

Rebecca Eisenberg

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 mostly walk places. We chose to live where we live - we rent a house very close to the California Ave Caltrain Station – because almost everywhere we need to go is walkable or bike-able. I like to bring our dog Zoey, so I mostly bike. My son (15) takes his bike everywhere, as does my husband. My daughter (17), like me, prefers to walk with Zoey.

When we have to drive - which is rarely recently! - I will take my 2012 Leaf, whose 40 mile (or so) range is more than what I need. If one of us needs to go to San Francisco, we will take our plug-in Subaru.

When I worked in San Francisco, I biked to Caltrain, rode in the bike train, and then biked the 2 blocks to my SF office. The bike ride home - usually from the University Ave station - was one of my favorite times of the day, allowing me to transition from the stress of work to the environment of home.

We are proud to be an all-Trek family. I grew up in Wisconsin and have been riding Treks ever since I was able to afford to buy my first Trek in 1989 when I was on the Stanford Team for Family Feud, and won \$2000 in cash and prizes! I no longer have that white aluminum Trek bike, which served me well for a decade, including as my transportation at Burning Man from 1995-2000, but I think about that bike every time I take off on my newer Trek, or watch any of my family members take off on theirs.

We bike over driving because it's faster and more fun. No one likes to look for parking. I do not understand why people drive so much.

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 support making these street modifications permanent, but with due care given to businesses, particularly restaurants, on the side streets, as with the closure of University and California Avenues, these side streets face much higher traffic, making it harder and inequitable for the restaurants on the side streets to operate.

I support making these street modifications permanent. I also support expanding the closures so that side streets can benefit from street closures as well. There is no rule that says that we must close only one street. Other cities have had great success from closing a block of streets in an area, to provide equity and access. Palo Alto could become a model car-free city! I want that.

A missing piece here is the existence of electric shuttles to provide transit to people who cannot walk or bike. The City Council promised in its Comprehensive Plan that it would provide a robust system of shuttles that would be convenient and free to residents, but then it shelved the plan as part of its many short-sighted counterproductive budget cuts that harmed residents. Oddly, City Council scrapped the electric shuttle program without asking the wildly successful electric car manufacturer who is based in Palo Alto to help. Tesla actually has profited from the shutdown. It pays taxes in every other city where it has a presence, and maybe it would have donated Tesla-branded shuttles to serve the residents of the city it chose to call home. At very least, they should have asked.

I will make sure we have electric shuttles.

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?

Yes. As a former member of the executive board of Greene Middle School's PTSA, I am familiar with, and a huge supporter of, the Safe Routes to School program. That said, I am disappointed that only 60% of high school students walked or biked to school. I don't blame the students; I think in part it might be parental fear, and probably also lack of sufficient safe, protected, well-lit bike lanes.

For physically capable adults and seniors, biking is entirely feasible, and I 100% support programs that encourage and empower adults and seniors to bike or walk.

In order to make these programs most effective, I will ensure that our current infrastructure is improved to protect the safety of cyclists and pedestrians. For example, the entire Embarcadero/El Camino area is a nightmare for pedestrians and bikers, with cars speeding around curves. The City has been promising to improve that area for years, yet nothing has happened.

In my mind, we need protected, well-lit bike lanes on all streets, like is done in Europe (especially Germany, where my son and I spent two weeks last summer). We also need to invest in building more pedestrian bridges over crazy streets like Embarcadero and San Antonio.

Most of all, we need to revive our free electric shuttle program, both to take cars off streets (thereby making streets more safe for bikers and pedestrians), and also to give mobility to seniors and others who cannot bike for physical reasons. Everyone deserves an opportunity for transit without having to drive, walk, or bike.

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?

The tragic death of 11 year-old Paul Lafargue in March is one of the reasons I decided to run for City Council. Although I did not know Paul, his older brother was a classmate of my son's at Greene when Paul was hit by a truck driver turning right on California Ave and El Camino - an intersection that Palo Alto has known for years is dangerous to non-drivers.

I think about Paul's death every day, and the pain that this family will have to endure for their lives. I am angry, so angry, at the City Council for always putting the interests of commercial developers before the safety of our community (I understand it was a construction truck that hit Paul). We never should allow commercial construction in our residential neighborhoods. And, all bike lanes should be safe, protected, and well lit.

After Paul died, his parents- who are stronger than any parent should have to be - wrote the following:

“Orange was Paul's favorite color but is also symbolic as a "warning" that more tragedies like this will continue to occur if changes aren't made to improve our city's street safety. Through this tragedy we would like to encourage everyone to SLOW DOWN for KIDS. Be more MINDFUL. Be more AWARE of your surroundings. Be more PRESENT in general for your loved-ones and for others. If you'd like to help support our efforts for change, please reach out to the Palo Alto City Council (cityofpaloalto.org) or show up and speak at Council meetings to appeal for better signage, more traffic education and effective speed limit enforcement, so that something positive can come out of this devastating loss. We are touched by everyone's support and are grateful to be part of such a supportive community. Thank you all.”

With Paul and his family in mind, I have attended and called into every City Council, Planning Commission, and Architectural Review Board meeting where a big construction project is being planned that will endanger pedestrians and bikers.

Recently, the biggest project being pushed through by our current City Council is the Castilleja expansion. In Castilleja's proposed (legally unjustified, environmentally harmful) application for a bigger CUP, Castilleja seeks to plan an underground garage to serve 100 underage driver-students, with entrance and exit on Palo Alto's most-traveled bike boulevard for elementary school students, Bryant Boulevard.

The current status of the project is that the City Council (and possibly the Planning Commission) have agreed with Castilleja's expensive lawyers that the underground garage does not warrant inclusion in any environmental impact report since it is not (bafflingly) “a basement” so therefore will have no environmental impact. (As an attorney who has practiced law, including much land use, law in California for almost 30 years, I can assure you that this analysis is faulty.)

Last week, however, finally a commissioner -- in this case, a member of the Architectural Review Board -- a commission that contains, like most other commissions - a current or former trustee of Castilleja (who never recuse themselves - finally brought up the fact that the proposed Castilleja development - to build 200,000 or so square feet of commercial space in a residential neighborhood -- may create safety hazards for bicyclists, especially in the situation of a construction truck turning right.

It's maddening. Here is what I will do:

make whatever improvements that city planners and civil engineers familiar with keeping bikers and pedestrians safe recommend. limit or ideally halt any large construction project in residential neighborhoods.

The risk of even one potential life is wholly unacceptable. Our community deserves better.

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?

First, I support keeping the promises that City Council made in 2016 to increase bike boulevards (and not subject them to the risk of 16 year old drivers; see above); and “improve bicycle infrastructure,” neither of which have happened.

Second, I support going past the minor promises made in 2016. This is a great opportunity to seek input from the cyclist community!

Finally, I support providing free bike stations with bikes provided by the city, so that any resident can pick up a bike and use it to go to their destination. Paired with electric shuttles, so that for older/less fit people, they can use the bike one way if they so wish, and take a shuttle back.

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?

The two biggest barriers are: (1) lack of affordable housing near jobs, which would alleviate the need to drive; and (2) lack of affordable, convenient public transit to take commuters from home to work.

What I will do as a member of City Council is:

prioritize the production of housing near jobs, starting with the lowest-paid workers, but extending to all workers. We must ensure that every person who works in Palo Alto has the opportunity to live in Palo Alto.

invest in transit. On a local level, we need to deliver the long-promised system of local electric shuttles to enable workers to run errands during off-times, and to park near freeways without bringing cars into residential areas.

work collaboratively with neighbor cities and with regional authorities to support and launch a better coordinated, more affordable system of regional transit that will empower all people to get where they need to be!

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 prefer Fletcher Street II. As a parent, I have serious concerns about street designs where bicyclists have to share the road with cars. This leads to drivers becoming impatient, and potentially using hazardous maneuvers. In Fletcher Street II, we have separate bike lanes at the expense of parking on one side of the street. I am fine with this sacrifice, as it is also in keeping with our longer term goal of encouraging transport options such as walking and biking and public transport over personal, single occupant vehicles.

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 would like to see much better support for biking etc. across arterial roads such as el camino real, alma, as these provide very direct connections to places of convenience. I would like to see Embarcadero and Middlefield roads fully support bike lanes. I do, however, think that we should be careful in our support of e-scooters as these can be safety hazards. More research is needed in that regard, in my opinion, especially after seeing the use of e-scooters in Germany last summer.

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 it is very important to take the time to involve residents and neighbors in the conversation about making the streets more green and safe for bikers and pedestrians. When changes happen without notice and the opportunity to be heard, neighbors reasonably can be upset.

I fundamentally believe that changes that enable safety for bikers and pedestrians are 100% good for residents. I would be excited to present to the residents the plans, and give examples of the many ways that similar plans have made other, similar streets more liveable (and the property values higher, as was the case in Bryant, like with most other bike boulevards).

Where I think that the city council went wrong with Bryant (and more recently, with Ross) was failure to take the time to discuss the proposed changes with the residents, and answer any questions. As a resident of Waverley Street, one city block east of Bryant, I promise you that most Waverley residents wish we had a bike boulevard too!

I strongly believe that much of this could be addressed by Marion Wright Edelman's famous insightful quote: "You cannot be what you cannot see." So let's show them all that a green city can be.
