

Appendix B

Placemaking Action Plan

The content in this appendix shares ideas about potential placemaking opportunities along El Camino Real. These ideas are included to provide inspiration for future conversations among agencies and community members along the corridor.



PLACEMAKING ACTION PLAN

Prepared for: SamTrans
Central El Camino Real
Multimodal Plan

*Study funded by the Metropolitan
Transportation Commission (MTC) prioritized
under the MTC Transit Performance Initiative*

August 2026



SITELAB urban studio

Context

The SamTrans Central El Camino Real Multimodal Plan focuses on the 8.5-mile segment of El Camino Real known as “Central El Camino Real.” The project spans El Camino Real from Peninsula Avenue to Brewster Avenue, and includes Cities of San Mateo, Belmont, San Carlos, and Redwood City as partners.

An important regional north-south connector, the corridor hosts the Route ECR, runs parallel to commuter rail Caltrain, and is slated for many future transit-oriented development projects.

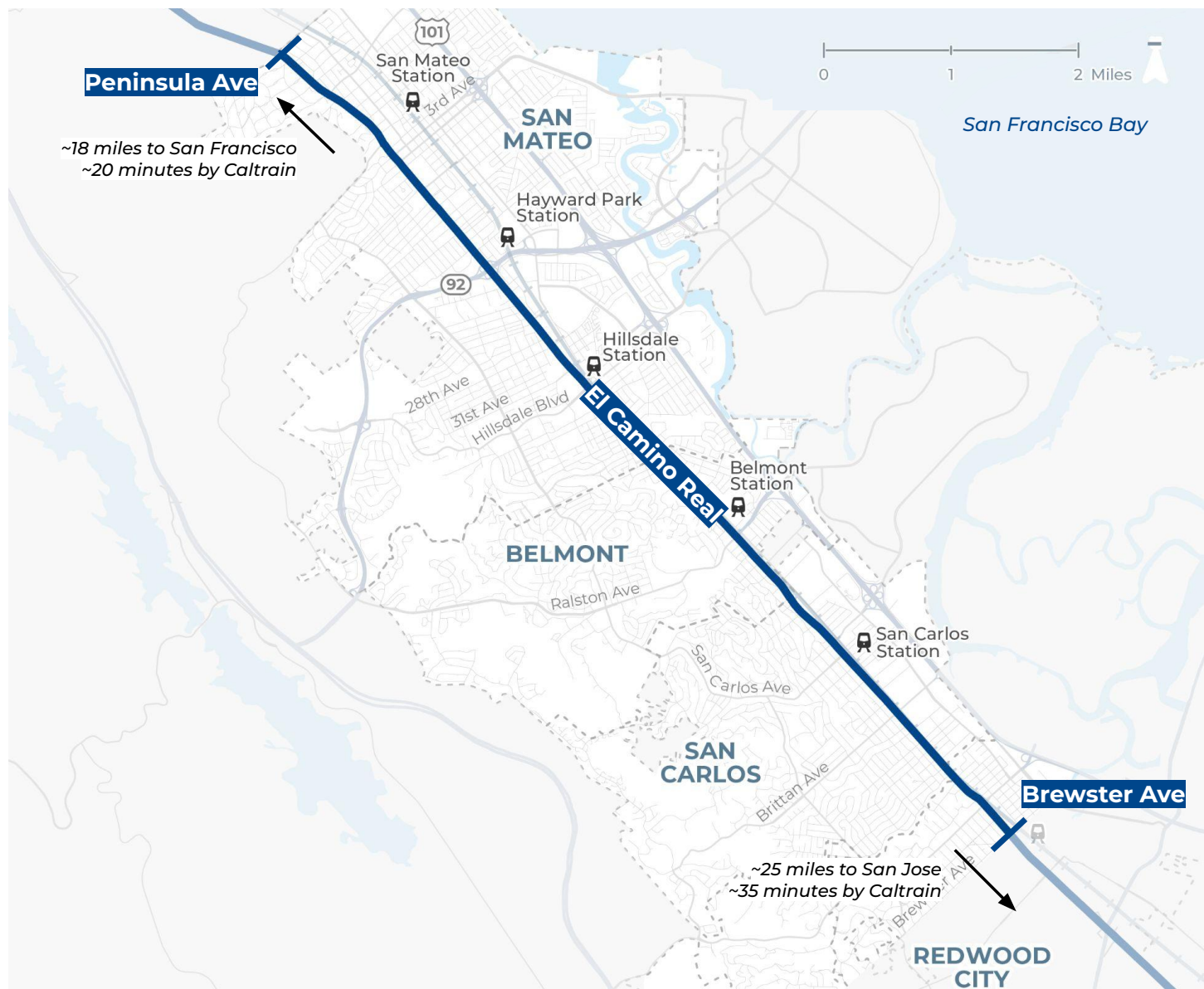


Figure 1: Project extents

Contents

- 1 Introduction
- 2 Placemaking Priorities + Strategies
- 3 Opportunity Sites



Note: Unless otherwise noted, image credits: SITELAB Urban Studio

A photograph of a city street scene. In the foreground, a green street lamp with a bell-shaped light fixture stands on a sidewalk. To the right, a white building with a balcony and a black trash bin are visible. A large tree with green leaves is in the middle ground. In the background, a multi-lane road with traffic lights and several cars is visible under a blue sky with wispy clouds. A blue diagonal banner is overlaid on the bottom left corner.

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Introduction

Introduction

The Placemaking Action Plan provides a supplement to the Central El Camino Real Multimodal Plan, focusing on making the public realm more welcoming and accessible to all. It questions and aims to reimagine the kind of transformations possible along El Camino Real if we reprioritize the public realm.

Identified in the following sections are overarching placemaking priorities and strategies, as well as opportunity sites that serve as pilots for activation projects and respond to the inspiration for the future of the corridor.

Prioritizing improvements to the public realm will not only facilitate safety and comfort for those who walk/roll, bike, and take transit today. It will also serve as testing grounds to catalyze future investment—whether inviting greater density and development, making movement attractive for all modalities, or improving overall quality of life on the corridor.

Central El Camino Real Today

Today, El Camino Real largely serves vehicular movement—at times containing up to six travel lanes—with limited dedicated bike infrastructure and pedestrian space.

During engagement in 2026, community members often expressed dissatisfaction with the conditions for pedestrians and bikers, citing desires for wider sidewalks, mature trees and planting, benches, bike racks, public art, and decorative street lighting.

“Pedestrians are currently an **after thought** on this road.

“A “Grand Boulevard” project should above all be **aesthetically pleasing**. Three lanes of cars plus another row of parked cars does not sell the concept.

“**Trees** provide shade...and make things look better than a **wall of buildings** that this place has become.

“I would like to ride a bike more and use more buses. I want to drive less as I get older. But I am **afraid to ride** on El Camino.

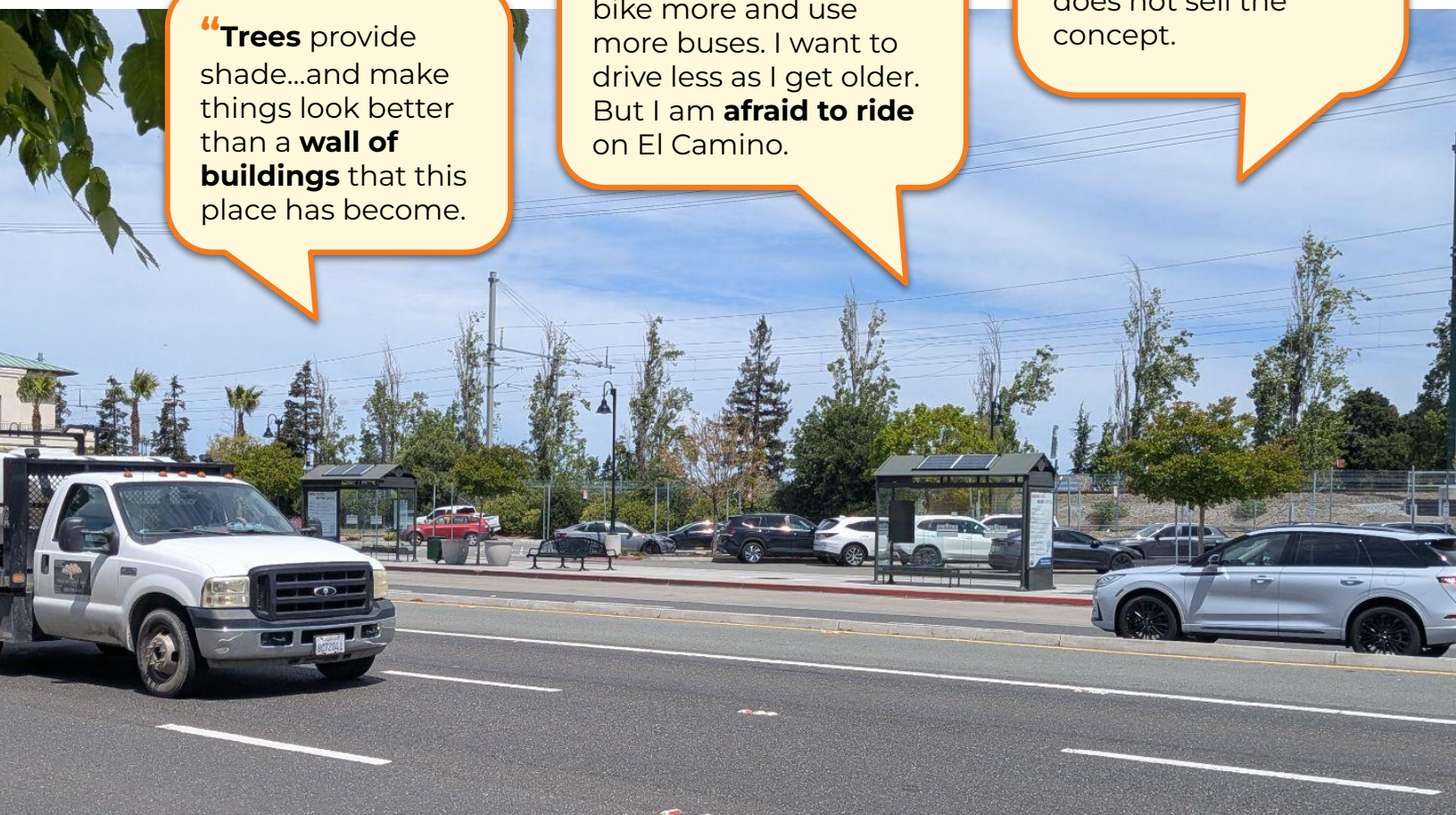


Figure 2: El Camino Real at Cherry St, San Carlos

Source for community quotes: Phase 2 survey responses

Lack of/limited tree canopy is a critical issue impacting the pedestrian and bike experience along Central El Camino Real today. As shown in the image below from the USDA Forest Service, tree canopy along El Camino Real is comparatively lower than in surrounding areas.

In addition, the corridor is generally inconsistent in its degrees of planting. Segments that have sidewalk trees, understory planting, and/or planted medians significantly improve perceptions of the street and reduce its vast sense of scale.

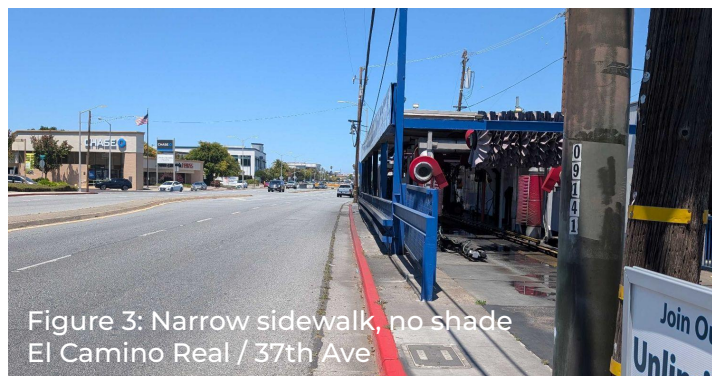


Figure 3: Narrow sidewalk, no shade
El Camino Real / 37th Ave

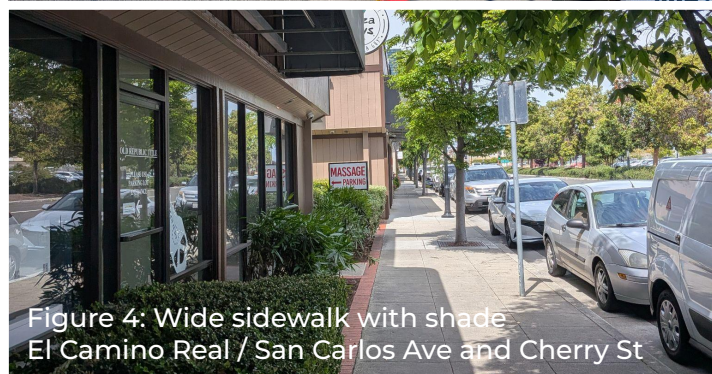


Figure 4: Wide sidewalk with shade
El Camino Real / San Carlos Ave and Cherry St



Figure 5: CA Urban Tree Canopy (USDA Forest Service)

Local Inspiration + Sense of Place

Amidst this car-focused landscape, local stories, histories, and cultures are present in the public realm if you look for them. Dotted along the corridor are gateway and historical markers, wayfinding signage, public art, and unique ecological features that provide opportunities to pause and learn. Examples include:

- A mosaic mural at the San Mateo Bank of America (El Camino Real / 3rd Ave) acknowledges the rich historical landmarks and cultural influences
- A ground marker (El Camino Real / San Carlos Ave) for San Carlos's centennial commemorates the construction of the Drake Building
- Local businesses (such as Chinese, Vietnamese, Mexican, Japanese, and Indian restaurants) along El Camino Real highlight San Mateo's multicultural communities
- Lower San Mateo Creek—one of the major creeks of San Mateo County—passes under El Camino Real to the San Francisco Bay

El Camino Real is also part of the Juan Bautista de Anza National Historic Trail connecting Mexico to San Francisco, which was traveled by the Anza colonizing expedition following existing Indigenous trails.¹

¹[National Park Service, Juan Bautista de Anza National Historic Trail](#)

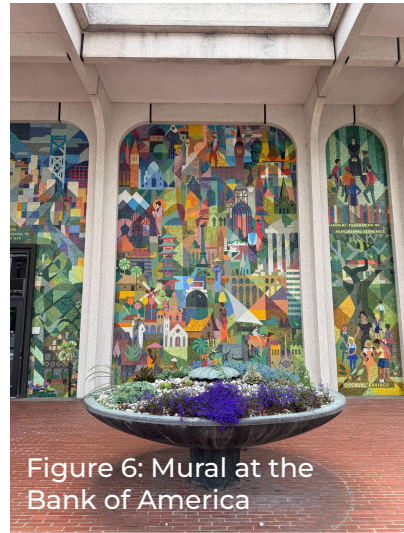


Figure 6: Mural at the Bank of America



Figure 7: Historical Marker

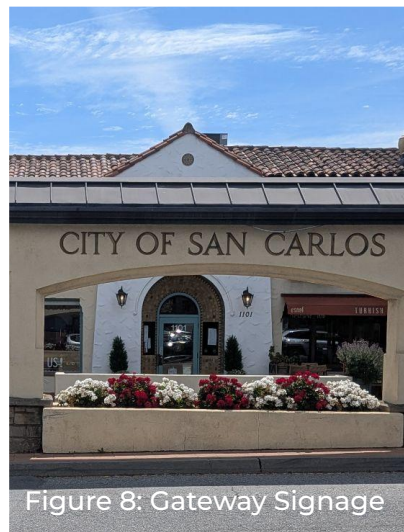


Figure 8: Gateway Signage



Figure 9: Local Businesses

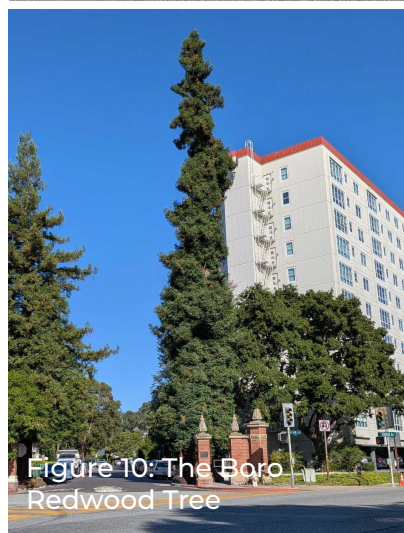


Figure 10: The Boro Redwood Tree

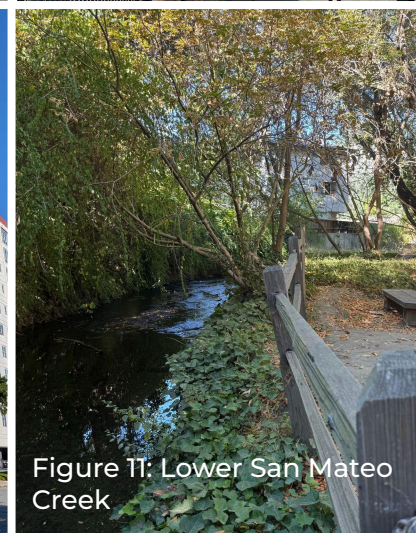


Figure 11: Lower San Mateo Creek



Figure 12: Santa Monica Blvd
Los Angeles, CA
credit: WeHoCity

Distinctive lighting supports nighttime activation



Figure 13: Passeig de Gracia
Barcelona, Spain
credit: Andrew

Consistent tree canopy provides shade and identity

What kind of transformations could be possible here if we reprioritized the public realm?

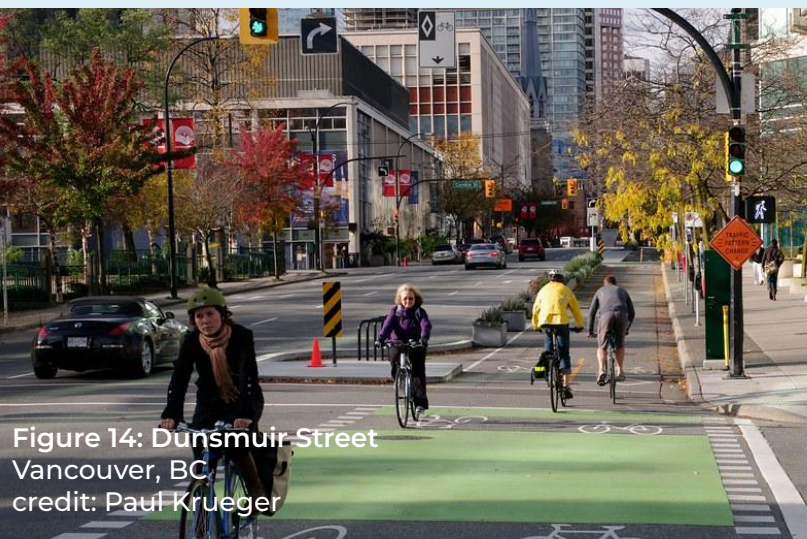


Figure 14: Dunsmuir Street
Vancouver, BC
credit: Paul Krueger

Prioritization of protected space for cyclists



Figure 15: Eastern Parkway
Brooklyn, NY

Multimodal connections with a generous pedestrian promenade



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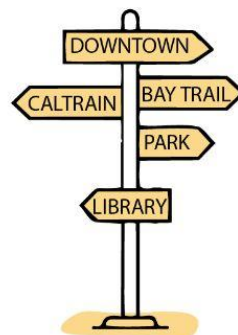
Placemaking Priorities + Strategies

Central El Camino Real Placemaking Priorities



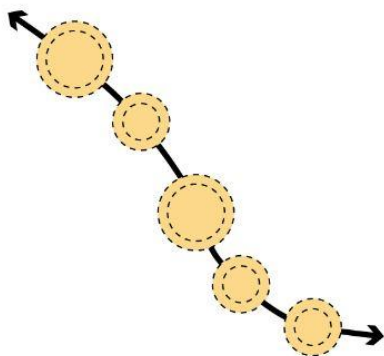
RECENTER PEDESTRIAN COMFORT

Fundamental streetscape improvements that bring back a sense of human scale to this busy thoroughfare



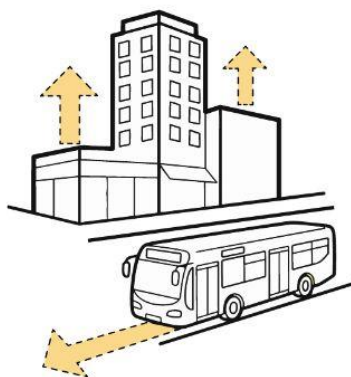
REINFORCE CENTERS OF GRAVITY

Improving wayfinding experiences between El Camino Real and nearby destinations by building upon existing places where people want to be



STRENGTHEN CONNECTIVITY

Highlight the distinct identities of the four cities while increasing the legibility of El Camino Real as a cohesive corridor



SHAPE WHAT GROWS HERE

Public realm improvements can help set the stage for future partnership opportunities, land use decisions, and transit-oriented development

Placemaking Strategies

Baseline Transportation Improvement (F&P)

Corridor-wide Strategy, Building on Baseline Transportation Improvements in Service of Placemaking Priorities

LINEAR

- Dedicated transit lane
- Dedicated bike lane
- Expanded sidewalk



MOVE + CONNECT

Support the Journey:
Increase presence of benches, lighting, and wayfinding signage for pedestrian /cyclist access and comfort near bus stops and Caltrain station intersections

Bike Forward:
Demonstrate first-class connections to existing and new bike networks, elevating the quality of bike facilities and supportive amenities

LINEAR

- Dedicated bike lane
- Expanded sidewalk



LET’S GREEN

Serious about Shade:
Prioritize consistent tree canopy and understory planting along El Camino Real sidewalks

Planted Partitions:
Understory planting alongside bike lanes and medians to provide buffers and traffic calming

SPOT

- Curb extension
- New crosswalk



STORYTELLING CANVAS

You Are Here:
Implement distinctive crosswalks, interpretive art and signage to draw attention to a place’s history, culture, ecology, etc. (e.g. Historic districts, local landmarks, native flora)

Day + Night:
Add decorative lighting near existing activity nodes to create an inviting and safe atmosphere at all times of day

SPOT

- Curb extension



ACTIVATE!

Partner with local organizations to promote temporary events/ programs that support active programming



3

Opportunity Sites

Opportunity Sites

Opportunity sites outline preliminary recommendations for streetscape activation strategies within the right-of-way. By combining public realm strategies, these projects synchronize momentum to deliver impactful enhancements going beyond baseline improvements. Site selection took into consideration multiple factors and priorities:

- Priorities defined in city documents, including specific plans for downtown, streetscape plans, mobility plans
- Project team identified transportation recommended improvements and placemaking opportunities
- SamTrans Equity priority studies

Sites encompass a variety of typologies, ranging from:

- **Gateway:** an entry into cities which centers their downtown or other community assets closely located near to El Camino Real
- **Connector:** cross streets serving as crucial assets like transit stations, retail corridors, parks, schools, bike or school routes
- **Node:** increase multimodal access across key intersections by reducing a sense of scale and increasing crossing safety

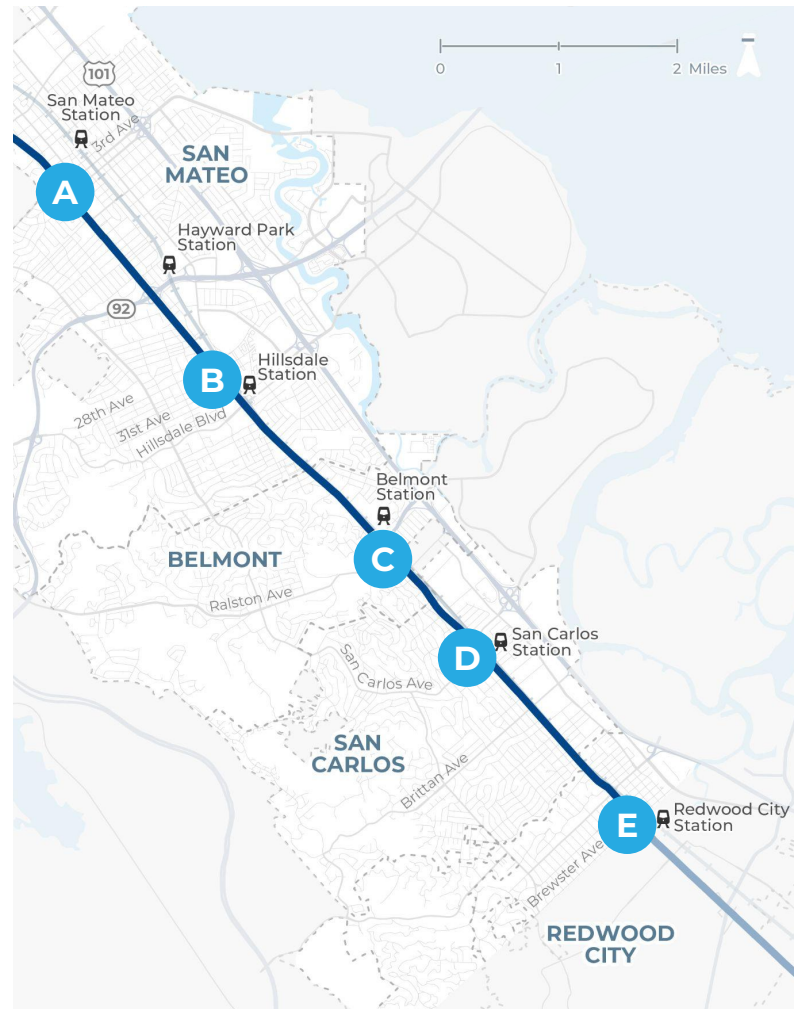
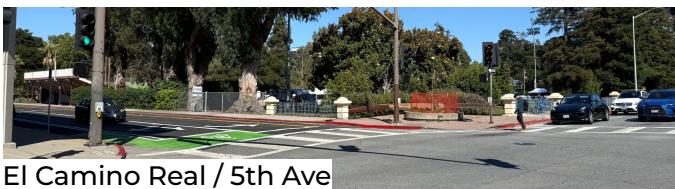
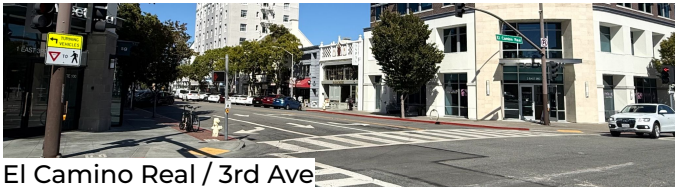


Figure 16: Selected Opportunity sites

- A Multi-Faceted San Mateo**
El Camino Real / Baldwin-5th Ave
- B San Mateo Spurs**
El Camino Real / 25th, 28th, and 31st Ave
- C Belmont Switch**
El Camino Real / Ralston Ave
- D San Carlos Front Porch**
El Camino Real / San Carlos Ave
- E Redwood City Portal**
El Camino Real / Brewster Ave

Multifaceted San Mateo

El Camino Real / Baldwin - 5th Ave

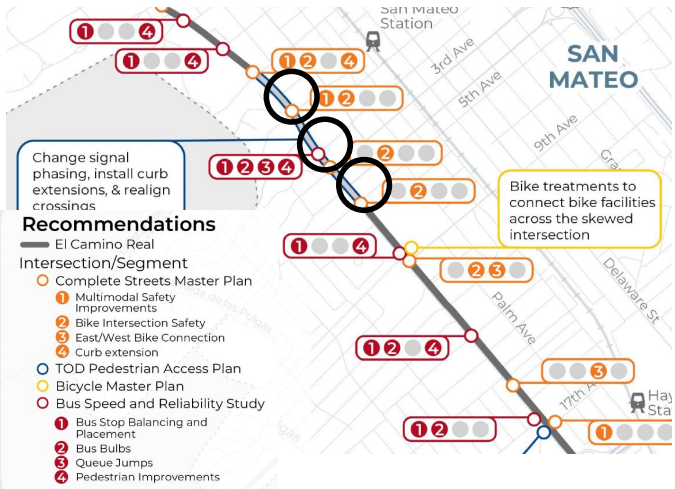


‘Multifaceted San Mateo’ provides downtown gateways that increase vibrancy and access along El Camino Real to San Mateo’s destinations: Central Park (including Japanese Garden, recreational areas, and playground), Public Library, and the historic downtown walk.

At the key intersections of Baldwin, 2nd, 3rd, 4th, and 5th Avenues, proposed interventions include various streetscape improvements such as increased crossing safety, intuitive wayfinding and signage, enhanced lighting, and public art opportunities— elements that work together to elevate the pedestrian and bike experience into the heart of downtown.

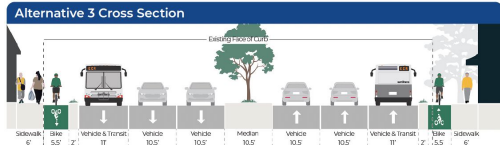
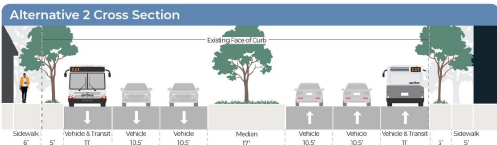
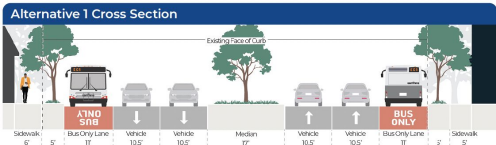
Proposed Improvements

Intersection, pedestrian, bike, bus, and roadway safety recommendations by F&P



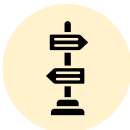
Source: Central El Camino Multimodal Plan Needs Assessment, June 2025

Alternative Cross Section



Source: Central El Camino Design Alternative, Fehr & Peers

Key Strategies



STORYTELLING CANVAS

Interpretive art showcasing the creek



ACTIVATE

Crosswalks, curb extensions, and signage to Downtown

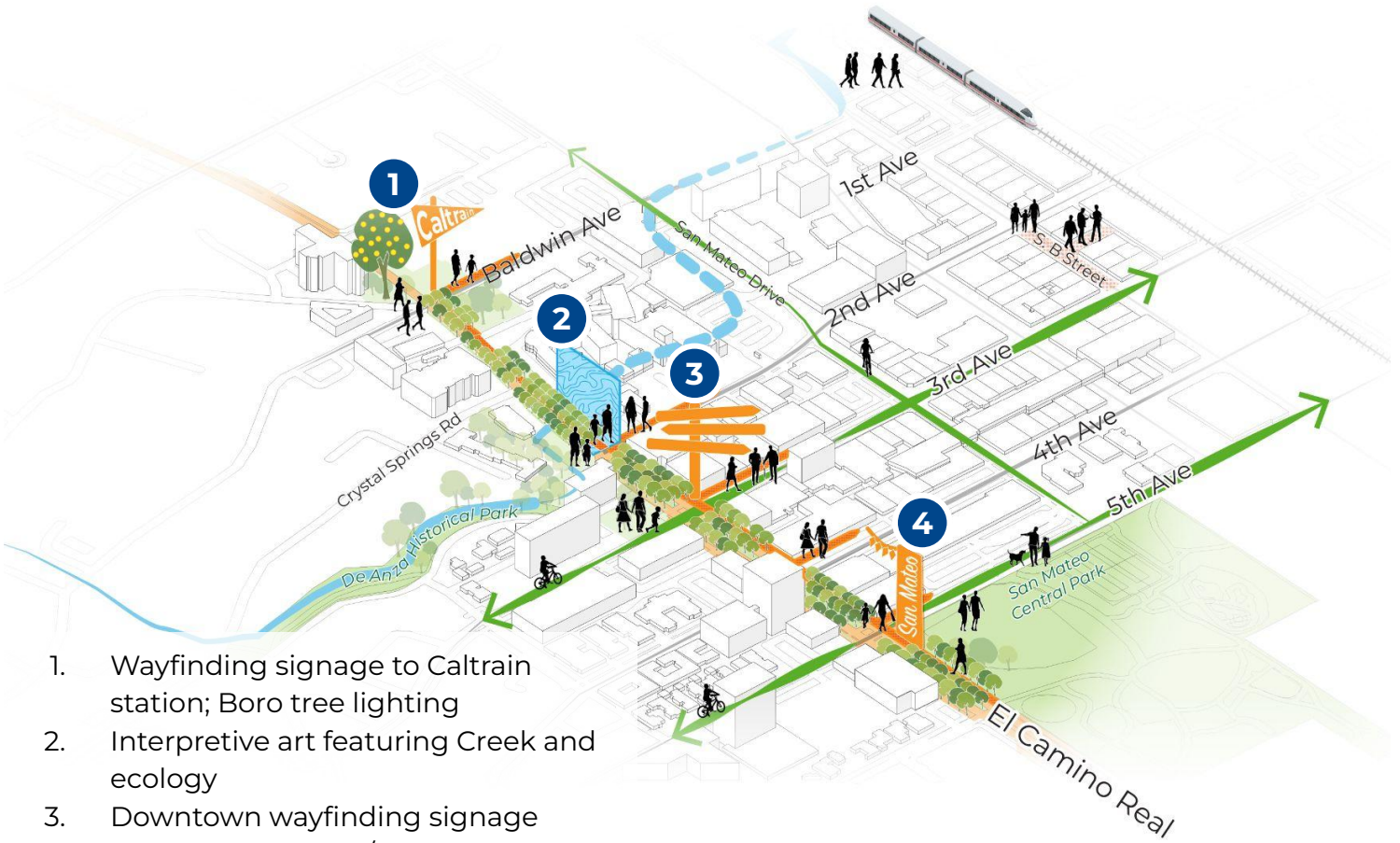


LET'S GREEN

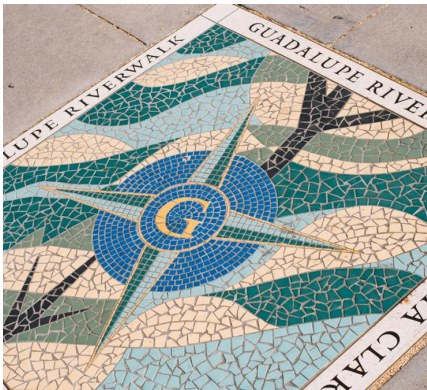
Consistent tree canopy along sidewalk and understory planting in the median

Multi-Faceted San Mateo

El Camino Real / Baldwin - 5th Ave



1. Wayfinding signage to Caltrain station; Boro tree lighting
2. Interpretive art featuring Creek and ecology
3. Downtown wayfinding signage
4. Gateway sculpture/art, lighting, and seating



Integrating opportunities of storytelling through art
San José, CA
credit: Baunfire



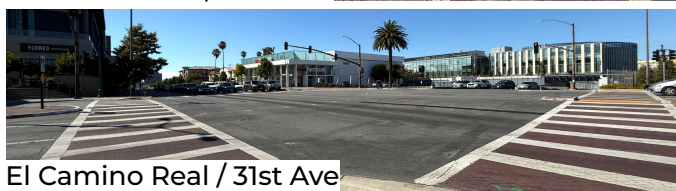
Wayfinding signage highlighting downtown destinations
Adelaide, AUS



Elevated streetscape design to signify entry points to downtown
San José, CA

San Mateo Spurs

El Camino Real / 25th, 28th, and 31st Ave



‘San Mateo Spurs’ increase visibility and access along El Camino Real to some of San Mateo’s most active places: Hillsdale Caltrain Station, 25th Avenue retail, Hillsdale Mall, and Bay Meadows transit-oriented development.

At three key intersections, proposed interventions include a corner pocket plaza, lush sidewalk tree canopy along the sidewalk and understory planting in curb extensions, and decorative crossings—elements that work together with transportation improvements to elevate the public realm experience to these important destinations.

Key Strategies



ACTIVATE

Corner pocket plaza with landscape and seating with room for pop-up programs



LET'S GREEN

Tree canopy with understory planting

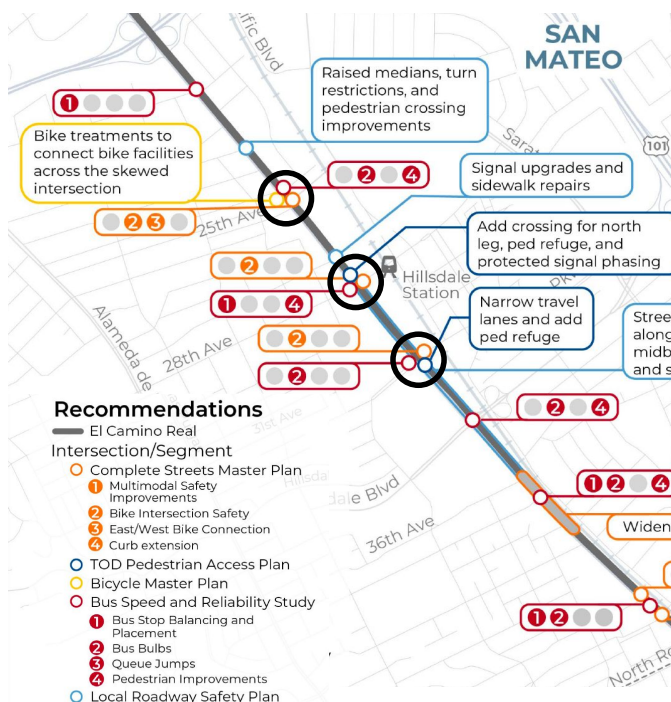


STORYTELLING CANVAS

Decorative crossing for an enhanced pedestrian experience

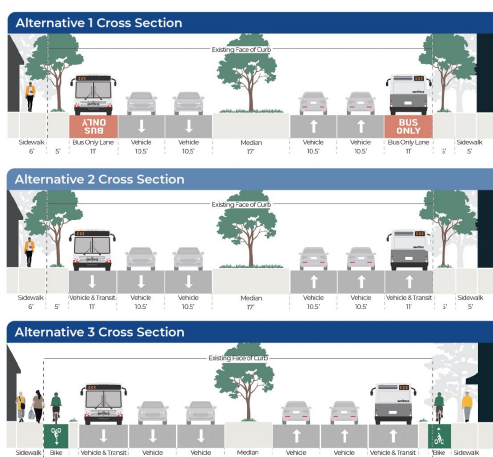
Proposed Improvements

Intersection, pedestrian, bike, bus, and roadway safety recommendations by F&P



Source: Central El Camino Multimodal Plan Needs Assessment, June 2025

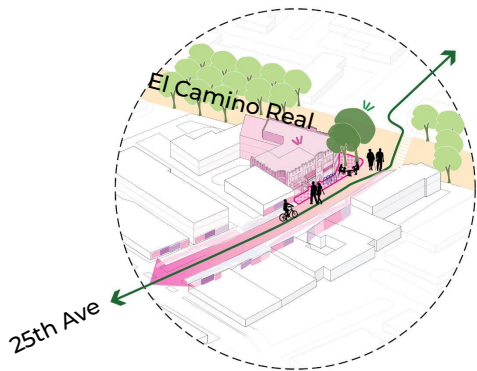
Alternative Cross Section



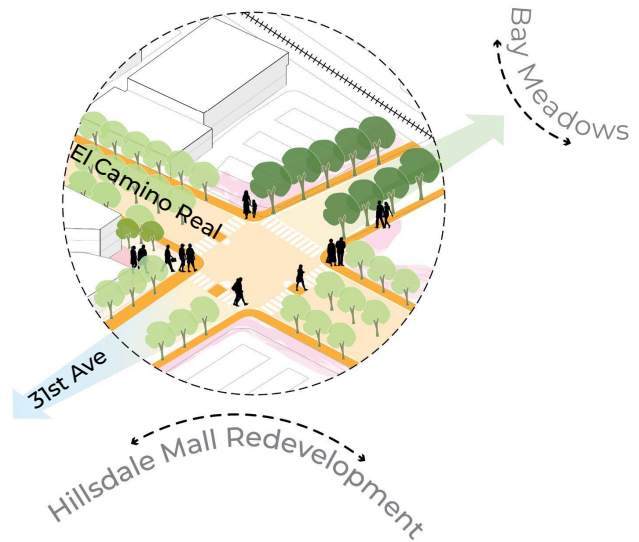
Source: Central El Camino Design Alternative, Fehr & Peers

San Mateo Spurs

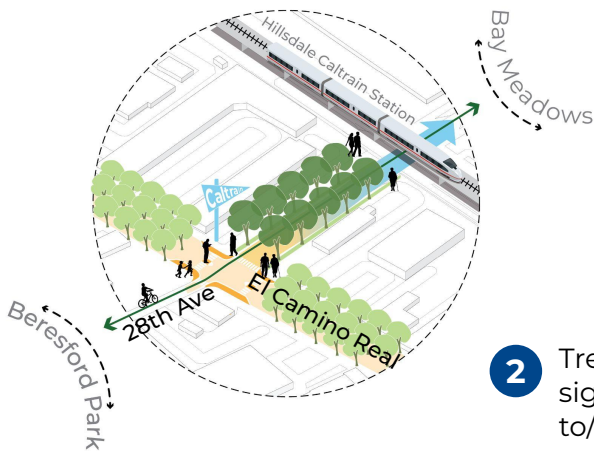
El Camino Real / 25th, 28th, and 31st Ave



- 1 Corner plaza reclaims wide paved space to slow down vehicle turning and direct attention to 25th Avenue retail



- 3 Active corners and pedestrian crossings leading into current and future developments



- 2 Tree canopy and wayfinding signage support the journey to/from Caltrain Station



Coordinated streetscape and corner plaza design
Kirkland, WA
credit: Fora Landscape Architects



Continuous tree canopy and understory
Long Island, NY



Decorative sidewalk treatment to signify intersections at key corridors
San Francisco, CA

Belmont Switch

El Camino Real / Ralston Ave

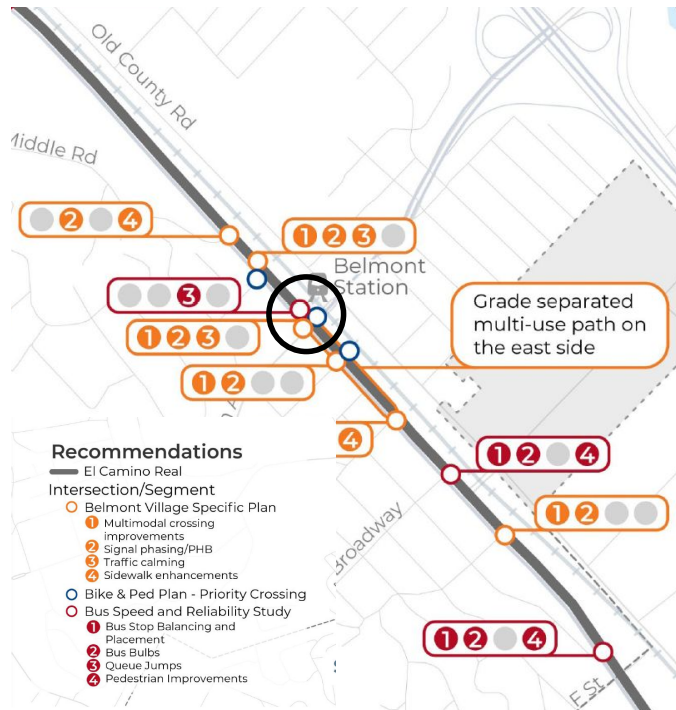


‘Belmont Switch’ optimizes multimodal connectivity at the crossroads of El Camino Real and Ralston Avenue, linking the city’s primary mobility modes and activity hubs: the Caltrain station, SamTrans ECR route, and the Belmont Village retail district.

Focused on transforming this transit node, proposed strategies include quick wins (continuous street tree canopy) and long-term ambitions (dedicated mobility hub and other amenities to support periodic programming on Caltrain parking lot). These design shifts work in tandem to soften the heavy infrastructure, creating a more human-scaled, inviting environment for commuters switching between trains, buses, bikes, cars, and foot travel.

Proposed Improvements

Intersection, pedestrian, and bus recommendations by F&P



Source: Central El Camino Multimodal Plan Needs Assessment, June 2025

Key Strategies



MOVE AND CONNECT
Seamless multimodal Caltrain, dedicated bike, and SamTrans ECR route

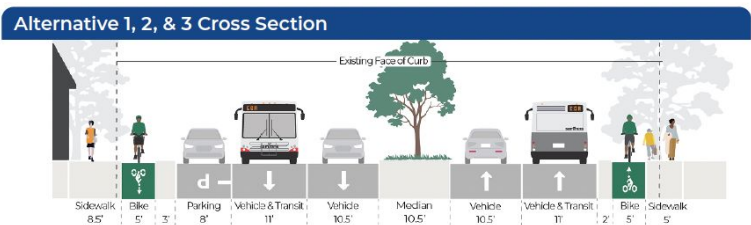


ACTIVATE
Support activation of Caltrain parking lot (e.g. year-round weekly farmer's market)



LET'S GREEN
Understory planting along El Camino Real and Ralston Ave underpass

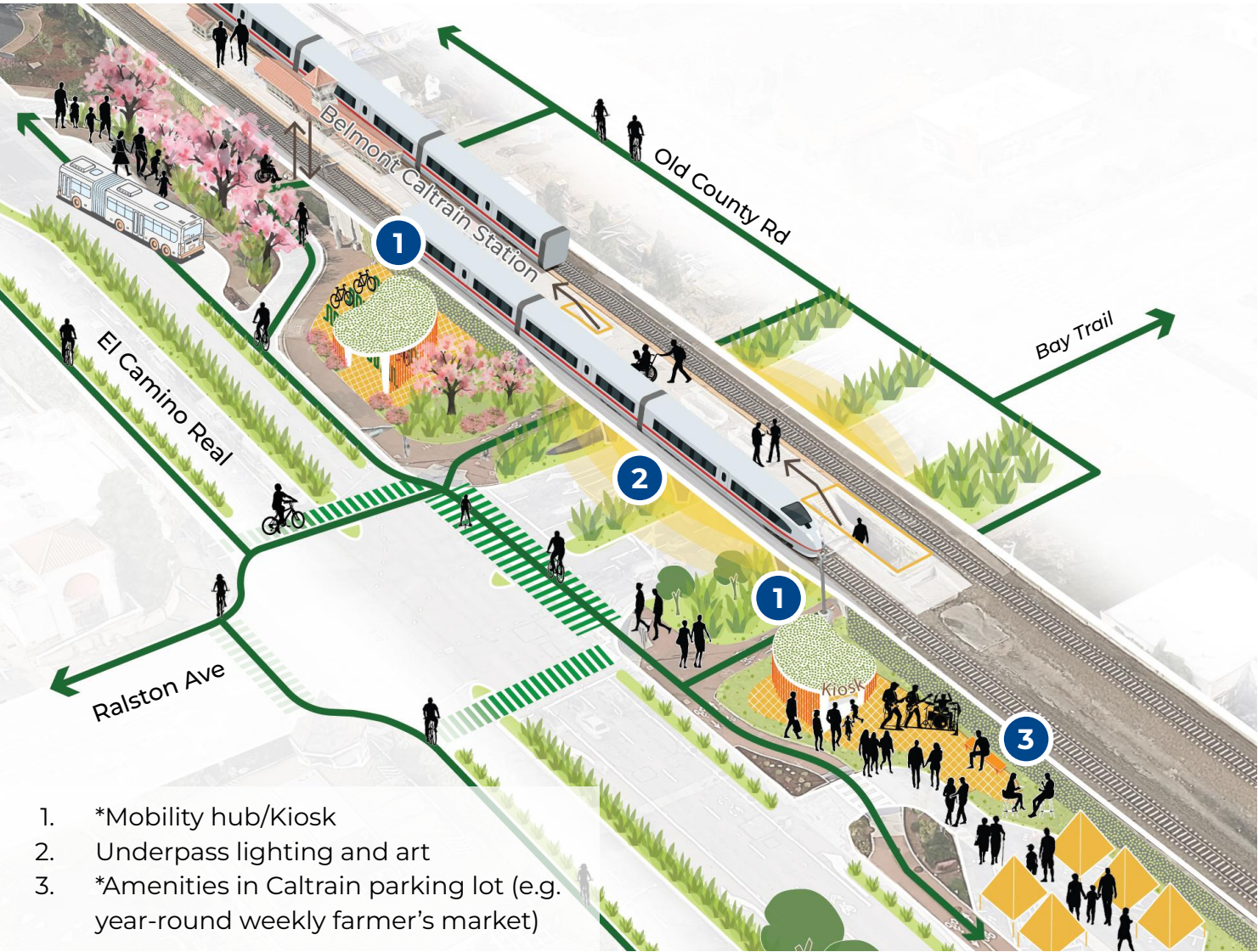
Alternative Cross Section



Source: Central El Camino Design Alternative, Fehr & Peers

Belmont Switch

El Camino Real / Ralston Ave



1. *Mobility hub/Kiosk
2. Underpass lighting and art
3. *Amenities in Caltrain parking lot (e.g. year-round weekly farmer's market)



Mobility hub integrated at key transit node to support mode shifts



Integrating art, lighting, landscaping at underpass
San José, CA



Welcome kiosk and movable furnishing to support temporary programming and activation
San Francisco, CA

* Longer-term ambitions for the city

San Carlos Front Porch

El Camino Real / San Carlos Ave

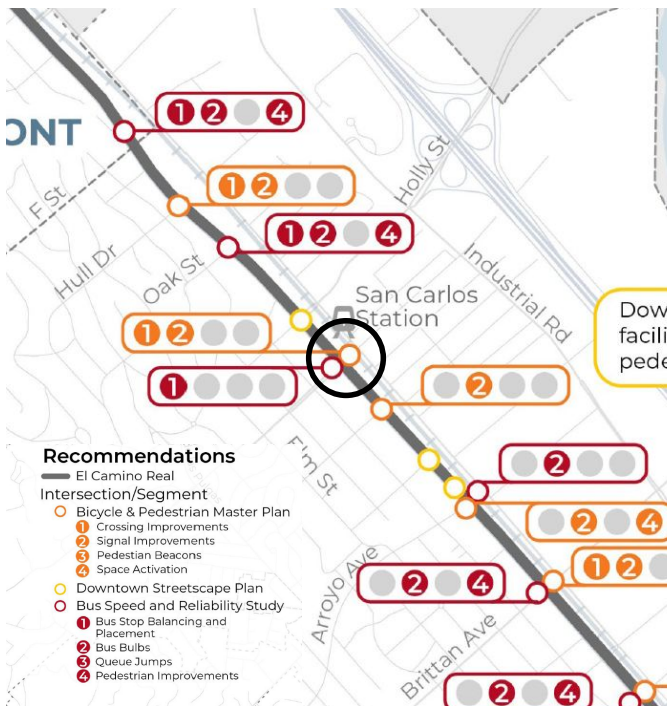


'San Carlos Front Porch' creates a welcoming connection across El Camino Real to the San Carlos Caltrain Station through a highly visible, decorative crosswalk, gateway lighting that frames this critical intersection, and understory planting that enlivens the median and provides a buffer alongside separated bike lanes.

Collectively, these elements support pedestrian and cyclist connections between nearby bus stops and the Caltrain Station.

Proposed Improvements

Intersection, pedestrian, and bus recommendations by F&P



Source: Central El Camino Multimodal Plan Needs Assessment, June 2025

Key Strategies



STORYTELLING CANVAS

Decorative crossing and gateway lighting



MOVE AND CONNECT

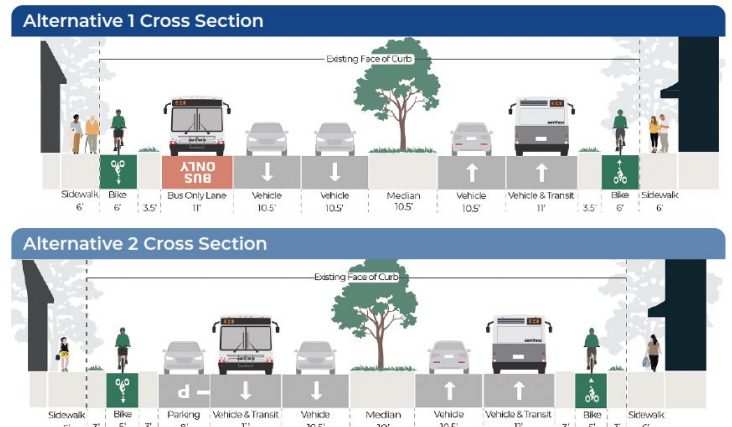
Diagonal crossing and bike infrastructure for Caltrain connection



LET'S GREEN

Understory planting in median and bike buffer

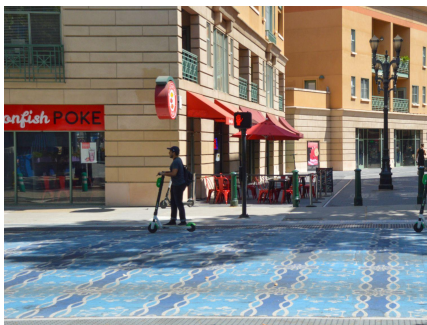
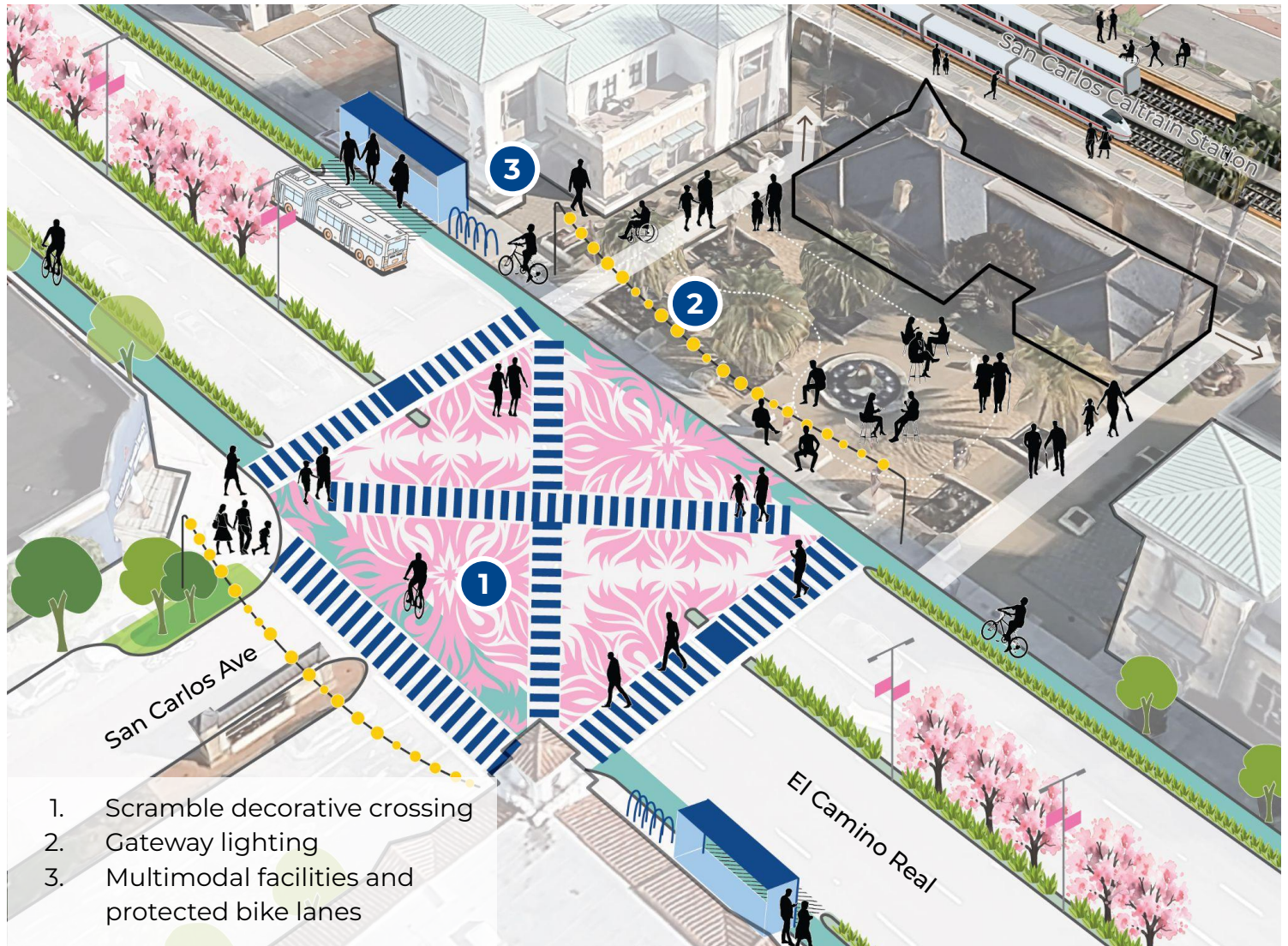
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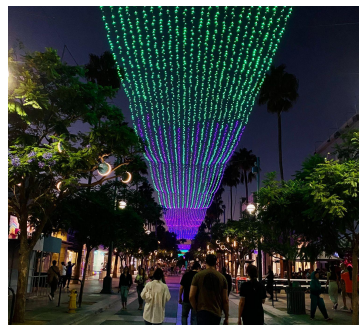
Source: Central El Camino Design Alternative, Fehr & Peers

San Carlos Front Porch

El Camino Real / San Carlos Ave



Decorative crossing connecting key destinations
San José, CA



Lighting art upon entry into downtown
Santa Monica, CA



Streetscape design supportive of safe transition between modes
Seattle, WA
credit: Green Lane Project

Redwood City Portal

El Camino Real / Brewster Ave

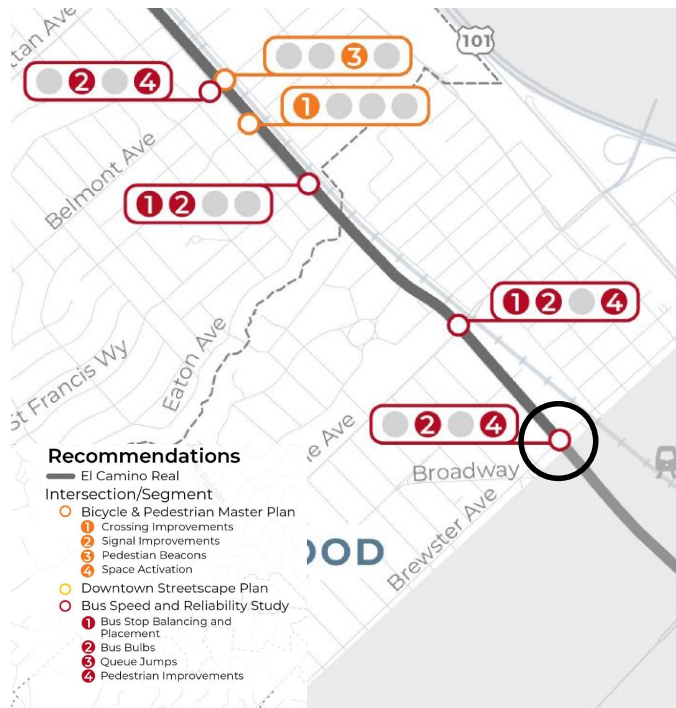


‘Redwood City Portal,’ located at El Camino Real and Brewster Avenue, amplifies the sense of arrival to the city’s new Transit District and elevated Caltrain station.

Given the potential for new development with active ground floors on all corners of this intersection, proposed interventions focus on enhancing the sidewalk through generous, continuous tree canopy. Gateway signage and pedestrian lighting further highlight this important transit transfer point between SamTrans ECR and Caltrain.

Proposed Improvements

Intersection, pedestrian, and bus recommendations by F&P

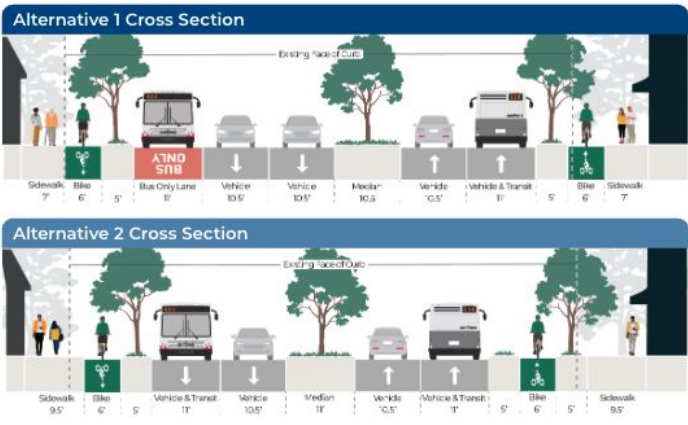


Source: Central El Camino Multimodal Plan Needs Assessment, June 2025

Key Strategies

- ACTIVATE**
Active ground floor retail and gateway signage to the new Caltrain Station
- MOVE AND CONNECT**
Seamless multimodal Caltrain, dedicated bike, and SamTrans ECR route
- LET’S GREEN**
Three rows of trees and bike buffers for shade and comfort

Alternative Cross Section

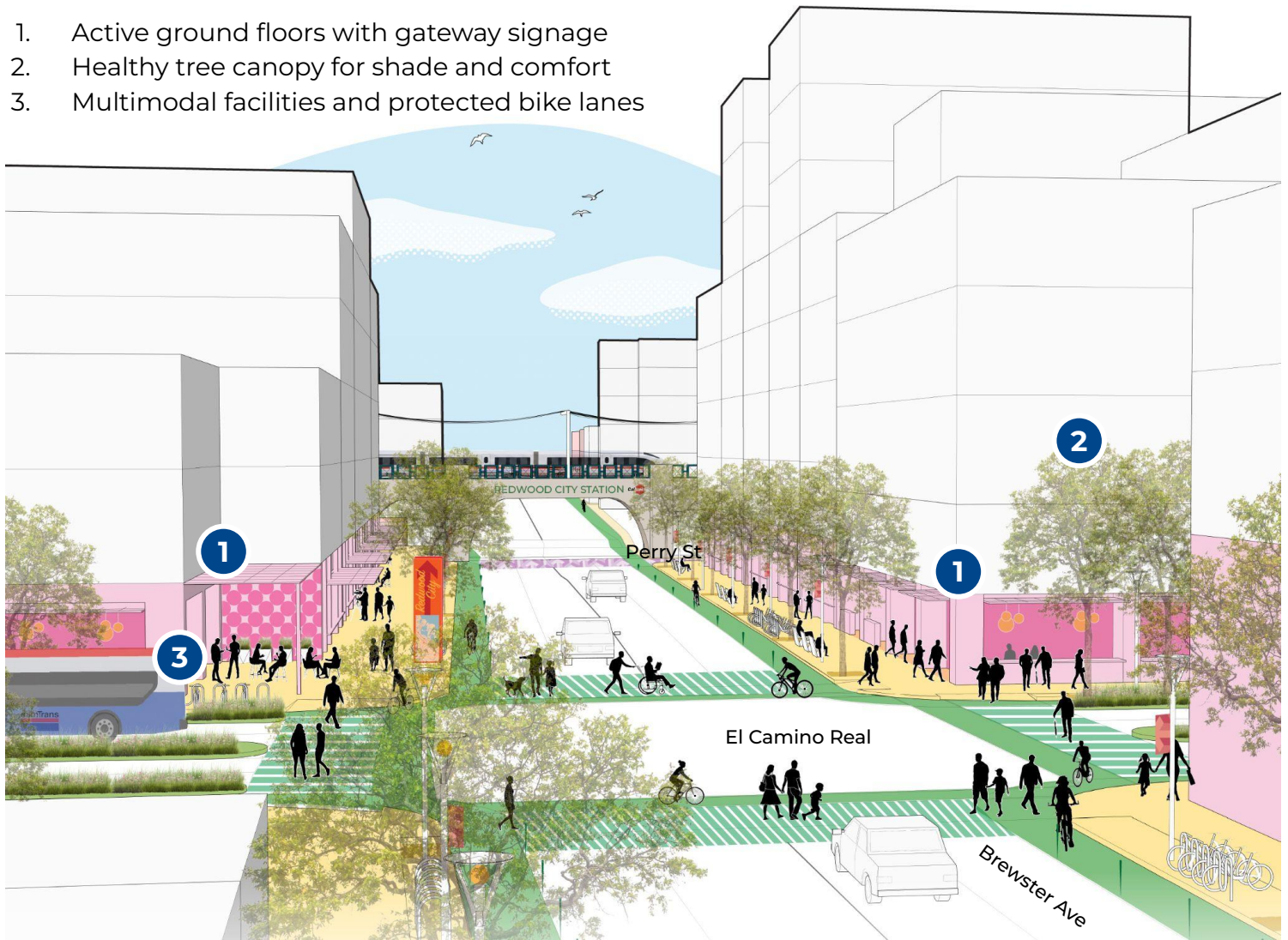


Source: Central El Camino Design Alternative, Fehr & Peers

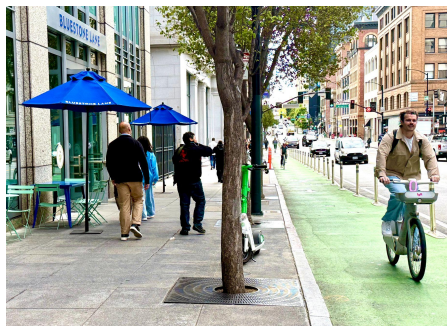
Redwood City Portal

El Camino Real / Brewster Ave

1. Active ground floors with gateway signage
2. Healthy tree canopy for shade and comfort
3. Multimodal facilities and protected bike lanes



Active retail along street corners
Austin, TX



Active ground floor and vibrant streetscape furnishings with tree canopy
San Francisco, CA



Decorative art to enhance multimodal experiences
San Francisco, CA
credit: SFMTA