

Ajit Varma

Personal transportation choices: What are your primary and secondary modes of transportation for getting around town? If one of your preferred modes is bicycling, how often do you ride? What type of trips do you make and why do you choose this option over other modes?

My primary mode of transportation is bicycling. At the start of stay at home I sold my car since I no longer need to go to work. My secondary mode of transportation is walking (when I need to pull my young kids in a wagon). I usually bike about 3-4 times a week to usually either go to the swimming pool, recreational riding or to pick up food or groceries in downtown.

Summer Streets: Palo Alto's [2012 Bicycle and Pedestrian Transportation Plan](#) notes that "Walkable, bikeable downtowns attract residents and visitors to spend money at local businesses". In addition, our [2030 Comprehensive Plan](#) proposes studying "the feasibility of converting parts of University Avenue to a pedestrian zone". "[Summer Streets](#)", the opening of California Avenue and University Avenue to pedestrian and bicycle traffic only, has provided the city with an opportunity to pilot this program. Would you support making these street modifications either seasonally recurring or permanent? Why or why not?

I'd make this change permanent. I live close to University Avenue and have really enjoyed the improved walkability and outdoor dining now available. I think it's a great improvement to the feel of our city.

Programs: Programs can be very effective at increasing the walking and biking mode-share within a population. An example of this is the [Safe Routes To School](#) (SRTS) program. Last year, about [60% of high school students](#) in the Palo Alto Unified School District (PAUSD) walked or biked to school. While this program has been successful at getting students to adopt active transportation, among adults and seniors the walking and bicycling mode share is only around 10%. Considering the significant health benefits of active living, would you be in favor of investing in a pilot program for adults and seniors? Why or why not?

I would invest in a pilot program for adults and seniors. I think that these routes are very important to get people comfortable with biking on the streets in a safer and more confident way.

Road Safety: The [2012 Bicycle and Pedestrian Transportation Plan](#) lists the [locations of hazardous intersections for pedestrians and bicyclists](#) in Palo Alto, and suggests treatments to improve safety. The city has addressed a number of these intersections, but, unfortunately, for many of them no safety improvements have been made. In early March, there was a tragic crash at one of these unimproved intersections, resulting in the death of a young bicyclist. What policies would you support to reduce risk for all users at hazardous intersections and roadways?

We have to fix all dangerous intersections. The crash in early March was truly tragic. Improvements can be done by creating more visible crossings, better lighting, removing blind spots, and better spots for bikers and walkers to wait to cross. I've personally been hit while biking, and broke my

wrist. I stopped biking on roads for almost 5 years because of fear. We have to do what we can to fix any known problems.

Commuting: The [2016 Sustainability and Climate Action Plan \(S/CAP\) framework](#) states a 2030 goal to “Increase bike mode share, including work commute trips, from 7% to 25%”. What kinds of programs and/or infrastructure improvements do you support to encourage more people to commute by bicycle to help the city of Palo Alto reach this ambitious goal?

More bike parking spots, more accessible bike sharing, free community bikes, more dedicated bike lanes, proximity of jobs and housing, and setting up of internet infrastructure to make it easier to work from home.

Equity: The [2030 Comprehensive Plan](#) states that “ Due to the high number of jobs relative to a low number of employed residents, many workers must commute to Palo Alto, resulting in traffic congestion, air pollution and parking constraints”. This is especially true for service workers. In addition, the [Calendar Year 2019 Annual Report](#) from the Palo Alto Transportation Management Association (PATMA) finds that 70% of service workers at University Avenue and California Avenue use single-occupancy vehicles (SOV) to commute to work. What barriers do you think could prevent these workers from using green transportation options, and what policies could the city adopt to alleviate these barriers?

Our public transportation isn't that great. Caltrain will soon become more frequent and we need to enable more buses. There are also potentially good solution like resurrecting the Dumbarton railway and then creating last mile access to Palo Alto so it's easier to get to Palo Alto from the east bay through public transportation.

Design: Designing complete streets for safe and convenient travel for all users -- pedestrians, bicyclists, persons with disabilities, motorists, movers of commercial goods, users and operators of public transportation, emergency vehicles, seniors, children, youth, and families -- is a part of [state law](#). Which of these alternatives shown below for a fictional Fletcher Street would you prefer, and why?





Fletcher Street Option 2 is a much better option in my view. Dedicated bike lanes is much safer than sharing the street with cars.

Infrastructure: Active transportation infrastructure makes walking, biking, and electric boards (like e-scooters) feel safer and more convenient. What kinds of infrastructure projects, supporting active transportation, would you like to see come forward for City Council approval in the next 4-8 years? What kinds of projects would be your highest priorities? How would you choose?

A list of bicycle and pedestrian projects is proposed in chapter 6 of the [2012 Bicycle and Pedestrian Transportation Plan](#). The [City Office of Transportation project page](#) has a list of all Palo Alto transportation projects -- the status for these goes from early development, to planned, to complete, or halted. Larger capital projects are part of the [Palo Alto infrastructure plan website](#).

I'd focus on improving bike lanes and public transportation options.

Community engagement: Bryant Street is one of Palo Alto's most beloved streets. However, when Bryant Street became a bicycle boulevard, the proposed changes were quite controversial and sparked community pushback. How would you balance concerns raised by residents who may oppose a change to their street with broader city goals to make streets more accessible to different modes of transport?

I think with many changes we can start small and test them and after they work we can rapidly expand. I think Bryan street has greatly benefited from becoming a bicycle boulevard.
