



# North Webster (Valley Vista, Petaluma Junior High, The Spring Hill School) SRTS Walk Audit

Thursday, August 29<sup>th</sup>, 2024



**In attendance:** Christina Panza (SRTS Director), Sarah Hadler (SRTS Program Manager), Jaime Buschman (Valley Vista Principal), Jennifer Klem-Clark (K-8 Division Head, The Spring Hill School), Terri Fillipo (Vice Principal, Petaluma Junior High School), Madeline Cloud (PCS Board Trustee), Bjorn Gripenburg (Active Transportation Planner, City of Petaluma), Sgt. Walt Spiller (Petaluma Police Department), Melissa Poole (PJH/Grant parent), Johanna Schleret (PJH/Mary Collins at Cherry Valley parent), Maria Sanchez (Valley Vista parent), Angie Siceris (Valley Vista translator), Araceli Enciso (Valley Vista parent), Rashid (Valley Vista parent/City Bus driver)

**Route:** Observed Petaluma Junior High School drop off on the morning of 8/26, both front and back of school site. Observed Valley Vista drop off from main entrance, headed north to intersection of North Webster and Bodega Highway, headed back south to the intersection of North Webster & Western Ave. Walked west on Western for a block to observe back pathway to Petaluma Junior High School. Then headed back east on Western, to North Webster, to The Spring Hill School campus for our debrief.

## **Pick up/Drop off:**

**Petaluma Junior High School:** There is a drop-off/pick-up loop in front of the school site on Bantam Way where parents drop off students. One full size school bus drops off students in the morning (we observed approximately 8 students exiting the school bus at 7:53 am) and one or more smaller special education bus(es) also drop off in the front loop. There are staff parking lots north and south of the school drop off loop, and visitor parking south of the drop-off loop. Parents are advised not to drop off in the parking lots. We did not observe any drop offs in those lots, with the exception of special needs parents/students, who are permitted to drop off in those lots.

A City bus drops off/picks up students at a city bus stop on the southeast corner of Bantam Way and Hillgoss Ct.

Many students are dropped off or picked up on or in the vicinity of North Webster St. and Sonoma Avenue or Western Avenue. Those students generally utilize the pathway/easement through The Spring Hill Campus, connecting North Webster to Petaluma Junior High School. A significantly higher number of students utilize the pathway after school vs. before school.

Bike racks are located on the lower/blacktop area of the school, and there is another bike and skateboard rack located on the upper part of campus, although the majority of bikes were parked in the lower area.

**Valley Vista Elementary School:** There is no school driveway loop at Valley Vista. There are perpendicular parking spots along a portion of the school frontage, a restricted parking/loading/unloading zone on the east side of North Webster north of the school frontage, small staff parking lots on both the north side and south side of the school campus. There are no parking restrictions on the west side of North Webster or on the east side of North Webster south of the school frontage. Some school staff park on the street all day because the staff parking lot does not have enough space to accommodate all the staff vehicles.

Students are primarily dropped off on North Webster. Parents either park in available spaces to drop off/pick up, or load/unload on the east or west side of the street. Students who are dropped off on the west side of North Webster sometimes cross where they are dropped off, rather than walking to one of the crosswalks. Valley Vista actually has several campus entry points: the lower grade playground on North Webster, the main school entrance on North Webster, the south parking lot on North Webster, and finally, there is a pathway to the upper grade blacktop gate from N. Fair St.

Bike parking is located in front of the school outside of the school main office. The Valley Vista principal noted that some Petaluma Jr High students will park their bikes at the bike racks at Valley Vista and then walk up the pathway behind The Spring Hill to school to the Petaluma Jr High campus. One of the parents noted that her son did not feel comfortable parking his bike on the Petaluma Jr High campus because he thought other students might mess with it.

**The Spring Hill School:**

We did not observe drop-off at The Spring Hill, however, staff described drop off/pick up as orderly, with the majority of parents utilizing the drop-off loop in front of campus. Bike racks are located in two places, both in front of the school and around the back adjacent to the church building.

**School Information:**

	<b>Petaluma Junior High</b>	<b>Valley Vista</b>	<b>The Spring Hill School</b>
Address (94952)	700 Bantam Way	730 N. Webster St.	705 N. Webster St.
Morning Bell(s)	7:40 (zero period), 8:35 (1 <sup>st</sup> period)	8:25	8:30
Afternoon Bell(s)	M, T, Th, F: 2:35 W: 1:45	M,T, Th-F: 1:50 (TK/K), 2:40 (1-3), 3:00 (4-6) W: 11:50 (TK/K), 1:00 (1-3), 1:05 (4-6)	3:00 (upper elementary) 3:15 (middle school)
Grade levels	7-8	K-6	3-8
Enrollment (24-25)	463	150	TBD
School type	Traditional	traditional	private

Student's proximity to school (2023-24)	¼ mile – 4 students, 1% ½ mile – 22 students (5%) 1 mile – 73 students (17%) 2 miles -- 223 students (51%)	¼ mile – 15 students (8%) ½ mile – 54 students (28%) 1 mile – 97 students (50%) 2 miles – 132 students (68%)	School unable to share data to create map
Participating School in Sonoma County SRTS program?	Yes	Yes	Yes
Student Travel Mode info (Sept 2023 student arrival/departure tally data)	Walk – 8% morning, 17% afternoon Bike – 6% Other – 1% Carpool – 11% School Bus – 7% Transit – 6% Single Family Vehicle – 65% morning, 58% afternoon	Walk – 16% Bike – 0% Other – 0% Carpool – 5% School Bus – 0% Transit – 0% Single Family Vehicle – 81%	Walk – 4% Bike – 6% Other – 3% Carpool – 0% School Bus – 0% Transit – 0% Single Family Vehicle – 89%
Safe Routes to School Non-Infrastructure Programming (2023-24)	7 <sup>th</sup> /8 <sup>th</sup> Grade “Drive Your Bicycle” lessons via PE Monthly Walk/Roll to School Events Youth Engagement through Leadership	2 <sup>nd</sup> Grade Pedestrian safety lessons 4 <sup>th</sup> Grade Bicycle Basics Lessons, Bike Rodeo 5 <sup>th</sup> Grade Mapping & Communication lessons Quarterly Walk/Roll to School Events	4/5 <sup>th</sup> Grade Bicycle Basics Lessons Monthly Walk/Roll to School Events Walking School Bus/Bike Train

## **OBSERVATIONS, CONCERNS &/or POTENTIAL SOLUTIONS:**

*Please note that all recommendations on the following pages are meant to capture potential solutions to issues or ideas raised during the walk audit. Each of these recommendations are subject to additional design, analysis, outreach, funding, prioritization, and approval by the City of Petaluma and/or Petaluma City Schools prior to implementation.*

### **Petaluma Junior High School/Bantam Way/North Webster**

#### **Observations/Concerns:**

- Fairly busy drop off/pick up area in front loop, staff indicated that parents sometimes do not pull forward, causing back-up and/or behavior such as vehicles passing unsafely. There is no signage to remind parents to pull forward. Sometimes students exit from the passenger side of the vehicle instead of the driver's side, but this is typically more of an issue the first week or two of school. Typically, there is one staff member out front during drop off, and it can be challenging to keep traffic flow moving. We did not observe pick-up but according to staff, apparently pick-up time is “crazier” than drop off time.
- Bus zone is not clearly designated in drop-off loop – paint needs refreshing.

- Students who are dropped off/picked up at the city bus stop on Bantam Way do not have a designated pathway to the school entrance. There is no crosswalk across the school driveway, and they must either walk through a grassy area which can get muddy or have tripping hazards, or through the staff parking lot, which can result in conflicts with vehicles. Students are advised not to walk through the staff parking lot, but sometimes (often?) do anyway.
- There is no sidewalk or pedestrian pathway on Western Avenue between Bantam Way and Benjamin Way (County jurisdiction), and there is no sidewalk or pedestrian pathway from Western Avenue to the school driveway loop on Bantam Way (city jurisdiction).
- There are no sidewalks or bicycle lanes from the Victoria residential/West Haven/Helen Putnam neighborhood to Bantam Way.
- The Western/Bantam intersection has blind spots for traffic, pedestrians, and bicyclists. A concerned parent shared the following thoughts: “The turn and the hill present a big challenge. It is often hard to gauge whether a car is coming uphill from the other direction while preparing for a safe left turn onto Bantam. Additionally, as a bicyclist heading East downhill this also occurs, and additionally, it is difficult to look backwards up the hill, while nearing Bantam, to see a car coming from behind the bicyclist on the curve and have enough time to choose to stop or proceed. If a bicyclist chooses to stop, it might be equally unsafe to start again and then turn left to cross Western because there may not be ample time to get enough speed to get out of the intersection before a car comes after the initial view was clear. Additionally, sunrise and sunset this time of year casts a blinding glow in the windshield of drivers that is unsafe around that bend.”
- Students walking/bicycling or being dropped off/picked up on or near North Webster typically utilize the pathway/easement between North Webster and Petaluma Junior High (through The Spring Hill Campus & District baseball fields) can be unruly/roughhouse, loud, and either don't pay attention or engage in unsafe behavior while bicycling (weaving in and out of the bicycle lane, etc.) as well as while crossing the street or on the sidewalk.

### **Potential Solutions:**

#### **School/District:**

- Continue to communicate and/or reiterate pick-up/drop off procedures with parents & students through various channels, from Back-to-School Night, videos made by the Digital Media class, parent square, school newsletters, announcements, etc. Consider assigning additional staff or student “safety” volunteers (similar to elementary school AAA student safety patrols) to monitor the pick-up/drop off zone & to remind parents to pull forward.
- Repaint bus zone in school driveway loop and add signage or a sandwich board reminding parents to pull forward as far as possible before allowing students to exit vehicle.
- Consider constructing a crosswalk across the north staff parking lot entrance and a paved pathway across the grassy area from the City bus stop to the sidewalk in front of the school entrance.
- Continue to remind students of proper behavior at drop off/pick up. Consider assigning staff who will hold students accountable for unruly behavior and/or incentivize good behavior, to monitor North Webster at drop off/pick up.
- Effectively encourage and educate students about active and alternative transportation options – i.e. walk, roll and bus to school!
  - Provide students with fun and easy to digest information about good bicycling and walking routes as well as bus routes & stops to school (collaborate with the Digital Media class, SRTS, the city of Petaluma, etc. for information)

#### **School District/City of Petaluma**

- Consider sidewalks on the east side of Bantam Way between Western Ave and Hilligoss.

### **City of Petaluma/Transit:**

- Determine feasibility of moving the City Bus stop to the school drop off loop on Bantam Way or to the south staff parking lot, to avoid student drop off at a location that does not have a clear path to the school entrance.
- Provide PJH with a “middle school kid” friendly communication piece that promotes the city bus routes that serve PJH.

### **County of Sonoma:**

- Consider constructing sidewalks and improving bicycle lanes to replicate Petaluma City standards, on Western Avenue between Benjamin Lane and Bantam Way as well as further along Western Ave to Chapman Lane and/or Windsor Drive, to have a connector to the area southwest of the school and Helen Putnam Regional Park.
- Should sidewalks be constructed, consider additional pedestrian enhancements (i.e. crosswalk/flashing beacon/stop light, etc) at the intersection of Western Avenue & Bantam way.

## **Valley Vista/Spring Hill Drop-Off**

### **Concerns and Observations:**

- Parents double park or block vehicles parked in the perpendicular spaces in front of the school during pick up/drop off. There is no “drop off loop” at Valley Vista.
- Valley Vista and Petaluma Junior High School parents often utilize The Spring Hill drop-off/pick up loop in order to head back in the direction they came from on North Webster. The Spring Hill staff indicated that these drivers will pass Spring Hill parents on the left in an unsafe manner, and make left turns out of the Spring Hill loop, which results in traffic delays for Spring Hill parents at drop off/pick up.
- Valley Vista parents sometimes drop-off students on the west side of North Webster, and students often cross mid-block in an unsafe manner rather than utilizing the crosswalks at N. Webster and Townview Ln.
- The volunteer (school staff) crossing Guard, Tony Larsen, does not possess a “regulation size” stop sign – her stop sign is quite small and may be less visible to drivers.
- We did not observe issues with parents parking in loading/unloading zones, although it is possible this occurs because we did not observe drop-off from a location where we could view that area. There is a block-long loading/unloading zone on the north side of the school frontage, north of the perpendicular parking area. There is what appears to be a “former” loading zone south of the perpendicular parking area, where the curb was once painted white but the paint has faded.
- The parking lot at the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints across the street is virtually empty in the mornings. The principal at Valley Vista indicated that the church was amenable to their lot being utilized by site/district staff on special staff development days, therefore the church may be open to parents utilizing their lot for drop off/pick up (if needed in future). Students/families can then use the crosswalk that is right in front of the church to cross N. Webster to get to Valley Vista.

- There is consideration to Live Oak Charter School moving to the Valley Vista campus and consolidating with Valley Vista as soon as the 25-26 school year. This will result in a large increase in students. Valley Vista enrollment this year is approximately 150 students, and Live Oak's enrollment this year is approximately 270 students. Combining sites will greatly impact traffic, parking, and drop-off.

### **Potential Solutions:**

#### **School/District:**

- Continue to communicate and/or reiterate pick-up/drop off procedures and safety recommendations with parents & students through various channels, from Back-to-School Night, parent square, school newsletters, announcements, etc.
- Consider reconfiguring the drop off zone at Valley Vista. One potential model could be what is done at McNear, where the perpendicular parking is blocked off and used as a "drop off loop" during drop-off, and converted back to parking after drop off.
- Consider restricting left-turns out of the Spring Hill parking loop exit and/or making the south driveway an exit only.
- Evaluate whether additional parking restrictions or drop off configuration adjustments at Valley Vista will be required if school population increases. Communicate with church about the possibility of utilizing their parking lot for pick up/drop off.
- Provide volunteer crossing guard at Valley Vista with a regulation size stop sign, or even better, one with LED lights, such as this one: [Link to flashing stop signs](#)
- Continue to promote Walking & Rolling to School at Valley Vista and Spring Hill to encourage parents & students to choose active transportation and reduce traffic.

#### **City of Petaluma:**

- Support decisions to reconfigure drop off zones & parking restrictions with appropriate curb-paint and signage.

### **North Webster**

#### **Concerns and Observations:**

- Drivers frequently do not obey pedestrian right-of-way at the all-way stop at N. Webster and Townview Ln. The Crossing Guard shared that drivers run the stop sign several times per day even when she is in it. When pedestrians are not present, drivers run that stop sign even more often. In the Spring 2023 Parent Survey, this was mentioned by numerous parents, with one writing "no one stops for kids in crosswalks." There is no advance stop-bar in the southbound direction of this intersection.
- Drivers also make u-turns in front of the school and at the North Webster and Townview intersection.
- Despite being a designated bike route with "sharrows" for bicycling, street feels unsafe for children bicycling to/from school, due to traffic congestion and/or speed, disrespectful drivers, and condition of pavement.
- According to Valley Vista staff, usage of the crossing at the all-way stop at N. Webster and Townview Lane, and the mid-block, pedestrian-activated crosswalk between the church and staff parking lot is split about 50/50, therefore both crosswalks benefit the community.
- Both of the above mentioned crosswalks are faded and require refreshing, and both require curb daylighting to prevent drivers from parking too close to the crosswalk and blocking views of pedestrians.

- Signage at the mid-block crosswalk between the Church and Valley Vista staff parking lot is faded and cracked.
- Sidewalks on North Webster are narrow and could use improvement in numerous locations.
- Johanna Schleret, parent, mentioned that she'd like there to be bike crossing signs at the N Webster and Western intersection, similar to the ones at the crosswalk at N. Webster/Sonoma Ave. However, the crosswalk at N. Webster & Sonoma Ave is an uncontrolled crossing, whereas the N. Webster and Western intersection is an all-way stop.
- PJH parents often park on Sonoma Ave to pick up students who walk down the back pathway and this causes more congestion in the school zone.

### **Potential Solutions:**

#### **City of Petaluma**

- Refresh all crosswalks and daylight all curbs at intersections and crosswalks along North Webster
- Consider improvements to the 3-way stop at North Webster and Townview Lane to improve visibility for pedestrians and increase driver compliance. Possible improvements:
  - A raised crosswalk
  - Bulb-outs to shorten crossing distance, and/or a refuge island
  - Replace stop sign on North Webster at Townview with a pedestrian-activated RRFB
- Replace faded/cracked signage at mid-block crossing on north side of campus (at lower grade playground entrance), and consider bulb-outs and/or a refuge island to shorten the crossing distance.
- Consider class II bicycle lanes in both directions on N. Webster or a 2-way cycletrack. Note: either solution would require parking removal on one side of the street.
- Improve sidewalks along North Webster
- Install bulb-outs and curb ramps at North Webster and Western Avenue. Bike crossing signage is not feasible at this location because it is an all-way stop, however, green paint could be added for conflict zones at this location.
- Install an accessible curb ramp on the NW corner of North Webster and Sonoma Ave.
- Consider converting North Webster and Sonoma to an all-way stop and/or adding a stop-sign to the Spring Hill Driveway exit.
- Lower speed limit to 15 mph when children are present, and 20mph at all other times.

#### **North Webster & Bodega intersection & Bodega Avenue**

### **Concerns & Observations**

- Crossing Bodega Highway is harrowing for both bicyclists and pedestrians, even at the signalized intersection at North Webster and Bodega Highway.
- Crosswalks are faded and in need of refreshing.
- There are no crosswalks across Bodega Avenue between North Webster and Howard.
- The bicycle lane on the south side of Bodega Avenue heading east, ends at North Webster and bicyclists must integrate into traffic at that point. (*Looks like*) there is no bicycle lane on the north side of Bodega heading west until N. Webster.
- A parent who lives north of Bodega near Oak Hill Park said that he prefers to walk to/from school via Prospect. He shared that they walk on the north side of Bodega Ave and then cross Bodega at N. Webster and then walk down N. Webster to school.

### **Potential Solutions:**

## **City of Petaluma**

- Confirm that light timing enables pedestrians to cross before the light turns green on Bodega Avenue.
- Refresh/repaint crosswalks
- Evaluate feasibility of additional crosswalks & crossing improvements on Bodega Avenue between North Webster and Howard
- Evaluate feasibility of bike improvements east of North Webster on Bodega Avenue
- Consider lowering speed limits on Bodega Avenue from 30 MPH to 25 MPH if allowed by AB43.

## **North Webster & Western Avenue intersection, and Western Avenue**

### **Concerns & Observations**

- Speeding on Western is a concern. Participants also expressed concerns about students who bicycle erratically on Western.
- The intersection of Webster and Western is heavily trafficked. According to parents, it is “very busy in the morning with people speeding to work or taking kids to all the various schools in the area. Drivers can get frustrated with all the activity. Parents expressed the desire for a Crossing Guard at this location.
- There are no curb ramps at this intersection.
- A parent who responded to our Spring 2023 Parent Survey expressed that there is a location at the corner of Stanley and Western (there is a small grass area in the middle) where they would like to see improvement (they suggested a crosswalk). The parent indicated that drivers speeding on Western and making a left on Stanley often don’t look/see pedestrians, and that many students take that route because it is a shorter way to stay on Western Avenue.
- Fair Street is frequently utilized...(should we mention this as an observation?)
- The City of Petaluma recently repaved the section of Western Avenue between Hill Drive and city limits, narrowed the travel lanes, and added bike lanes in both directions (buffered on the uphill side) However the narrowed lanes and newly painted bicycle lane ends at the City Limits slightly west of Benjamin Way.
- There may be a lack of school signage on Western Avenue.
- Johanna Schleret, parent mentioned that it would be good to have bollards/protection, on the section of bike lane on Western Ave, especially where the road curves, just east of Benjamin Lane, so that drivers don’t cut into the bike lane.
- We observed that students/families also have access to Petaluma Junior High from a somewhat steep, but walkable, pathway on the north side of Western, right after the sidewalk ends, through the baseball fields. Is likely utilized by baseball/softball families more than students, but could potentially be improved by the school/district.

### **Potential Solutions:**

#### **School District**

- Consider improvements to the pathway off Western, through the baseball field to enable safer access to campus from that location.

#### **City of Petaluma**

- Lower speed limit 5 mph along Western – to 25 between Howard and Webster, to 30 from Webster to the City Limits, and 35 after city limits.



- Add curb ramps to North Webster and Western.
- Implement bicycle and pedestrian improvements along the entire corridor of Western Avenue between Hill Drive and downtown with upcoming paving project.
  - ADA improvements to curb ramps
  - Refresh crosswalks & shorten crossing distance with bulb outs
  - Narrow travel lanes & widen bicycle lanes

*\*note, there is not sufficient width to add a buffer on the uphill curve east of Benjamin Ln (916 Western Ave).*
- Fair Street – see recommendations from Petaluma High School audit
- Evaluate school signage along both Western Ave & North Webster and add where needed

## Safe Routes to School Program Information

- The SRTS program coordinates a Safe Routes to School Task Force to bring together representatives from schools/school districts (school administration, staff and/or parents), city planning/engineering, law enforcement, and SRTS program staff. The goal of the Task Force is to:
  - Seek input from Task Force members and the public, in order to identify barriers to active transportation, opportunities for improvement and collaboration, and set priorities for future infrastructure projects within the city of Petaluma.
  - Provide a venue for sharing of program initiatives and projects in the city of Petaluma, as well as inter-agency collaboration.

Task Force meetings are currently held on the 3<sup>rd</sup> Thursday of the month during the school year. Meeting notices, agendas, and meeting notes & handouts can be found on our SRTS Task Force page [HERE](#).

- Enrollment for participation in the SRTS program takes place in April each year. Schools must enroll each year to be eligible to receive visiting education services & ongoing technical support. Enrolled, comprehensive sites agree to:
  - Meet with SRTS program staff 3x per year to discuss/plan programming
  - Collect student travel tally data in September
  - Provide data for the SRTS program to enable creation of an annual SRTS “study map” showing where students live in relation to the school
  - Engage with/implement a minimum of 5 walk/roll encouragement initiatives per year.
  - Support scheduling & implementation of education programming.
- SRTS encouragement “Walk/Roll” initiatives and promotional materials are emailed to enrolled school contacts every month via our SRTS E-Newsletter, and may also be accessed at [www.sonomasaferoutes.org](http://www.sonomasaferoutes.org). To request to receive our SRTS E-Newsletter directly, email [christina@bikeosnoma.org](mailto:christina@bikeosnoma.org)

## Appendix: Walk Audit Pictures:



Drop off loop, Petaluma Junior (white truck is in faded bus zone)



Another view of drop off loop – where sidewalk ends is the grassy area that kids need to walk through to get to bus stop.



Walking across PJH grassy area on Bantam, to get to city bus stop



City bus stop on Bantam pictured above, as well as the school driveway kids need to cross (without a crosswalk) to get to campus.





Bike racks on lower blacktop at PJH – about 10 bikes parked, a few are electric



The pathway/hill PJH pedestrians or bicyclists travel from North Webster to the school





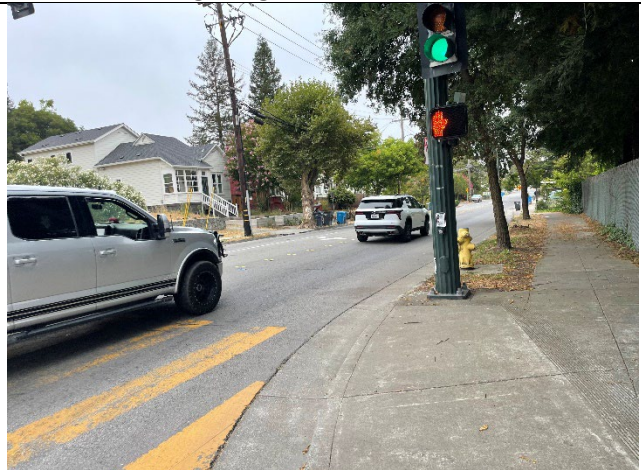
Drop off traffic in front of Valley Vista



Crosswalk on north side of Valley Vista campus, needs refreshing & sign also faded/cracked



North Webster & Bodega – improve with bulb-outs, refresh crosswalks, double check signal timing.



Bike lane ends on Bodega Hwy heading east after N. Webster

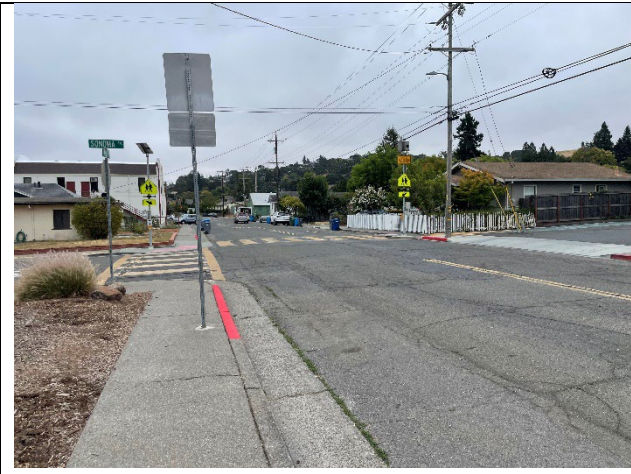


Crosswalk at N. Webster & Townview needs refreshing, consider conversion from 3-way stop to removal of stop sign on N. Webster and replacing with a pedestrian activated signal, RRFB, raised crosswalk and/or island.



Add a stop bar at N. Webster & Townview heading south





N. Webster & Sonoma



Western & North Webster



Continue bike lane improvements on Western east of N. Webster



New bike lanes on Western



Western Ave, note change in bike lane at City limits



Access to PJH from Western Avenue, through the baseball field – consider improving for safer access?