The very nature of San Bernardino Valley, with its multitude of cities and communities geographically separated but connected in many ways, lends itself to a transit-walkability collaboration. Such a collaboration strives to solve the challenges faced by geography to the people who live, work, and learn in its communities.

At the center of this collaboration is San Bernardino County Transportation Authority (SBCTA), responsible for cooperative regional transportation planning for an efficient multi-modal system for San Bernardino County. SBCTA initiated a big push for active transportation and established the San Bernardino County Active Transportation Network in 2013. The aim was to create a cohesive network to achieve better coordination for active transportation partners to collaborate and capitalize on grant opportunities, especially from the state.

Omnitrans, established in 1976 by SBCTA to serve as a unifying voice for the valley’s regional transit service, participates as an active member of this new network and also provides specialized services. The Omnitrans board includes members from local agencies and 15 cities. It serves a population of 1.5 million people in San Bernardino, with a reach that extends beyond the valley with transit connections that cross in and out of Los Angeles and Riverside counties.

Anna Jaiswal, Development Planning Manager for Omnitrans and one of the founding members of the San Bernardino County Active Transportation Network, says the goal has two critical pieces: improving safety for biking and walking through infrastructure, policy changes, and education initiatives, and improving mode share of transit, biking, and walking. From a volunteer biking pop-up co-op to pushing for Complete Streets, SBCTA, Omnitrans, and other partners including Inland Empire Biking Alliance, and local jurisdictions in the San Bernardino valley are working as a team to improve pedestrian and bicycle safety and to expand active, multi-modal transportation options.

Josh Lee, Chief of Planning for SBCTA, recalls that it wasn’t too long ago that active transportation wasn’t even discussed in San Bernardino County. Although there has been progress, political roadblocks still intercept transit-walkability efforts.

“We’re definitely not San Francisco, Los Angeles, or the coastal counties... the political climate is still leaned against active transportation for the most part here,” says Lee.

America Walks is a nonprofit national organization empowering communities to create safe, accessible, and enjoyable walking conditions for all.
One of the biggest challenges that Omnitrans and others face in the fight for people-first design is the lack of a more proactive Complete Streets practice. Sidewalks go in when developments go in and so design and planning is dependent on the vision and commitment of the developers. As a result, a lot of Omnitrans’ service area is not very walkable. That’s a problem when 91% of your passengers walk to the bus stop.

For people with disabilities, this issue is especially pressing. That un走able last mile is made even more challenging by compliance issues. Without walkable transit stops, public transportation quickly becomes unrealistic as a viable mode.

“There have been Complete Street studies but there’s not really a Complete Streets policy for the county... one of the challenges is to find ways to provide input on designs before things get finalized,” says Jaiswal.

Jaiswal says another challenge is that riders often want more than what Omnitrans can provide. The organization would love to be able to provide the late-night service and higher frequency that community members want, but funding and other capacity is limited. Unfortunately, this is an all-too-frequent story for cities hoping to get community members to ditch their cars.

**BANDING TOGETHER FOR FRUITFUL FUNDING & SPECIAL SERVICES**

**TRANSIT-WALKABILITY STEPS FORWARD**

- Omnitrans fully embraced partnerships with multi-modal advocacy agencies
- Omnitrans and SBCTA received separate Active Transportation Program grants (federal money from the State), both for pedestrian and bicycle connectivity projects around different transit stops
- Omnitrans partnered with the City of Ontario and received funding for increasing frequency of a bus route, purchase of buses, transit passes, travel training, bus stop accessibility improvements, shelters, and real-time arrival signage

**BIKE REPAIR SHOP POPS UP TO STAY**

New opportunities often times lead to additional doors being opened. Opening a major transit center in downtown San Bernardino in 2015 sparked a partnership with Inland Empire Biking Alliance to start a pop-up bicycle repair co-op on the site of the center.

“We’ve had quite a few transit passengers who use their bikes and take them on the bus so it’s helped people repair their bikes in a more cost-effective way. Volunteers actually teach them to do the repairs themselves to empower them to maintain their bikes,” says Jaiswal.

*America Walks is a nonprofit national organization empowering communities to create safe, accessible, and enjoyable walking conditions for all.*
Omnitrans and others launched a collaborative fundraising campaign to hire staff to work the co-op. It opened in 2016 and operates three days a week at the transit center.

Marven Norman, Executive Director at Inland Empire Biking Alliance, sees the big picture benefits of connecting biking with transit in an accessible way.

“People really appreciate the ability to come get their bikes repaired for a reasonable price. There are several other bike shops in the area and they often charge what are really quite high prices for repairs and parts,” says Norman.

The biggest payday from their partnership came in the form of a 35-million dollar state grant award for the city of Ontario. SBCTA, Omnitrans and several other community partners worked together on the grant application. For Omnitrans, the grant gave them the capacity to offer more frequent service on one bus route, additional funding for buses, as well as ten new bus shelters. Another active transportation program grant that Omnitrans received will allow for walkability improvements to connect to all the stations of a bus-rapid transit line opening in 2023. Construction on the active transportation sidewalk connectivity project will be completed in 2019.

“It’s definitely fruitful in terms of partnerships to bring in resources... it helps serve the transit passengers and the public,” says Jaiswal.

Lee agrees, and says the collaboration doesn’t stop in San Bernardino. The model of the Active Transportation Network has been such a shining example of Transit-Walkability Collaboration that neighboring Riverside County took note. SBCTA consulted with them on starting one up too.

“The improvements and the awareness of active transportation right now, it has totally changed and grown a lot in our state and county. The Active Transportation Network has definitely been a part of that,” says Lee.

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IMPACTFUL IMPROVEMENTS

- The Network secured 35-million dollars via the state’s Active Transportation Program
- SBCTA’s Improvement to Transit Access for Cyclists and Pedestrians project won a National American Planning Association award
- Metrolink station improvements
- Bus-rapid transit station improvements
- First mile / last-mile walkability enhancements
- Compliance consulting with community disability advocacy group
- Public outreach and workshops
- Bike/ped improvement surveys
- County-wide Safe Routes to School program reaching 55 schools
- Walk/Bike Audits
- 250 million-dollar Redlands Passenger Rail project to be completed in 2021

GOALS FOR FUTURE TRANSIT-WALKABILITY COLLABORATION

For Omnitrans, Jaiswal sees the visionary goal as having good coordination and communication before transportation projects or roadway projects are developed.

“To have coordination between all those partners to make sure the bridge or highway interchange or roadway projects are designed to incorporate active transit — bicycles, pedestrians, bus riders, all road users. That’s the big goal. And we’re definitely strengthening the relationships and working toward that.”

What better way to anticipate invaluable bike/ped input on future projects than with strong data? SBCTA is in the process of developing an open data portal and dashboards for all things active transportation, which will help better identify the quantifiable measures of the Transit-Walkability Collaborative efforts into the future.