Cerrito.

Regional traffic access to El Cerrito’s BART stations also heavily affects conditions on streets in the Del Norte area and, to a much smaller degree, in the El Cerrito Plaza area.

The Interstate 80 Corridor

The Interstate 80 corridor consists of Interstate 80, San Pablo Avenue, and other north-south streets that provide continuous travel opportunities in El Cerrito. Regional growth forecasts indicate that congestion in the Bay Area is expected to grow significantly. The bulk of this growth will occur in areas with significant new development such as San Mateo and Santa Clara Counties. For Interstate 80 through El Cerrito, regional forecasts indicate an average 2.4 percent traffic growth per year through the year 2020.

With this level of growth on an already congested freeway, drivers may seek parallel alternative travel routes such as San Pablo Avenue. It is important to note, however, that San Pablo Avenue will also become more congested due to development within El Cerrito. In addition, in an effort to reduce the impacts of regional traffic on El Cerrito, no significant capacity enhancements are recommended for San Pablo Avenue. As a result, San Pablo Avenue will become a less attractive route. The result of increased travel demand and congestion on the principal routes within the Interstate 80 corridor is likely to be changes in the times of day that people travel (i.e., peak hour spreading), changes in travel modes (i.e., increased use of transit), and possibly changes in destinations (i.e., elimination of trips within the corridor).

The forecasts made for the General Plan build-out assume that the amount of through traffic currently on San Pablo Avenue will increase by at least 15% to 20%. This is based on an estimate that about one-fourth to one-third of the peak hour traffic presently on San Pablo Avenue consists of through trips, neither beginning nor ending in El Cerrito. As a result of this 15% to 20% growth in the through-trip component, the total amount of traffic on San Pablo Avenue will increase by about 5%. Traffic will also grow as a result of new development within El Cerrito. This traffic growth is estimated using a detailed traffic forecasting model, representing the potential changes in activity levels in over 20 different sub-sectors of the City. The locally-generated growth is added to adjusted background traffic. Combined, the effects of regional and local growth produce increases in San Pablo Avenue traffic of approximately 50%.