



# TRANSPORTATION CHAMPIONS



## FAMILIES OF COLOR

Lauryn Ricigliano and her son Asante are a familiar fixture biking around the Monterey Bay area. What began as a way to run errands or go to the park has blossomed into a full fledged community empowerment program.

When Asante was born, Ricigliano looked for a way to exercise that involved her young son and doubled as a mode of transport for their one car family. Biking seemed to meet their needs, but living in Seaside, Ricigliano found it difficult to access the bike path, and traffic could be treacherous if they wanted to take a longer ride out to Asilomar.

Frustrated with what Ricigliano refers to as a lack of "dedicated infrastructure" in Seaside, Ricigliano and her partner, Adisa Vaughn, decided they needed to do something for the community that would encourage other families to start biking within a supportive and nurturing environment. Vaughn became a certified League Cycling Instructor (LCI), and during the course, he noticed the lack of diversity in the LCI group. The couple wanted their program to include and introduce families of color to biking and so they started Families of Color Monterey County (FoCMC) in October 2016. Since then, the organization has grown organically and through social media and has spawned the Facebook group Family Biking Monterey County. Today the Family Biking group has 321 members.

FoCMC's mission is to work through community building and advocacy to make biking affordable and accessible for all families regardless of ethnicity or economic background. FoCMC has held three balance bike camps (November, January and March) where young riders attend with parents and caregivers to learn biking techniques, have helmets fitted, and learn road safety. Their 3 year old son Asante who has become FoCMC's unofficial mascot, likes to set up the orange cones and is always eager to demonstrate his growing skills on a balance bike to participants.

Registration is limited to 20 participants so Vaughn and Ricigliano ensure everyone leaves well educated. Additionally, FoCMC has organized a Black History Month Family Ride and Women's History Month Family Ride, with National Bike Month Family Ride scheduled for May 6.

In the future, Ricigliano would like to see more infrastructure for family friendly bike riding. "We don't want to drive to Santa Cruz with our bikes on a rack in order to go biking," she says. Ricigliano and Vaughn have been encouraged by the positive reception they've received in the community and plan to make FoCMC a nonprofit organization to continue their work.

For more information on upcoming activities visit [facebook.com/FoCMC](https://facebook.com/FoCMC)



## PACIFIC GROVE HIGHWAY 68

In 2015, Virginia Smith, a young mother, spoke at a city council meeting in Pacific Grove about her frustration over not being able to walk her son to school from her home on Sunset Avenue. City council member Robert Huitt knew it was time to respond. "I couldn't keep turning people away and saying there is nothing we can do. We had to at least look into the possibilities," he recalls.



Huitt reached out to the Transportation Agency for Monterey County (TAMC) and Caltrans, and the three agencies agreed to partner on a study exploring how to improve safety and access along the Highway 68 Corridor in Pacific Grove. The Pacific Grove Highway 68 Study focused on 1.8 miles of Sunset Drive and Forest Avenue (from Sunset Drive to Pacific Grove city limits through the Forest Hill neighborhood). The primary question: how could the Highway 68 Corridor better serve all users of the roadway including walkers and cyclists?

The 13 month study, funded through the Sustainable Transportation Planning Grant Program included community workshops, presentations to stakeholder groups, online surveys and corridor-wide mailers to residents and property owners to answer this question.

Study results showed 20% of Pacific Grove residents use the corridor, with the primary concern being safety. Between the curvy road, lack of sidewalks, bike lanes and distracted driving, fear of being hit by a car as a bicyclist or pedestrian on Forest Avenue or Sunset Drive isn't unfounded. During an 11-year period from 2004 through 2014, there were ten collisions with motor vehicles in the corridor that resulted in a pedestrian or cyclist fatality or injury.

The study concluded the ideal plan for safety enhancements and construction would involve transforming the corridor into a "complete street"; a street that's safe for people, not only cars. Existing traffic lanes would be reconfigured and one or two roundabouts potentially included to help manage incoming and outgoing traffic to Pacific Grove.

Huitt reports the concept of making Highway 68 a complete street has been well received. "We believe that if we created a safe place, people would come and use the corridor," he says.

With Measure X now a reality, there is more money for funding the project, and although Huitt knows it could be a decade before the construction is finished, he's adamant about making sure the project doesn't turn into a survey that's put on the backburner. The Study was adopted last fall and staff is preparing to move to the next phase: design and environmental review.



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## FORTAG

Scott Waltz and Fred Watson sit comfortably in camping chairs alongside a small overgrown trail behind the Marina Equestrian Center. If their hard work and planning comes to fruition, they're surveying the future. Here among the chaparral will one day wind a 30 mile paved recreational trail connecting Fort Ord, the Coastal Recreation Trail, Cal State University Monterey Bay, Seaside and Del Rey Oaks. Their project: Fort Ord Recreational Trail and Greenway, better known as FORTAG.

FORTAG began as a collaboration between Waltz and Watson, both professors at CSUMB, about four years ago. Both men are avid bikers, "although Fred races and I just ride," adds Waltz. They wanted to find a way to provide access to the breathtaking open space left over from the closing of Fort Ord and create a permanent asset for the region.

The fully envisioned FORTAG is made up of three loops: The proposed northern loop of the FORTAG trail is a 13 mile route that encircles Marina, and includes three miles of the existing Coastal Recreation Trail. A central loop encircles CSUMB and the 15 mile southern loop of FORTAG circles the city of Seaside and connects Del Rey Oaks and the Coastal Recreation Trail.

FORTAG's official vision is to "connect people to open-space from their homes and workplaces...and act as an artery from which to launch numerous other recreational activities..." Waltz and Watson also imagine the new trail system will be "a green space experience." The trail would open up currently inaccessible vistas winding through various ecosystems and reveal panoramic vistas that even locals aren't aware of.

The advantage to FORTAG, both men agree, is that the land isn't being used and in that sense, they're setting their sights high. "Many people knew about this space, but we were willing to step forward, draw up maps and meet with city councils, TAMC and other partners to make the project happen," says Waltz. Watson's daughter grew up using the Recreational Trail and he hopes that FORTAG will become as familiar and well-used as the Rec Trail. FORTAG has secured \$20 million in funding through Measure X which was approved by Monterey County voters in November 2016. In total, the project is estimated at \$40 million, and could take ten years or more to complete, but Waltz and Watson are hopeful, buoyed by the enthusiastic response they've gotten from the community. FORTAG is full of possibilities to improve quality of life for residents and boost the local economy.



Watson and Waltz are currently working with TAMC to apply for federal funds to construct the first segment of trail.

**For project information, contact [fortag.org](http://fortag.org)**

**For Measure X funding information contact [tamcmonterey.org](http://tamcmonterey.org)**

## BAY VIEW ACADEMY WALK AND ROLL PROGRAM

On Fridays at 7:30am, rain or shine, a group of kids, teachers and parents gather on bicycles at Fisherman's Wharf in Monterey. Parents do a quick homework check and then kiss their kids goodbye. When it's raining, kids wear ponchos to protect their backpacks and the youngest riders steer their bikes gleefully into puddles. Students range in age from kindergarten to fourth grade, and at the helm of this operation is Mindy Surrat. Now known as Bay View Academy's Walk and Roll Program, the group ride began when Surrat started taking her daughter, Siara, and her best friend, Lyla, to Bay View by bike when the girls were in kindergarten. "I didn't want my kids to start expecting car rides, and we've been biking since they were small," she says. "We only have one car, so it just made sense for us to bike."

The Surrat family lives in New Monterey, so their ride to school at Casa Verde and Del Monte is just long enough to get some exercise without being tedious. Soon enough, word caught on about the family's commute, and students started showing up ready to roll on Friday mornings. (The Surrat family bikes 5xs a week). It's been five years and

Walk and Roll continues as a weekly tradition.

Once teachers joined, Surrat reports the group doubled in size. "Some kids thought it was mandatory, like a field trip," she says with a laugh. Now about half the Lower School teachers ride to Bay View.

From Fisherman's Wharf to Bay View Academy, is about 1 mile, so with Surrat leading the group, and a few volunteer moms running behind, the kids are safely ushered down the Recreation Trail, crossing Del Monte. Surrat is vigilant about teaching safe riding practices and the kids are trained well to stop when prompted. The group often passes students biking in the other direction towards the Upper Campus.

In October, Surrat hosted a Pedestrian Rodeo at Bay View, including a pedestrian safety course, stickers, tattoos, and raffle prizes. A Bike Rodeo is scheduled for May 5 at the Lower School and May 12 at the Upper School which will include a bike safety presentation, basic bike maintenance, bike registration, bike fitting, helmet fitting, and bike-power blended smoothies.

Surrat believes once a program like hers is established, it's self sustaining.

The evidence seems to bear out her optimism. When the kids get to Bay View, they park their bikes at the rack and head in to start their days. When the final bell rings, they'll jump back on their bikes to make the journey home.

**For information on how to start a Walk and Roll program visit [tamcmonterey.org](http://tamcmonterey.org)**



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## NORTH FREMONT BIKE AND PEDESTRIAN ACCESS SAFETY IMPROVEMENT PROJECT

Andrea Renny, a 35-year old mother of two, is an associate civil engineer with the City of Monterey but admits that even she was hesitant to bike North Fremont with her young children. Inspired by transportation alternatives from her native Rio de Janeiro, Renny had a hunch that median bike lanes might work in Monterey. Constructed down the center of the street yet completely separate from traffic these median bike lanes would be ideal for the highly trafficked North Fremont Street. "It was my crazy idea. I got out my colored pencils and started sketching. I was interested in attracting that 60% of people who don't bike. I knew if we made it safe, people would come," says Renny.

Officially known as North Fremont Bike and Pedestrian Access Safety Improvement Project, the median bike lanes are about to become a reality by virtue of a \$6.48 million dollar grant received from the State Active Transportation Program.

In addition to a Class IV median bike lane, which allows bike traffic in both directions, a new sidewalk will be installed on the north side of North Fremont. The improvements include bike signals at the intersections, along with curb extensions and American Disabilities Act compliant curb ramps to improve pedestrian access along North Fremont. Audio pedestrian signals will be added, which are especially important for the visually impaired attempting to cross the street safely.



Renny imagines that for events like Monterey County Fair's Kids Day,

families will be able to walk or bike to the event together. The separate bike lane will run from Casa Verde Way to Casanova Avenue. Local businesses along North Fremont are looking forward to attracting more customers by foot and bicycle.

Renny's design for the median bike lane is innovative, and she hopes improvements will not only enhance the Seaside/Monterey area, but will act as a showcase for other cities in terms of urban planning.

Renny also plans for North Fremont to be outfitted with a bus queue jump lane, cutting down commute time for MST buses by allowing a separate lane for buses to bypass cars. The hope is that all traffic will flow more easily on Fremont, no matter which mode of transport is being used.

Renny has been busy meeting with Monterey and Seaside residents to explain the project and get their input. Construction began in December of last year and will be done June 2018. Although the construction may require patience of those living and working in the area, Renny reports that people are excited about the improvements.

## CICLOVIA SALINAS

Ciclovia Salinas, a youth-led grassroots initiative to promote healthy lifestyles, stimulate the local economy and unite a diverse community began in 2012. Inspired by the Ciclovia in Bogota, Colombia, where city streets are closed to cars for the event and opened to bicyclists, walkers, runners, roller skaters, and skateboarders, the local group felt the event would unite the divided sides of Salinas while dispelling myths about youth violence. Led by teenagers who were fed up with the narrative about their community

being a place of gangs and unhealthy lifestyle choices Ciclovia Salinas wanted to rewrite that story. Young people wanted a chance to show the community they were healthy and active, and that they cared deeply about making Salinas a better place for themselves and future generations.



So began Ciclovia Salinas: Where The Streets Are Yours!

Now in its fifth year, Ciclovia happens in October and last fall over 6,000 people attended. Organized by some forty teenage interns with assistance from coordinator Alejandra Silva and Building Healthy Communities, the group starts work in June to plan the event. On Sunday of the Ciclovia weekend Alisal Street is closed to vehicle traffic for 1.5 miles from Main Street to Sanborn Road. People are able to visit local businesses along Alisal, as well as see different fitness opportunities like zumba classes exhibited along the way. Last year the event kicked off with a 5k race.

For a city that suffers from overcrowded housing and lack of open space, Ciclovia Salinas is a day where the streets are open to pedestrians, bicyclists, runners, dogs, families, children, musicians, dancers, skaters and artists. Gaby Siores, a sophomore at Alisal High School, has returned for her second year with Building Healthy Communities. Siores says Ciclovia gives kids a reason to come back to Salinas. She plans to remain part of the program as she continues through school, and thinks even when she graduates she'll come back home to help. "Some people have never even visited Alisal, and Ciclovia gives them a chance to see all the good in Salinas," she says proudly. Siores enjoys the leadership role she's found herself in, while coordinator Silva emphasises that the internships instill a sense of confidence in students that they can carry into their future professional endeavors.

Ciclovia has also called attention to the lack of infrastructure for pedestrians and bicyclists along Alisal, and as a result, Salinas has embarked on the Alisal Vibrancy Plan. City Transportation Planner James Serrano reports of plans for restriping streets and buffered bike lanes with construction projected for completion in July 2018.



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## CASTROVILLE CROSSING

Retired North Monterey County High School band teacher DL Johnson is finally seeing years of planning, collaboration and persistence pay off. Castroville Crossing, a new bicycle and pedestrian overpass that will cross the train tracks next to the high school is well on its way to becoming a reality. The project will close a crucial safety gap for the Castroville community.

Eight years ago, Johnson was horrified when he realized approximately 200 of his students were walking home from North Monterey High School by cutting through the artichoke fields and then crossing the Union Pacific Railroad tracks. Since North Monterey High students were unable to walk safely on Highway 156, they were forced to take alternative routes home. The railroad tracks were notoriously dangerous, and Johnson wanted to give his students a chance to commute to school in an active way. "Castroville is so good about using their current bike and pedestrian trails, I see groups of people out there every day," he says. "I knew if we had a bridge, it would get kids riding their bikes to school," Johnson reports.

First as a concerned teacher, but second as a member of the TAMC bicycle and pedestrian advisory committee, Johnson brought the issue of crossing the fields and the Union Pacific Railroad tracks to TAMC's attention. Working with TAMC, Caltrans, and former County Supervisor Lou Calcagno, Johnson pushed relentlessly for the bridge to be built. The project experienced a range of potential setbacks and detours from threatened de-funding to dealing with farmers who were worried about spraying their fields at access points students were using to get to school. At one point an underground tunnel was even considered, but old infrastructure and safety issues made an overpass crossing more attractive.

The pedestrian bridge will be approximately 1400' long, including 900 feet of pathway on each end, and will connect to the existing trail network. Additionally, a 2000-foot long extension of the bike trail was recently added to the project. The project is underway with pillars clearly visible; giving passers-by an indication of the safety improvements to come. One of the other positive impacts of this project, is that the Castroville Crossing will become another important part of the coastal trail system allowing bikers from Elkhorn Slough or Marina to continue their ride uninterrupted, without having to get off and walk bikes across the fields or brave Highway 156. The second is that the pedestrian crossing is going to have a less than 5% grade, thereby making it multimodal, and welcoming people in wheelchairs or the elderly to use to bridge, too.

In January 2016, TAMC was successful in securing \$6.6 million dollars from the State and the County of Monterey was able to move forward with the project. Now as workers are busy building the new bridge, DL Johnson and students at North County High are looking forward to riding over the bridge late next year.



## VIA SALINAS VALLEY

Via Salinas Valley is a collaborative health initiative between TAMC and Monterey County Health Department designed to provide healthy transportation options for communities in five Monterey County cities: Salinas, Soledad, Gonzales, King City, and Greenfield. As the slogan advertises: "Pathways to Health through Active Transportation," Via Salinas Valley works towards the goals of building pedestrian and bike friendly roads with a strong emphasis on safe routes to school. This \$4.6 million project, which began in 2014, marks the first of its kind in terms of a partnership amongst multiple contributors from public works departments, engineers, project managers, TAMC and Monterey County Health Department all coming together to reach a common goal. It is funded through an Active Transportation Program State grant.

Carmen Gil, Health in All Policies Manager at Monterey County Health Department was inspired by the enthusiasm and cohesion she saw between all the moving parts, "As we kept moving forward, everyone involved started to appreciate the project from a health perspective," she says. "We have so many people who are in a one car family and they just get stuck sometimes," Gil says. "We wanted to get the communities moving, and facilitate opportunities for pedestrians and bikers."

Gonzales, a town that's often overlooked in development opportunities, hit the ground running when the funding came through and started construction last May, aiming to complete as many street improvements as they could before school started in August. Since all three public schools in Gonzales are centrally located, the City knew improvements to the sidewalks would make an immediate difference. Before the improvements it was common to see moms pushing strollers or young kids walking dangerously close to cars. Construction was focused in old town Gonzales, where many of the streets, built in the 1950s and 60s, didn't have access ramps. The City of Gonzales now has 80 new sidewalk access ramps, thanks to Via Salinas Valley.

Salinas and Greenfield broke ground on their construction projects a few weeks ago. Salinas efforts are focused on East Market Street between Williams and Sanborn. The four lane thoroughfare will be trimmed down to two lanes with a center left turning lane to cut down on the distance pedestrians have to cross, along with curb extensions, new traffic lights and buffered bike lanes. These improvements will ensure the safety of schoolchildren at Alisal Middle School and Fremont Elementary School. Construction is slated to be complete as soon as July 2017.

By constructing new infrastructure in these communities, automobile speeds and traffic volumes will be reduced, and more active lifestyles can become a regular part of life in the Salinas Valley. From a health perspective, everyone is hopeful that through the Via Salinas Valley health initiative obesity and diabetes rates will lessen as more families turn to walking and biking for their daily transportation.



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