

# SLOW LAKE STREET

March 21, 2022

Dear Supervisor Chan:

We write as constituents who represent thousands of residents of the Richmond District (and beyond) who support a permanent Slow Lake Street. We are non-professional activists, mostly new to city politics. We joined together because of how much Slow Lake means to us.

First, we thank you for your patience and willingness to listen to all stakeholders. You met with many of us by Zoom on December 13, 2021, and since then you have generously given your time, in one-on-one meetings, to members of our ever-growing movement. We appreciate that.

Today we write to explain:

I. How the MTA’s March 10, 2022 resident survey analysis and California traffic study directly support the continuation of Slow Lake;

II. How a permanent Slow Lake is consistent with your vision on how to determine the future of Lake Street.

\* \* \*

## **I. The March 2022 MTA resident survey and California traffic study support the preservation of Slow Lake and thoroughly disprove opponents’ claims on Slow Lake**

We have maintained that the controversy over Slow Lake Street should be determined by concrete facts, professionally assessed, not by speculation about traffic patterns or guesses about the extent of community support. We now have those facts. The results of the two MTA studies support the preservation of Slow Lake and refute the claims against Slow Lake on virtually every count. Below we address the principal objections to Slow Lake, as they have been expressed at “open house” meetings, press statements, and on social media.

*First*, some opponents of Slow Lake claimed that the project was **favored by a “small, vocal minority of activists from across the city.”**<sup>1</sup> In fact, *two* surveys—in 2020 and 2021-22—both confirm broad majority support. An impressive 5,703 respondents took the survey. 83.5% of Lake Street residents support Slow Lake. A robust majority of 53.4% of Richmond District residents also support Slow Lake. If the survey were a presidential election, it would be a blow-out; no



president has enjoyed that margin of victory since 1984. No demographic group evaluated by the MTA—residents of Lake Street, or the Richmond District generally, or respondents citywide—supported the “No Build” option to close Slow Lake.<sup>2</sup>

*Second*, some opponents asserted that Slow Lake imposes a **hardship on residents of Lake Street**, supposedly by “trapping” them or otherwise impeding their access. Actually, whatever the feelings of individual residents may be, Lake Street neighbors, as a group, love Slow Lake more than any other demographic group considered by the survey.<sup>3</sup>

*Third*, some opponents suggested that Slow Lake **creates a “private street”**—advantaging those who live on it, but unfair to everyone else. In fact, multiple surveys now affirm Richmond District-wide resident support for Slow Lake—and even *greater* support from those living *outside* of the Richmond.<sup>4</sup>

*Fourth*, some opponents alleged that **Slow Lake is “empty.”**<sup>5</sup> In fact, in October 2021, the MTA reported that Slow Lake, on a typical day, has 1,410 pedestrians and 540 bikes—i.e., nearly 2,000 non-car users—and that Slow Lake is one of the “most popular and well utilized Slow Streets implemented.”<sup>6</sup> (MTA table at right.) Those remarkable numbers grow daily, as pedestrians and bicyclists come increasingly to rely on Slow Lake as a safe, enjoyable mode of transport.

AVERAGE COUNTS ON HIGHLIGHTED SLOW STREETS

SLOW STREET	TRAFFIC SAFETY		MOBILITY		DIVERSION IMPACTS
	AVG. WEEKDAY DAILY VEHICLE VOLUME	AVG. WEEKDAY MEDIAN VEHICLE SPEED (MPH)	ESTIMATED PEDESTRIAN ACTIVITY (15 HR TIME PERIOD)	OBSERVED BIKE ACTIVITY (15 HR TIME PERIOD)	ROADWAY VOLUME TO CAPACITY (V/C RATIO)
LAKE STREET	610	13	1,410	540	MODERATE
PAGE STREET	670	12	1,850	660	LOW
SANCHEZ STREET	2,210	15	3,650	120	LOW
SHOTWELL STREET	870	12	2,410	120	LOW

*Fifth*, and perhaps most significantly, opponents insisted that Slow Lake **floods California Street with diverted traffic**. That myth can at last be put to rest. The MTA published a detailed 22-page study on traffic patterns in California Street between 2019 and the present, based on data collection over many months—to learn what impact, if any, is attributable to Slow Lake.<sup>7</sup>

That study found that Slow Lake has *no impact* on California Street traffic. Instead, vehicle traffic on California is effectively identical to what it was in 2019, pre-pandemic. The report found a slight increase in peak morning traffic, as measured by vehicle travel time, eastbound from 28th to Arguello, from 2019—*all of 14 seconds*. And the report identified, as principal cause for this increase, not Slow Lake but a major street change on California Street itself—the safety-promoting “road diet,”

implemented in July 2020, that cut four California through-lanes to two. That is why most of the traffic increase today occurs along the road-diet section of inner California. Meanwhile, afternoon peak travel times on California, west from Arguello to 28th, *decreased* by 35 seconds.<sup>8</sup>



We would add another reason that Slow Lake has not affected California Street traffic: Slow Lake has inspired hundreds of individuals to “mode shift,” i.e., to switch, on certain trips, from driving to biking. Mode-shifting has eliminated *hundreds* of daily car trips on California.<sup>9</sup> This trend should

be encouraged. We don't have Los Angeles's traffic woes, but we will soon enough if we don't figure out how to get more San Franciscans moving without cars.

Finally, there are other possible causes for increased traffic on California Street independent of Slow Lake. As many now return to work, (1) MUNI's California 1AX and 1BX service remains suspended<sup>10</sup> and (2) many still opt out of mass transit (and instead drive) out of COVID concerns.

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## II. How a permanent Slow Lake conforms to your office's vision for the decision-making process

On January 11, 2022, your office issued a press release addressing the future of "pandemic road measures."<sup>11</sup> *First*, your office demanded that city departments provide constituents with a **"fair and transparent public outreach process** that isn't merely checking a box for a predetermined outcome." We submit that, today, no one can deny that that process has occurred. In fact, it may be that no street-level decision in San Francisco history has ever been accorded *more* process.

It began in summer 2020 with an MTA survey of residents and users that sought to gauge how the street was working and community interest. The survey found that 67% of respondents and 84% of users supported making Slow Lake a "permanent feature"—including 73% support from residents on Lake Street itself. The most common activity was "essential travel."<sup>12</sup>



On August 3, 2021, the SFMTA Board of Directors voted unanimously to authorize a permanent Slow Lake, one of four among the thirty or so Slow Streets then-existing.<sup>13</sup>

In late 2021 SFTMA announced a public process on the implementation of the Board's decision to make Slow Lake permanent. It hosted three "virtual open houses"—on December 16, 2021, January 6, 2022, and January 12, 2022. These Zoom meetings, attended by hundreds, allowed for oral or written comment or both. At these events, MTA officials shared ideas, addressed constituent concerns, and explained the decision-making process and timeline. The MTA also presented the community with a "No Build" option to assess whether residents wanted, in effect, to abandon Slow Lake.

That process culminated, in winter 2021, in an online survey—offered in multiple languages and publicized extensively by the MTA through mailed



postcards, neighborhood posters, and online. Residents also heard of the survey through news reports, citizen flyers, and active voices on social media. The survey period ran from December 16, 2021 to January 15, 2022.

The point is that there was an exceedingly elaborate and fair public process that provided for a complete vetting of public sentiment. Stakeholders had months (if not years) to hear arguments, convince each other, and to assess Lake Street for themselves.

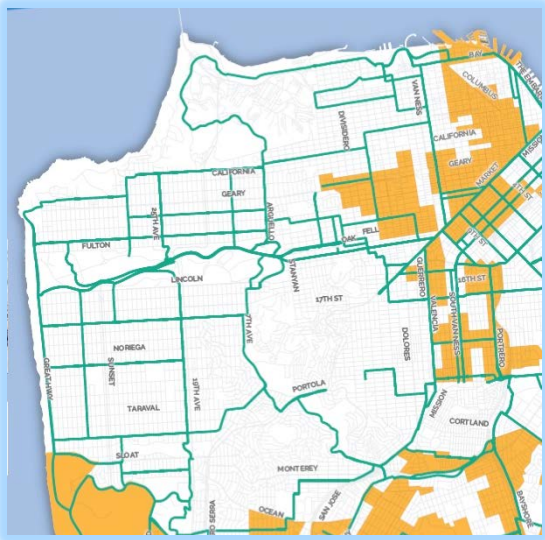
*Second*, your office’s January 11 press release indicated your view that Slow Streets “should be decided on a case-by-case basis after properly **determining the level of support** from residents living in the nearby neighborhood.” That level of support is now irrefutably established.

On March 10, 2022, as noted, the MTA released neighborhood-survey results that had been vetted and analyzed by a professional third-party firm. The results proved, yet again, overwhelming local support for Slow Lake. 83.5% of Lake Street residents support Slow Lake. 53.4% of Richmond District residents, more broadly, support Slow Lake. If the “nearby neighborhood” means people on Lake Street, support is immense (and indeed higher in the 2021-22 survey than in the 2020 survey). If that term also includes streets adjacent to Lake, or the Richmond District generally, there is again resounding majority support. Of note, too, is that 63.9% of *non*-Richmond District zip code residents support Slow Lake.



*Third*, the press release called for a public process that “encourages **compromises between all stakeholders**, rather than a ‘winner takes all’ approach.” We respectfully submit that Slow Lake, as it stands, *is* a compromise. Drivers in the Richmond District enjoy hundreds of streets that operate without restriction. Slow Lake’s supporters simply ask for a *single* east-west corridor on which drivers using the street as a thoroughfare are asked to take another route. This is done in support of the compelling interest in reducing the chances of violent injury or death for pedestrians or bikers, children and seniors being the most vulnerable. Drivers who need access to a particular block—to get home, make a delivery, etc.—remain free to do so. Moreover, Slow Lake is part of a 47-mile

network of two dozen or so Slow Streets that provide safe infrastructure for non-drivers to traverse the city.<sup>14</sup> (Image at left.) Drivers retain unaffected access to the remaining 1,000 miles of San Francisco pavement. In short, the friends of Slow Lake actually ask for very little: that we simply preserve the compromise that now exists.



Vision Zero SF Active Transportation Network

Fourth, the press release expressed the concern that we have “blurred the **line between comprehensive transportation planning and recreation space planning**” and that the city must decide whether slow streets are meant to “provide safer connections for sustainable modes of transportation, or to provide a place to play and recreate.” We understand the concern. We believe that a post-pandemic Slow Lake is essential above all to create safe transportation infrastructure for workers, students, and others to get to work or school, to shop, and so on.

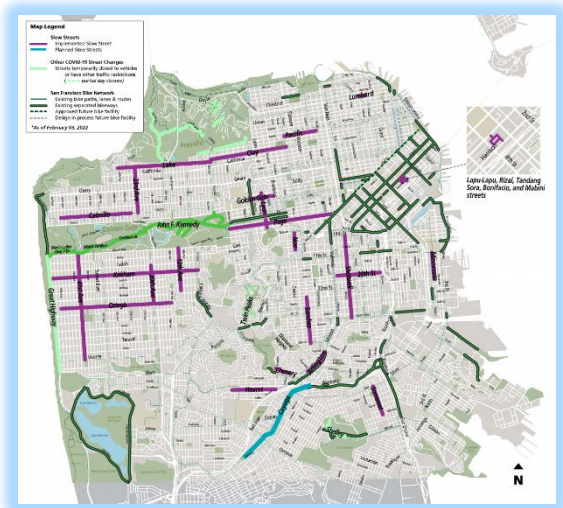
But we respectfully suggest that transportation and recreation are not mutually exclusive goals. An exercising bicyclist or pedestrian does not detract from the safety of a commuting bicyclist or pedestrian. In fact, they reinforce each other’s safety by creating a mass of non-car users that reduce vehicle speed and volume.

The City’s 2021 Vision Zero SF “Action Plan” recognizes that “[m]ore people walking and biking on safe streets helps make it safer for everyone traveling.”<sup>15</sup> Second, there is no distinct line between transportation and recreation. Many, for instance, commute by bike precisely because it includes an element of exercise. Or a family may use Slow Lake as transportation—to get to a recreational activity (beach, restaurant, etc.). Slow Lake gives many users an attractive new option for their locomotion. Cars, by contrast, endanger recreators and commuters alike.

\* \* \*

The 2021-22 survey confirms what was already evident on the ground: that Slow Lake is immensely popular. On a typical day, nearly 2,000 locals and visitors—on foot, paws, bikes, motorized wheelchairs, and other non-car modes of transport—fill Lake Street to commute, gather, and stroll.<sup>16</sup> (MTA figures from October 2021 in chart nearby.) Hundreds now rely on it to get to work and school; some travel from the Richmond District, or to it, and yet others simply through it. It is part of a *network* of healthy, sustainable Slow Streets that takes hundreds of cars off the roads by giving residents the sense of security to bike. If you build it, they will come; and they did. Clearly there was demand for a Slow Lake. And this neighborhood improvement has, quite literally, kept families in San Francisco.

What’s more, the city, recognizing vehicles as the top source of carbon emissions, set a bold goal of 80% of trips by sustainable modes by 2030. If we mean that, we need as many Slow Streets as possible. The switch from driving to biking or walking that Slow Lake encourages has prevented tons of gasoline exhaust from fouling our air—and will continue to do so, if we keep Slow Lake going.



Map of Slow Streets

When it comes to our streets in general, and Lake Street in particular, we have always needed leadership to create a better future—despite the inevitable objections. A driver wrote in a letter to the *San Francisco Examiner* about Lake Street: “[O]ne can no longer drive with any sanity along this pleasant, wide street from Arguello to 28th Avenue...and the silliest part is that while EVERY do-gooder loves the bicyclists, I have yet to see one using the lanes reserved exclusively for them. What a waste of good space!”<sup>17</sup> That letter appeared in 1971—in opposition to the creation of Lake Street’s bike lanes, the first in San Francisco. Today, we cannot imagine San Francisco, or any civilized city, without bike lanes. But those lanes didn’t come easily.

So, too, here. Yet the facts are now in. The March 2022 California Street traffic study refutes claims of unfair burdens on California Street, and two surveys prove popular support. What began as a pandemic experiment has proven, two years on, to be an astonishing success. It is time to move forward. The intensity of the debate over Slow Lake is, we believe, a function of the prolonged nature and ambiguity of the decision-making process. The opposition will fade, we venture to suggest, once permanent features for Slow Lake are finally instituted—features that have been resoundingly demanded by thousands of neighbors, for the benefit of all.



Sincerely,

*Friends of Slow Lake*

David Alexander  
 Roz Arbel  
 Ari Baruth  
 Caroline Bas  
 Jackson Borchardt  
 Sarah Boudreau  
 Michael Patrick Crehan  
 Molly Crehan  
 Alex Darr  
 John von Eichhorn  
 Jonathan Feldman  
 Kevin Finn  
 Jennifer Gosselin  
 Eugene Gregor  
 Trish Gump

Eva Holman  
 Neil Kamireddy  
 James Le  
 Kristel Leow  
 Lisa Lougee  
 Nathan Lovejoy  
 Ruth Malone  
 Reed Maltzman  
 Noel Manerud  
 Ellen Manerud  
 Owen Manerud  
 Zoe Manerud  
 Alan G. Maloney  
 Susan Maloney  
 Vince Meyer

Nancy Mullane  
 David W. Rinaldo  
 Suzanne G. Rinaldo  
 Jonathan Roman  
 Elizabeth Strand  
 Denise O’Sullivan  
 Wesley Tam, Urban Environmentalists  
 Joseph Tartakovsky  
 Tahlia Tartakovsky  
 Lindsay A. Ward  
 James Webb  
 Lauren White  
 Susan Yu

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## SOURCES

<sup>1</sup> See, e.g., blast email from “Neighbors for Reopening Lake Street,” via [openlakestreet@gmail.com](mailto:openlakestreet@gmail.com), dated Jan 2, 2022, at 9:23 a.m.

<sup>2</sup> See SFMTA, “Analysis Report—Lake Street Slow Street Survey Data” (“Slow Lake Survey”) (released March 10, 2022), at page 1 (“unique 5,703 responses”), page 2 (“The “No Build” proposal is not supported by any of the geographic target groups. The majority of 82.2% of Lake Street residents do not support proposal # 4, nor is the “No Build” option supported by 55.0% neighbors adjacent to Lake Street. Comparably 65.2% of respondents in a non-Richmond Neighborhood zip code also do not support this proposal”); page 14 (“The majority of all other geographic respondent groups, Lake Street neighbors, Richmond Neighborhood zip code and all zip code area respondents do not support the “No Build” proposal (55.0%, 54.3% and 65.2%, respectively”). The survey is available at [https://www.sfmta.com/sites/default/files/reports-and-documents/2022/03/lake\\_survey\\_analysis.pdf](https://www.sfmta.com/sites/default/files/reports-and-documents/2022/03/lake_survey_analysis.pdf).

<sup>3</sup> See, e.g., Slow Lake Survey, at page 1 (“83.5% of Lake Street residents expressed their support for at least one of the first three slow street proposals, with only 16.5% supporting the “No Build” proposal”).

<sup>4</sup> See, e.g., Slow Lake Survey, at page 1 (“53.4% of Richmond Neighborhood zip code residents support one of the slow street proposals, compared to an even higher 63.9% of non-Richmond Neighborhood zip code residents”).

<sup>5</sup> See, e.g., Tweet by “honoreebrown,” at 2:08 p.m., Mar. 19, 2022 (self-made video of driver, on an afternoon forecasted for rain, driving down repeated Lake Street blocks and apparently running a stop sign, while passing multiple pedestrians and a biker).

<sup>6</sup> SFMTA, “COVID Street Transformations Recovery Plan – October 2021” (“Recovery Plan”), available at [https://www.sfmta.com/sites/default/files/reports-and-documents/2021/10/covidstreettransformations\\_cs\\_rev\\_102521\\_web\\_0.pdf](https://www.sfmta.com/sites/default/files/reports-and-documents/2021/10/covidstreettransformations_cs_rev_102521_web_0.pdf); see Table on page 27 (on Lake Street, activity over 15-hour measurement period included 1,410 pedestrians and 540 bicyclists); see also *id.* (“Lake, Page, Shotwell, and Sanchez Streets are the most popular and well utilized Slow Streets implemented.”).

<sup>7</sup> The MTA anticipates that the agency will issue another traffic study on California Street, this time by its California Safety Project Team. The MTA does not expect substantially different results regarding traffic patterns. The dates for the data collection for the March 2022 study referenced here appear on page 1 of the study.

<sup>8</sup> See SFMTA, “Lake Slow Street Evaluation – Summary of Findings | February 2022” (“California Street Traffic Study”) (released March 10, 2022):

- page 22 (“The data suggests that the Lake Slow Street has not negatively impacted traffic safety on California Street, even with slight increase in vehicle traffic in certain sections along the corridor”);
- page 20 (“Overall, measured changes are not significant, and any change is relatively modest. Looking at the year over year changes, 2021, a year in which the city started to gradually “re-open” and more activity occurred, vehicle travel time is shown to be either faster or slightly slower to 2019 and 2020. In the AM-Peak, there was a slight increase, roughly about 30 seconds to three fourths of a one minute) in vehicle travel time during the periods where there were differences. In the PM-Peak, 2021 vehicle travel time was faster than both 2019 and 2020”);
- page 21 (“The AM-Peak commute period on California Street is showing longer travel time in 2021 when compared to both 2019 and 2020, but that difference and increase is only about 20 and 14 seconds. In the PM-Peak, vehicle travel time has improved year over year. When compared to 2019 and 2020, travel time has decreased by 47 and 35 seconds”);
- page 21 (table: “Typical Median Vehicle Travel Time Minutes (Arguello Boulevard to 28th Avenue)”);
- at page 8 (“comparing vehicle volumes between pre-COVID-19 to COVID-19 conditions and the implementation of the various street project efforts in the area, vehicle volumes on California Street are not worse or is about the same as before. There is not enough evidence to suggest that the Lake Slow Street partial traffic diversion impacts have negatively impacted vehicle volumes on California Street”);
- at page 6 (“vehicle speeds remain unchanged on California Street and do not show signs of traffic patterns interrupting or degrading current traffic flow and operations”);
- at page 14 (“Since the eastern portions of both California and Clement streets are the areas that indicate signs of any level in congestion impacts, and the western portions have not, even with slower vehicle speeds and slight increase in vehicle volumes, it can be assumed that perceptions of increased congestion

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are due to the changed road. In July 2020, a road diet, which is a reduction in travel lanes, was implemented on California Street between Arguello Boulevard to 18th Avenue”);

- at page 15 (“Since the findings on California and Clement streets indicate that there has not been a significant change in vehicle volume and speed in the eastern portion, the changed roadway conditions from four to two through vehicle lanes is the most likely reason for the current measured V/C ratios and perceptions of increased congestion from the public”).

The California Street Traffic Study is available at [https://www.sfmta.com/sites/default/files/reports-and-documents/2022/03/lake\\_slow\\_street\\_evaluation\\_-\\_findings\\_summary.pdf](https://www.sfmta.com/sites/default/files/reports-and-documents/2022/03/lake_slow_street_evaluation_-_findings_summary.pdf).

<sup>9</sup> The importance of Slow Streets to mode-shifting is recognized in the 2021 Vision Zero “Action Plan.” *See, e.g.*, page 20 (discussing “[m]ode shift to sustainable trips, including tools such as congestion pricing and Slow Streets”), available at [https://www.visionzerosf.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/VZSF\\_AS\\_111021\\_spreads-FINAL.pdf](https://www.visionzerosf.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/VZSF_AS_111021_spreads-FINAL.pdf).

<sup>10</sup> *See* <https://www.sfmta.com/routes/1ax-california-b-express-suspended> (last accessed March 17, 2022); <https://www.sfmta.com/routes/1bx-california-b-express-suspended> (last accessed March 17, 2022).

<sup>11</sup> “Press Release: Sup. Chan’s Statement on the Future of Pandemic Road Measures,” Jan. 11, 2022, available at <https://sfrichmondreview.com/2022/01/11/press-release-sup-chans-statement-on-the-future-of-pandemic-road-measures/> (last accessed March 18, 2022).

<sup>12</sup> SFMTA, “Lake Slow Street Project,” available at <https://www.sfmta.com/projects/lake-slow-street> (last accessed March 13, 2022) (see graphic table).

<sup>13</sup> SFMTA Board of Directors Resolution No. 210803-095 (Aug. 3, 2021), available at [https://www.sfmta.com/sites/default/files/reports-and-documents/2021/08/8-3-21\\_mtab\\_item\\_11\\_slow\\_streets\\_extension\\_resolution.docx\\_.pdf](https://www.sfmta.com/sites/default/files/reports-and-documents/2021/08/8-3-21_mtab_item_11_slow_streets_extension_resolution.docx_.pdf).

<sup>14</sup> *See* SFMTA, “Slow Street Evaluation Summary—Summer 2021,” available at [https://www.sfmta.com/sites/default/files/reports-and-documents/2021/09/slow\\_street\\_evaluation\\_report\\_final\\_0.pdf](https://www.sfmta.com/sites/default/files/reports-and-documents/2021/09/slow_street_evaluation_report_final_0.pdf).

<sup>15</sup> City and County of San Francisco, “Vision Zero SF Action Strategy 2021-2024,” [https://www.visionzerosf.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/VZSF\\_AS\\_111021\\_spreads-FINAL.pdf](https://www.visionzerosf.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/VZSF_AS_111021_spreads-FINAL.pdf), at page 34.

<sup>16</sup> SFMTA, “Recovery Plan,” Table on page 27 (on Lake Street, activity over 15-hour measurement period was 1,410 pedestrians and 540 bicyclists), available at [https://www.sfmta.com/sites/default/files/reports-and-documents/2021/10/covidstreettransformations\\_cs\\_rev\\_102521\\_web\\_0.pdf](https://www.sfmta.com/sites/default/files/reports-and-documents/2021/10/covidstreettransformations_cs_rev_102521_web_0.pdf).

<sup>17</sup> Andy Thornley, “Marty MacIntyre and the Lake Street Bike Lanes,” available at [https://www.foundsf.org/index.php?title=Marty\\_MacIntyre\\_and\\_the\\_Lake\\_Street\\_Bike\\_Lanes](https://www.foundsf.org/index.php?title=Marty_MacIntyre_and_the_Lake_Street_Bike_Lanes) (last accessed March 17, 2022).