

CITY OF MENDOTA

SAFE ROUTE TO SCHOOLS MASTER PLAN

EXISTING CONDITIONS

Memorandum

JUNE 21, 2022

Overview

The City of Mendota is a rural agricultural community located in Fresno County, California. The City's relatively dense, compact design make it well-suited for alternative transportation methods, beyond the personal automobile. At the same time, however, street design in the City is not always conducive to safe pedestrian or bicyclist activity. Increasing alternative transportation options is especially important for students, who may not yet be able to drive themselves to and from school. Increasing the safety of routes to school creates more options for families trying to get students to school and improves the transportation network as a whole for all users.

This memorandum examines the existing infrastructure, policies, and programs in place in the City of Mendota. It will be used to inform the recommended improvements and help prioritize improvement implementation in the Safe Routes to School (SRTS) Master Plan.

Existing Setting

The 2020 United States Census recorded a population of 12,595 in the City of Mendota. Approximately 39% of this population is 18 years old or younger. According to the California Department of Finance, the City population is growing by around 2% each year. There are 2,838 households in Mendota, with an average of 4.29 people per household. 47.5% of units are owner-occupied, and monthly housing costs with a mortgage are on average approximately \$1,254. Monthly average rents are \$764.

The City of Mendota is primarily Hispanic or Latino, who account for 96% of the population. 3.6% of the population is White alone and not Hispanic or Latino, though in total 35.9% of the population is White. 0.3% of the population is Black or African American and 0.1% of the population is Native American. 88.5% of households use a language other than English at home.

The following summarizes existing conditions and considerations for: environmental equity, Mendota Unified School District (MUSD), and the transportation infrastructure system within the City of Mendota.

Environmental Equity

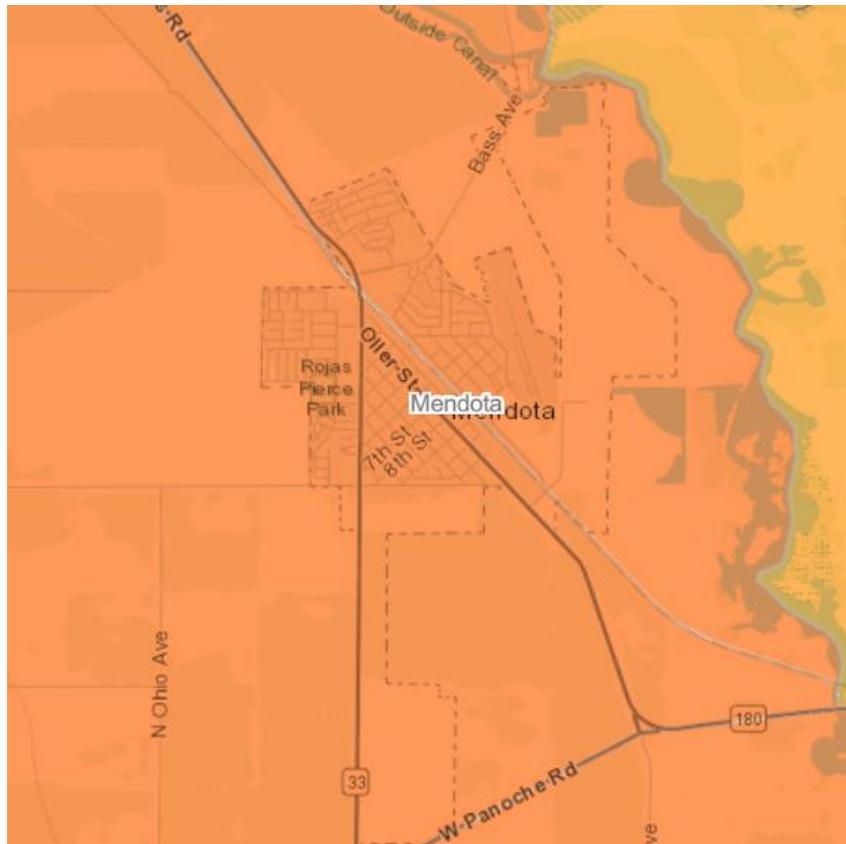
CalEnviroScreen is a helpful tool for identifying disadvantaged and overburdened communities. This can also support the prioritization process when implementing recommended improvements. Because CalEnviroScreen is organized around census tracts, it tends to paint a broader picture for communities comprised of only a few tracts. However, it can still be beneficial to understand the environmental challenges a community faces when identifying recommended improvements.

Mendota is covered by two census tracts, which are both in the 80-90 CalEnviroScreen percentile range.¹ Both tracts are in the 50-60 percentile range for pollution burden, but in the 90-100 percentile range for disadvantaged population characteristics. This high score demonstrates that Mendota experiences a high burden of negative environmental effects compared to the rest of California.

CalEnviroScreen

CalEnviroScreen 4.0 is the newest iteration of the California Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment's tool for identifying disadvantaged and overburdened communities. It uses several indicators to determine this, including exposure to pollutants, environmental effects, the presence of sensitive populations, and socioeconomic factors. Data is provided by census tract.

Figure 1: CalEnviroScreen 4.0 Mapping



¹ Using the scores calculated through the CalEnviroScreen tool, all census tracts are ordered from highest to lowest and assigned a percentile rank. The ranking for each census tract demonstrates the tract's degree of burden relative to the rest of the state's census tracts. Areas with higher scores experience a higher pollution burden than areas with lower scores.

Schools

Schools in Mendota are operated by the Mendota Unified School District (MUSD). The district operates three elementary schools, a junior high school, a high school, and a continuation high school. Washington Elementary School is located in the central grid of the City, surrounded by residential and commercial uses. McCabe Elementary School is located on the west side of State Route (SR) 33, surrounded by residential and recreational uses. Mendota Elementary School, located on the north side of the City, was originally designed to be a walkable school campus, and thus includes limited vehicular traffic access points. The school is surrounded by residential uses, with some health services uses directly adjacent as well. While each of the schools were originally intended to serve the students that live nearby, MUSD has since restructured its elementary school program to meet the needs of the growing number of students in Mendota. Each campus serves a certain range of grades, with not every school offering every grade each year, meaning students are likely to attend an elementary school located outside the neighborhood in which they live for at least a portion of their primary school career. Mendota Junior High School and Mendota High School are located on adjacent campuses on the south side of the City, with residential uses located on the north side of Belmont Avenue, adjacent to the schools. All MUSD students attend these schools for junior and senior high school. Mendota Community High School is located on the west side of SR 33, near McCabe Elementary School. It serves as the campus for the high school continuation program. School locations can also be seen in **Figure 5: Planned Improvements**.

The focus of the Safe Routes to School Master Plan will be on the three elementary schools, junior high, and high school. Aerial imagery of these five school locations are included as attachments to this memo. These schools are primarily located on major streets which serve as entryways to the City. Only Mendota Elementary School is located on a collector street, rather than an arterial. The rest of the schools (McCabe Elementary School, Washington Elementary School, and the junior and senior high schools) are located on arterials, which serve significant levels of vehicular traffic. This can cause conflicts between pedestrians, bicyclists, and drivers that can create dangerous interactions during the journey to school. More detail on roadway infrastructure can be found below in **Roadway Network**.

Street Types

Arterial streets accommodate high traffic volumes and are the major circulation routes throughout the City. Collector streets provide access from arterials to local streets and accommodate lower traffic volumes than arterials. They have lower speed limits than arterials but still carry a significant portion of intra-city traffic.

Transportation Infrastructure

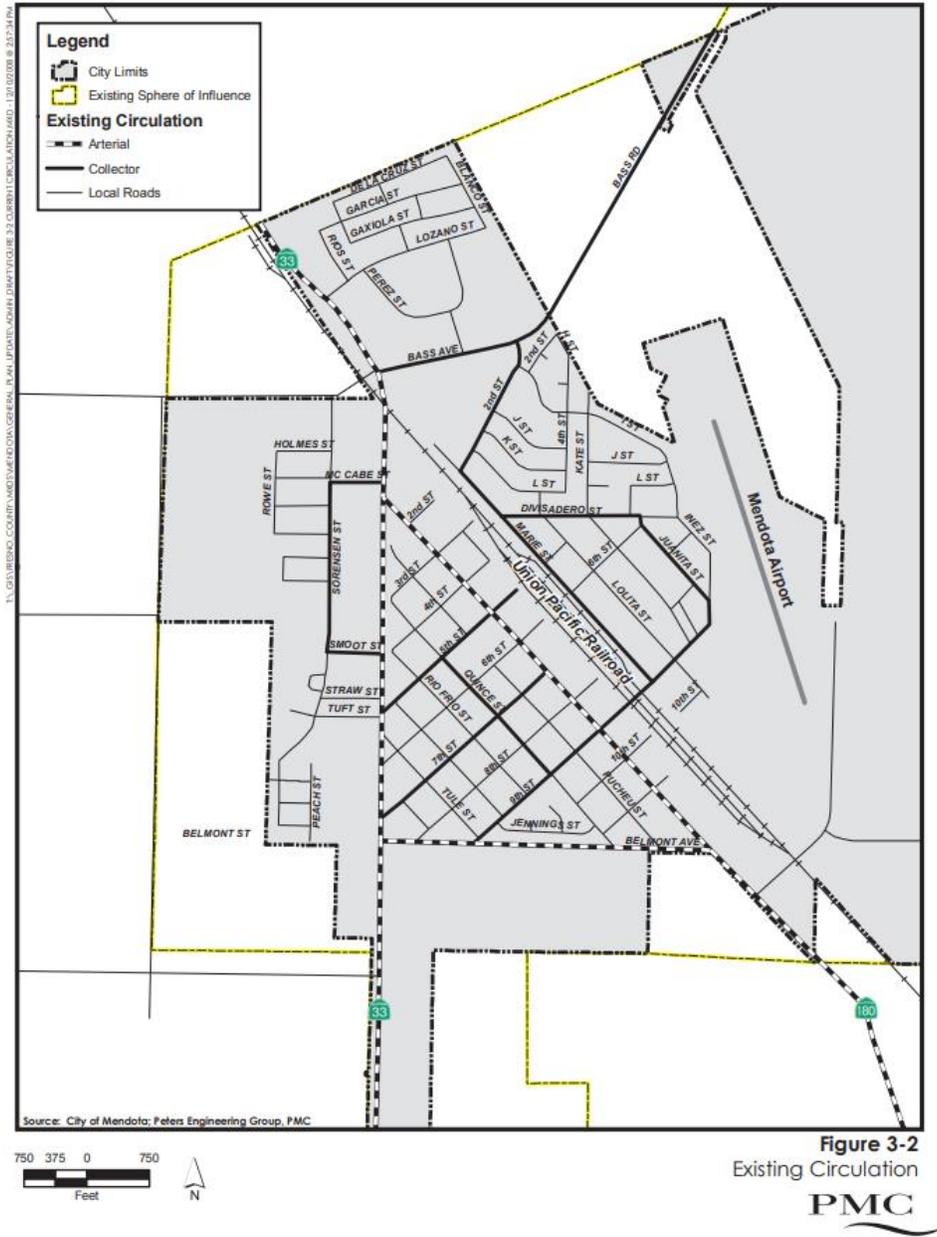
This section describes the pedestrian, bicycle, and transit infrastructure pieces that make up the physical landscape of the City of Mendota. Understanding where infrastructure networks are present and, more importantly, where there are gaps helps identify where future improvements are needed most. It should be noted that not all roads in Mendota are under the jurisdiction of the City. Some roads are controlled by the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans), which requires a different process for making improvements to the street. Additional coordination and approvals with the agency are necessary to make improvements to a Caltrans right-of-way.

Roadway Network

Two agencies have jurisdiction over roadways in the City of Mendota: the City itself and Caltrans. There are three streets designated as arterials in the City of Mendota, which accommodate the highest traffic volumes and are major circulation routes through the City. Two of these arterials, SR 33 and SR 180, are

considered Caltrans right-of-way, meaning they are operated and maintained by the state agency rather than the City. The City has an agreement with Caltrans whereby the City maintains the lighting and trees along the right-of-way and Caltrans maintains the physical facilities of the street. The remaining arterial is Belmont Avenue, which connects the two state routes at the southern end of the City. While the streets all serve the same purpose within the circulation network in Mendota, right-of-way under Caltrans jurisdiction requires a different process for improvements than roads under City jurisdiction. Making safety improvements on SR 33 or SR 180 will require greater coordination and approvals with Caltrans. Mendota street designations can be seen in **Figure 2: City of Mendota Circulation Diagram**.

Figure 2: City of Mendota Circulation Diagram

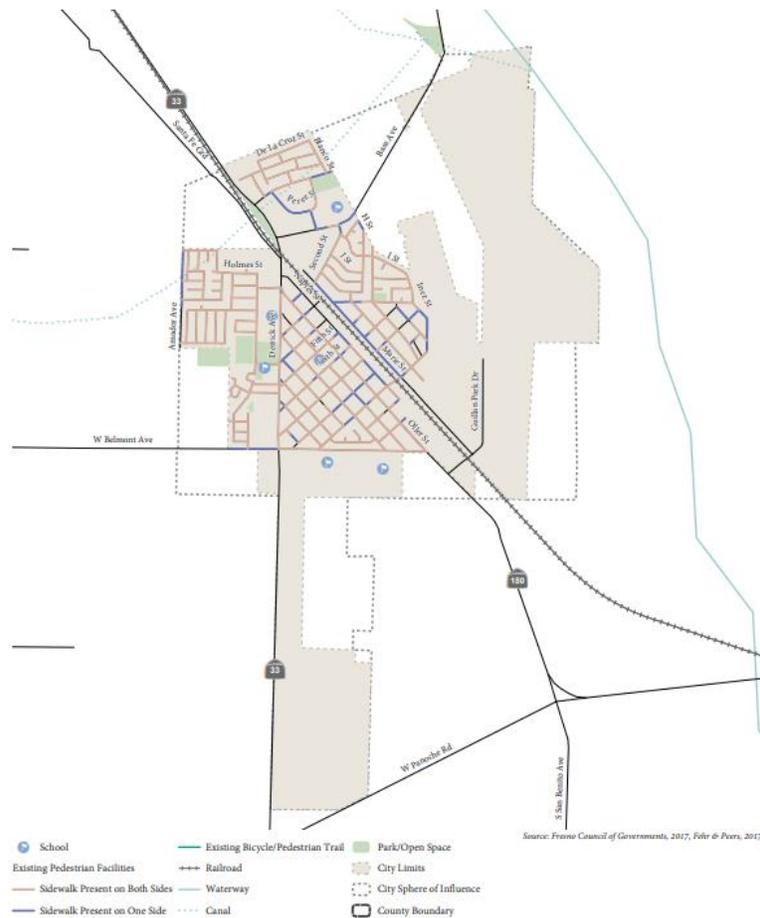


Pedestrian Facilities

Sidewalks are the most significant infrastructure piece when considering if walking is a feasible transportation option. Sidewalks should be wide enough to accommodate pedestrian traffic levels, as well as mobility aids such as wheelchairs. Curb extensions/bulb-outs at crossings can increase safety, along with pedestrian islands and signals. Ramps are also necessary for sidewalks to be feasible for people who use mobility aids and can also be used to enhance pedestrian safety when properly designed.

Sidewalks are present throughout most of the City. While there are some gaps where sidewalk is not present on one side of the street, there are very few road segments where sidewalk is not developed on at least one side. Gaps that do exist last less than one block. Mapping of the sidewalk network was completed by Fresno COG in 2017 and can be seen in **Figure 3: Existing Pedestrian Facilities**. Road segments with no sidewalk are shown in black, though it should be noted that some improvements have been made since 2017 to fill in those gaps. Directional crossing ramps, which direct foot traffic onto the street people are intending to cross rather than into the middle of the intersection, are ideal for pedestrian safety. These are present at intersections that have been more recently improved. However, most intersections in Mendota have single pedestrian ramps, where one ramp is located at each corner and used to cross either of the intersecting streets. These ramps direct pedestrians towards the middle of the intersection where traffic is moving, which can pose a risk to pedestrian safety.

Figure 3: Existing Pedestrian Facilities



Bicycle Facilities

Bike lanes are vital to creating a safe biking environment. Protected bike lanes, with bollards or other barriers between vehicular and bicycle traffic, are the safest option, but other lane types may also be appropriate depending on the type of traffic and vehicular speed on the street. However, bike lanes are not the only bike infrastructure necessary to make it a viable transportation method. Necessary support infrastructure primarily includes bike parking at key destinations, in this case at the schools. Lockers and showers may also be helpful support infrastructure, though may not be as significant in the context of safe routes to school.

Existing bicycle infrastructure in Mendota is extremely limited. The primary bike lane in the City is a striped lane on both sides of Belmont Avenue that is present only in front of the middle and high school campuses, providing a total of 1.2 miles of bike lane in the City. This bike lane does not connect to a wider network of lanes, and thus does not provide substantial safety benefits for students who may be biking to these campuses. Bike parking is present at all of the Mendota Unified School District schools. Mapping of the existing bicycle facilities in Mendota was completed by Fresno Council of Governments (COG) in 2017 and can be seen in **Figure 4: Existing Bicycle Facilities**.

Bike Lanes

There are four classifications of bike lanes:

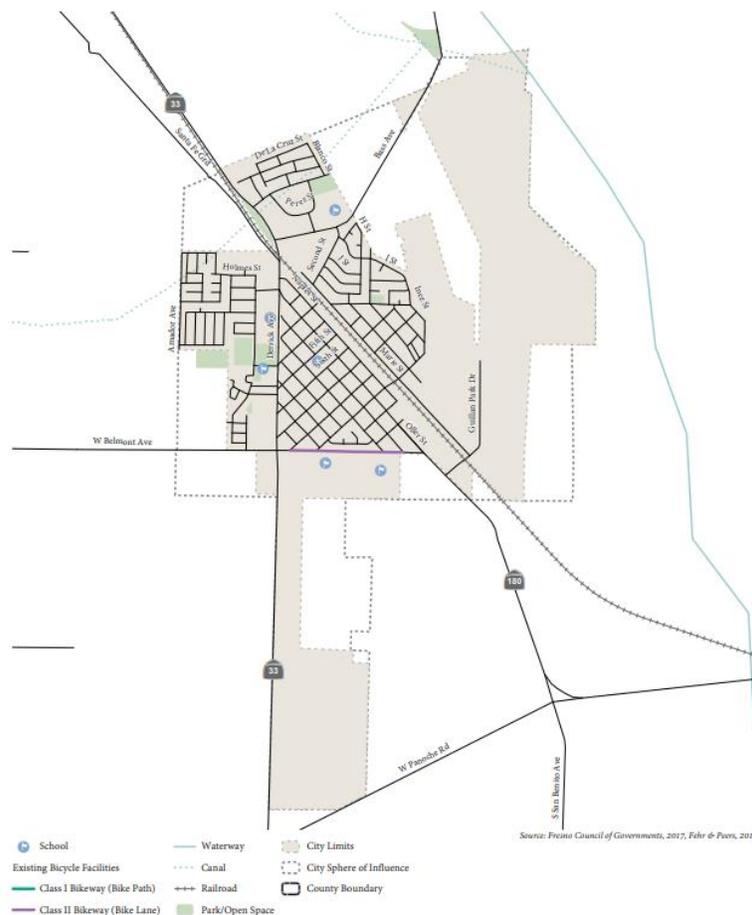
Class I: Completely separated right of way for bicycles and pedestrians, such as a paved multi-use trail

Class II: On-street striped lane for one-way bicycle travel

Class III: Shared on-street facility for bicycles and vehicles, marked with signage

Class IV: Physically separated bicycle facilities that are distinct from the sidewalk, such as an on-street bike lane separated from vehicle lanes by bollards or street parking

Figure 4: Existing Bicycle Facilities



Transit

Transit in Mendota is operated by Fresno County Rural Transit Agency. The Westside Inter-City Transit line stops at three bus stops in Mendota, traveling from Firebaugh to Fresno and vice versa. The bus comes through once in the morning and once in the afternoon for each direction, meaning the bus stops a total of four times at each of the three bus stops. As such, it is not a viable transportation option to schools. Instead, school bussing is operated by the school district through the transportation department.

CalVans facilitates carpools in the region by providing vans to groups of employees wanting to travel together. However, CalVans requires people to operate their own vans, meaning a CalVans carpool is not a feasible option for students trying to get to school.

MUSD school bus policies are discussed in the **MUSD Policies** section below, under **Existing Programs and Policies**.

Planned Improvement Projects

There are two traffic calming and safety improvement projects underway in Mendota. Both projects have completed design and will have begun construction by summer 2022. The first, the Mendota Junior High School Safe Route to School Project, will improve the intersection of Belmont Avenue with 9th Street and Tule Street, directly across from Mendota Junior High School. The intersection will be updated to reflect the improvements at the intersection of Belmont Avenue and Quince Street, most importantly adding a Pedestrian Rapid Light Beacon (PRLB) to alert drivers to pedestrian activity.

The second project was initiated by Caltrans, in coordination with the City, and includes a slurry seal and road diet project on both SR 33 and SR 180. The road diet will reduce the number of travel lanes along these streets, resulting in one travel lane in each direction, a two-way turn lane, bike lanes, and street parking for nearly the entire length of the streets between Belmont Avenue and their intersection at the north end of the City. The project will also add PRLBs to all marked crosswalks along the improved road segments.

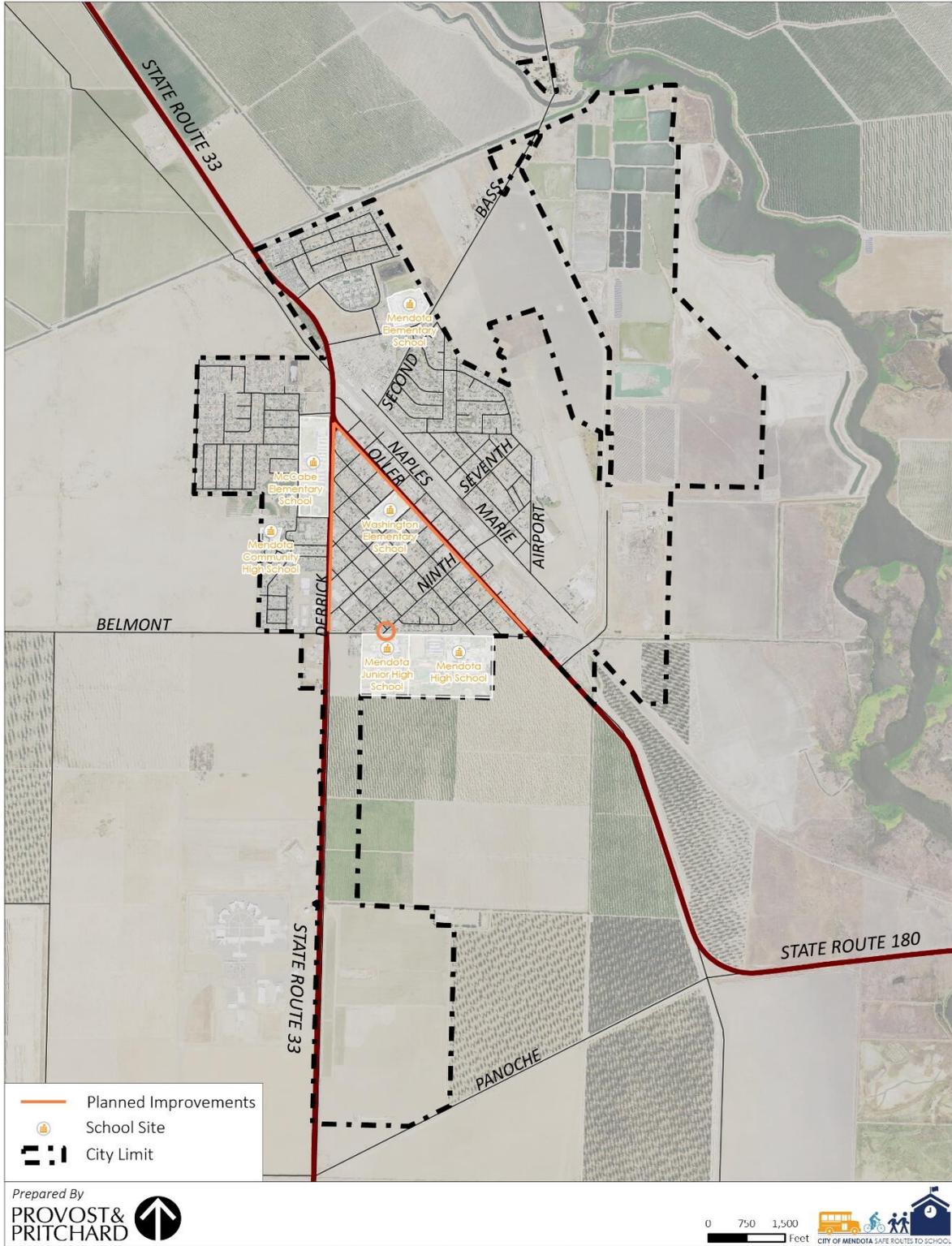
An additional Caltrans project is planned along the same SR 33 and SR 180 road segments to make improvements to the pedestrian curb ramps. This project does not have an official start date, nor have project specifics, including design, been finalized. A Regional Safety Plan was prepared by Fresno COG in 2021 which identified potential safety improvement measures based on what types of traffic incidents they can help prevent. However, improvements for specific intersections were not identified as part of this plan. Similarly, the Multi-Jurisdictional Local Road Safety Plan, prepared by Fresno COG in 2022, provides a breakdown of collision incidents in the City and recommends engineering strategies to reduce these incidents, but does not specify improvements for specific intersections or road segments.

Traffic Counts

As part of the Mendota Junior High School Safe Route to School Project, traffic counts were collected prior to project construction, with additional counts scheduled to be conducted after completion. The study includes morning and afternoon counts on a regular school day, with morning being from 7 to 9 AM and afternoon being from 3 to 6:30 PM. In the morning, 65 pedestrians crossed 9th street while 139 crossed Belmont Avenue. In the afternoon, 86 crossed 9th street while 140 crossed Belmont Avenue. In the morning, one biker crossed 9th street and two crossed Belmont Avenue. In the afternoon, one biker crossed 9th street and nine used the bike lane on the south side of Belmont Avenue.

See **Figure 5: Planned Improvements** for the location of all planned improvements summarized above.

Figure 5: Planned Improvements



Existing Programs and Policies

This section describes the programs and policies from the City and school district that relate to transportation safety and safe routes to school. The City of Mendota encourages programs that increase transportation safety. The City also has policies in its General Plan that facilitate transportation safety best practices. MUSD also has policies in place that discuss transportation to school and school facilities. Caltrans operates several programs, including grant programs, that are relevant to the implementation of selected transportation safety improvements, especially on Caltrans right of way (i.e., SR 33 and 180). Caltrans policies and standards also relate to how streets are designed. Although Caltrans policies and programs should be considered during transportation improvement projects, they are not discussed in more detail here due to their broad range of topics and applicability.

City Programs

While the City of Mendota does not currently operate any programs that regularly work to increase transportation safety for school children, it does encourage one-time events and the establishment of such programs. One-time events are hosted relatively regularly, with the cooperation of the City, to help encourage safe, alternative transportation around the community, including the use of such methods to get to school. Recently, the City worked with The Wonderful Company and Teens That Care to host an event that offered free bicycle helmets to children, along with educational materials about bicycle and street safety. This event was typical of other one-time events that occur in Mendota, which involve partnerships between the City, Mendota Unified School District, community groups, and law enforcement.

The 6 Es

The Safe Routes to School program is organized around principles known as the 6 Es. They are:

- *Engineering,*
- *Education,*
- *Encouragement,*
- *Enforcement,*
- *Equity, and*
- *Evaluation.*

These principles are intended to remove barriers for students walking or bicycling to school. Existing programs and policies will inform recommendations for each of these categories moving forward in the process.

City Policies

The General Plan discusses the provision of adequate school sites to meet the educational needs of students in the City. Goal LU-21 also requires, “safe and efficient access to school facilities.” This goal is connected to one policy, Policy LU-21.1. It states that, “the City shall develop a Safe Routes to School Program which includes a coordinated development of trails and bicycle lanes, where possible, to provide improved access to school and recreational facility locations.” This goal and policy establish the need for transportation safety features, especially in relation to schools, and have helped facilitate the development of this Safe Routes to School Master Plan. Goals and policies elsewhere in the General Plan help establish the strategies for improving safety included in the Plan.

The City’s General Plan actively encourages alternative transportation, including walking and biking. The Plan includes several goals and policies related to providing safe and comfortable opportunities for these transportation modes. These goals and policies include:

- **Goal C-3.** Provide a City-wide system of safe, efficient and attractive bicycle and pedestrian routes for commuter, school and recreational use.

- **Policy C-3.1.** Increase the City’s network of bicycle paths as viable alternatives to vehicular transportation, especially for access to neighborhoods, commercial centers, schools, parks and other key activity centers.
- **Policy C-3.2.** Explore opportunities to install bicycle and pedestrian paths that provide connections to surrounding neighborhoods, parks and open space areas.
- **Policy C-3.3.** Emphasize use of pedestrian pathways and sidewalks as an integral part of the City’s circulation system.
- **Policy C-3.5.** Require bicycle and pedestrian connections to public transit systems at stops, stations, and terminals; carpool/vanpool park-and-ride lots; and activity centers (e.g., schools, community centers, medical facilities, senior residences, parks, employment centers, high-density residential areas, commercial centers).
- **Policy C-3.6.** To increase bicycle use, the bicycle system shall consist of on-road striped bicycle lanes and off-road bicycle trails, whenever feasible (Class I and II).
- **Policy C-3.7.** Provide greater public awareness of the City’s bikeways and encourage the use bikeways through signage, logos, maps, coordination with bicycle advocacy groups, advisory committees, and special events.
- **Goal C-6.** Develop Pedestrian-Oriented Streetscapes by encouraging Community Design Principles and standards which de-emphasize automobiles.
 - **Policy C-6.1.** Promote the design of streets and buildings that make the City’s streets more attractive and inviting for pedestrians, bicyclists, and public transit users. New development should promote the use of these modes of transportation by including amenities such as sidewalks, bike lockers, and bus shelters.

MUSD Policies

Mendota Unified School District has a number of district-level policies that relate to safe routes to school. Students are required to wear helmets while biking, skateboarding, scootering, etc., to and from school (MUSD Policy 5142). Schools may also employ crossing guards, which helps increase safety during high-traffic times, namely school drop-off and pick-up (MUSD Policy 5142). The school district also requires all schools to have comprehensive school safety plans and these plans must address safe ingress and egress (MUSD Policy 0450). The schools primarily have the same policies to meet this requirement, with slight differences regarding access to the school buildings themselves. For the purpose of safe site access, the relevant policy reads,

The school site Parent Handbook defines the procedures for safe ingress and egress of students as well as details regarding the nature and hours of campus supervision. Parents are informed of procedures for student drop-off and pick-up as well. At the beginning of each school year, school personnel take the time to discuss school rules and safety procedures including safe ingress and egress of students. Supervision is provided by school staff prior to the start of school. Adult supervision is also provided at the end of the day as students depart.

Mendota Unified School Board Regulation 3541 establishes the thresholds for the provision of school-sponsored transportation. If students live a greater distance from the school campus than the thresholds established in **Table 1: Transportation Service Thresholds**, they are eligible for transportation services. The regulation also establishes that “the Superintendent or designee shall design transportation routes and stops to promote the safety of students and maximum efficiency in the use of buses.” The Superintendent

or their designee is also able to authorize transportation services at shorter distances if they identify hazards or safety problems that make walking infeasible.

Table 1: Transportation Service Thresholds

STUDENT GRADE	DISTANCE TO SCHOOL
Kindergarten – 3 rd Grade	¾-mile
4 th Grade – 8 th Grade (if attending an elementary school)	One mile
7 th Grade – 9 th Grade (if attending a junior high school)	One mile
9 th Grade – 12 th Grade (if attending a high school)	Two miles

The school board establishes policies for bus drivers and transportation safety procedures on school transportation in Regulation 3543.

CITY OF MENDOTA
SAFE ROUTE TO SCHOOLS MASTER PLAN
EXISTING CONDITIONS

ATTACHMENT A

School Site Aerial Images

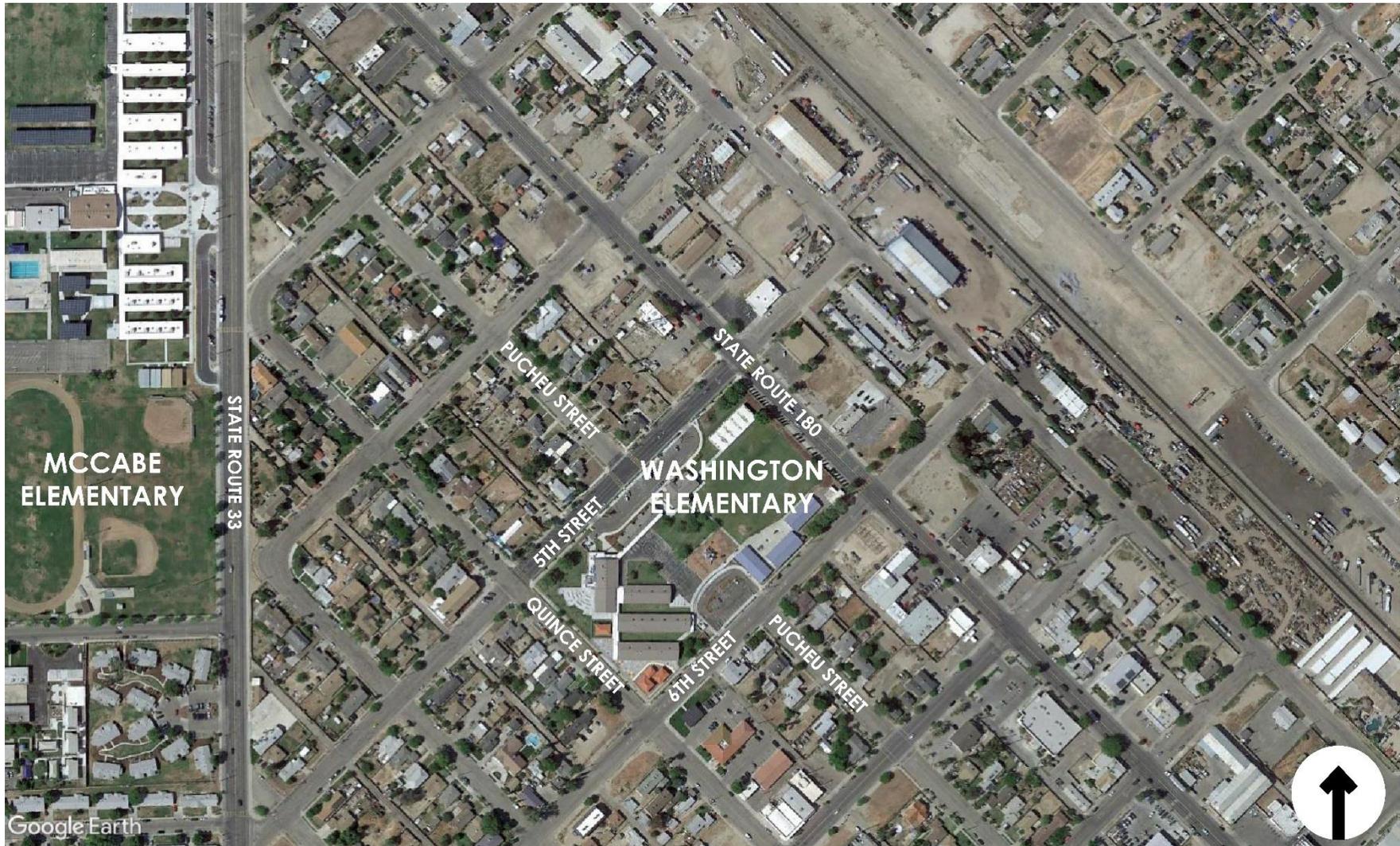
McCabe Elementary School



Mendota Elementary School



Washington Elementary School



Mendota Junior High School



Mendota High School

