

## Lydia Kou

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**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?

I drive my electric car and walk.

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**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?

The Summer Streets was a wonderful way to encourage outdoor dining and to help our hard-hit restaurants stay in business. I have not seen any survey asking Palo Alto residents if Summer Streets should be a temporary or permanent program. I also have not seen a survey of all the businesses in the Program area. Have they seen an increase or decrease in their business? Do they support or not support an extension of the Program?

Also, I am concerned about unintended consequences of the Program. Has there been an increase in traffic on neighboring streets? Has the Program or traffic flow change negatively impacted residents? If yes, how?

What happens when it rains? Do the businesses want to continue with outside dining or limited automobile traffic once COVID ends? All these, and more, questions need to be answered by residents and business owners and carefully evaluated. Only when I have all the data, can I answer your question.

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**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 am well aware of the tremendous health benefits from walking, bicycling, and doing any form of aerobic exercise on a regular basis. Many seniors, however, have balance issues. AARP indicated 1/3 of all adults over 65 years fall each year. I would be cautious about encouraging those seniors with limited bicycling experience to suddenly start bicycling. However, walking for most is a wonderful and safe exercise.

We just cut \$39 Million from our City Budget, including vital city and safety services. Until we can restore both and be on financially sound footing, I am unable to fiscally support a pilot program.

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**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?

Such a tragic accident. I certainly support making our intersections safe for all users, starting with those listed in the 2012 Bicycle and Pedestrian Transportation Plan.

Again, Palo Alto just cut 39 million dollars from its budget so I am unsure when these important safety changes will be made. It would be interesting to see if any short-term, inexpensive ideas could be used to reduce the hazards at these identified intersections.

In San Francisco, the most dangerous downtown intersections for pedestrians and bicyclists are marked as such with signs at the correct level. While I have not personally seen these signs, I have read articles about their effectiveness. Worth a thought as a short-term measure until the required changes can be made.

I have heard from residents complaining that some of the safety “fixes” created more hazardous situations, making the intersection and crossing for children more dangerous. An example is the intersection at Newell and Embarcadero.

Involving the Community early in the process could reduce these unfortunate occurrences. Residents know the traffic flow and how children bunch up at intersections better than (most non-resident) consultants. What works at one intersection may need to be modified for another intersection.

Until these safety changes can be made, I would recommend we all be even more cautious, follow all safety measures, and look twice before turning or entering an intersection. Also, we must tell our children to look do the same.

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**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?

COVID has changed so much. Will these changes be temporary or permanent?

Palantir, which rented 14% of the available downtown office space is leaving Palo Alto. Other businesses are having their employees work from home. Who knows for how long? If, and when, employees return to offices, they will not be sitting next to each other in an “open office workspace” where employees had 3 feet of workspace on a long counter. More space will be required for each employee.

This will reduce the number of employees each office can accommodate and would likely reduce car traffic.

If other businesses leave Palo Alto, and car trips are reduced, does this, by default, increase the percentage of bicycle trips?

Again, I believe most individuals are in a holding pattern. I need to wait and see whether temporary changes in the way major employers are conducting business become permanent or not.

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**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?

Again, COVID has altered any answer I might have given 6 months ago. Building on my answers above, we do not know what commuting into and from Palo Alto will be like 6, 12, 18 months from now. So, I can only give you a general answer.

I firmly believe the answer is not to densify Palo Alto. Calls to just build housing fail to acknowledge the impact of an ever-increasing number of office and commercial complexes being built and occupied. Such calls also ignore math: Before COVID, less than 150 sq. ft per employee was a reasonable estimate, but that same employee's share of a housing unit could be 800-1000 sq. ft. or more. Where is the land to build this quantity of housing? But this is pre-COVID – what the future ratios will be is pure speculation.

The problem for many service workers on University Avenue and elsewhere is that they have multiple part-time jobs and need to commute not just to them but between them. For example, many restaurants restrict employee hours to avoid the costs of them becoming categorized as full-time employees. Such an employee might work the lunch service at a restaurant in Palo Alto – including set-up and clean-up – and then have to get to a restaurant in Cupertino where they work the dinner service. Our available public transportation has inadequate schedules and connectivity.

Residents are against continued unfettered commercial development, as shown by the Residents Referendum on Office Development several years ago. We must have balanced and thoughtful growth.

In my opinion, balanced and thoughtful growth, by decreasing large developments, makes walking and bicycling safer and more likely to occur. When roads and an area are crowded, many feel safer in a car.

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**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?



I would choose neither alternative because neither represents the reality of Palo Alto streets. The street in the diagram appears to be 60-70 feet wide. The street I live on is 25 feet wide. There are streets in Palo Alto that are both residential arterials and designated bikeways but are only 20 feet wide -- the legal minimum -- with parking often in the travel lanes.

Eliminating parking on one side of the street goes against current policies of increasing residential density while under-parking the buildings, thereby increasing the need for on-street parking. The notion that these buildings will be "car-lite" is contrary to what I see. I was talking to an owner of a mixed-use building on California Avenue. His residential tenants work at Stanford and take the Marguerite Shuttle to work. But they have cars because they need them for most of their other trips. This example indicates the potential for counter-productive programs, in this case, increasing use of green transportation results in more on-street parking in residential areas which makes those streets be perceived as less safe for bicyclists.

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**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](#).

Again, I cannot make any recommendations as I have no idea of what changes the next 6, 12, 18 months will occur in Palo Alto. Seven months ago, we would never have imagined the changes which have occurred. A once-in-a-lifetime pandemic.

Financing projects with grants can be problematic: The sponsor may be promoting design features that are inappropriate for Palo Alto's project, creating a choice between no project and a bad project.

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**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 believe the best way to reduce concerns around any change is education. Residents must be meaningfully involved in each step of any process. They must be listened to and their opinions respected. These residents LIVE on the streets being discussed and pay for the changes. Unlike Consultants who are paid to recommend changes but do not suffer the consequences of poor decisions. It is too late when the paving equipment shows up on the road and changes start.

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