

Cities are opening streets to pedestrians during the pandemic. L.A. officials say it's risky

By *Dakota Smith, Laura J. Nelson*

Last week, the Del Rey Neighborhood Council shared some big news: Starting the next day, traffic would be restricted on about a dozen residential streets in the Westside area to give residents more space to exercise.

Hours later, Los Angeles city officials told the group that the project was on hold. Neighborhood council President Matt Wersinger spent the evening sending glum responses on Twitter to those who'd celebrated the planned street closures.

When one person responded, "April Fool's came late this year," Wersinger responded: "Seems so."

The postponement was a blow to Los Angeles residents who have been pushing officials to follow the example of more than two dozen other U.S. cities — including New York, San Diego, San Francisco and Oakland — that have created space for people to walk, bike and jog at a safe distance during the coronavirus pandemic.

The delay was also a fresh disappointment for advocates who have said that Mayor Eric Garcetti and his administration have failed to change the city's car culture.

Advocates had hoped that the "soft closure" of streets in Del Rey, home to about 33,000 people, could be the first step in a citywide effort to create more space for residents to exercise outside.

As access to parks, hiking trails and beaches has been restricted, and as traffic levels have dropped, cooped-up residents have used local streets to jog, dance, ride bikes, rollerblade and play catch.



A jogger runs along Maxella Avenue in the Del Rey neighborhood on Saturday.

(Kent Nishimura/Los Angeles Times)

Sidewalks have become so crowded in the evenings that Del Rey residents have been forced into the street to maintain social distancing guidelines, Wersinger said, adding: "It's very important for people's mental health that they get out safely."

Asked about what other cities have done, Garcetti said Wednesday that he was "very supportive" of limiting traffic on some L.A. streets. But, he said, it was important to listen to Los Angeles County health officials and not "jump the gun."

Garcetti said he had spoken with Department of Public Health Director Barbara Ferrer and that she did not support open-streets projects "at the neighborhood level at this point."

"It could draw too many people to one area — it could be something that spreads the disease," Garcetti said. "So we have to be extremely thoughtful, extremely careful about it."

Los Angeles City Councilman Mike Bonin, who represents Del Rey, voiced frustration Friday about the postponement of the neighborhood's plan. Bonin said he believes that health officials mistakenly thought that Del Rey was proposing a program similar to CicLAvia, an event that shuts down major boulevards and draws thousands of people.

The Del Rey proposal isn't a "massive, regional" event, Bonin said. "People from Silver Lake or Encino weren't going to come to Glencoe Avenue in Del Rey to take a walk."

A health department spokesperson did not respond when asked about the Del Rey proposal.

Ferrer said last week that she knows neighborhoods want more open space and that any such street closures should be done on a coordinated, countywide basis.

"We just want to do it in a thoughtful way," Ferrer said.

That caution is shared by a handful of other local officials across the U.S., including Washington, D.C., Mayor Muriel Bowser. On a radio program last month, Bowser said she didn't "want to send the message to people to go out and have a festival."

Still, Bowser moved to [temporarily extend sidewalks](#) near grocery stores and other essential retailers to give people more room and allow them to comply with social distancing rules. She also has [announced the closure](#) of roads in some parks so residents have more space to walk, run and bike.

The best way to guard against crowding on a handful of streets is providing enough space to exercise near their homes, said Michael Schneider, founder of Streets For All, a nonprofit that advocates for bus lanes and bike lanes in Los Angeles

"It can't be one or two spots," Schneider said. "It has to be done in many parts of the city."

Schneider said his group wants to restrict traffic on up to 400 miles of streets across the city, about two to four miles per neighborhood council district.

In Del Rey, officials planned to install signs at intersections to warn about the closures. The dozen or so "soft-closed" streets would have remained open to residents with cars, as well as delivery trucks and emergency vehicles, Wersinger said. Parking restrictions would remain the same, he said.

Oakland officials say they have closed 74 miles, or nearly 10%, of the city's streets to outside traffic. New York Mayor Bill de Blasio's office set a goal of 100 miles of closures, sidewalk widening and additional bike lanes, focusing on communities most affected by the pandemic.

Seattle's program, which has opened nine miles of residential streets and plans to open 11 more, has been so successful that officials are considering making the changes permanent, said Department of Transportation Director Sam Zimbabwe.

City officials started opening streets April 17 to encourage people to walk, jog and exercise in their own communities, rather than get in the car and drive to a park. Zimbabwe said the program adheres to health guidelines, saying: "It's not a block party."

The outbreak has [disproportionately hit low-income residents](#), with those living in such communities more likely to die of the disease than those in wealthier communities.

Locally, some of the areas with the highest death rates also lead the nation in levels of overcrowding, including Pico-Union and Westlake where more than a third of housing units are crowded — meaning there is more than one person per room, excluding bathrooms.

At Beethoven Street and Maxella Avenue in Del Rey, one street considered for a soft closure, pedestrians and joggers could be seen last week weaving into the street to avoid one another. Usually, the quiet area is teeming with cut-through traffic, residents said.

Mike Brady is staying with friends in Del Rey and walks six to seven miles a day. The streets are fairly empty, he said, but he crosses into them to avoid walking by strangers on the sidewalk.

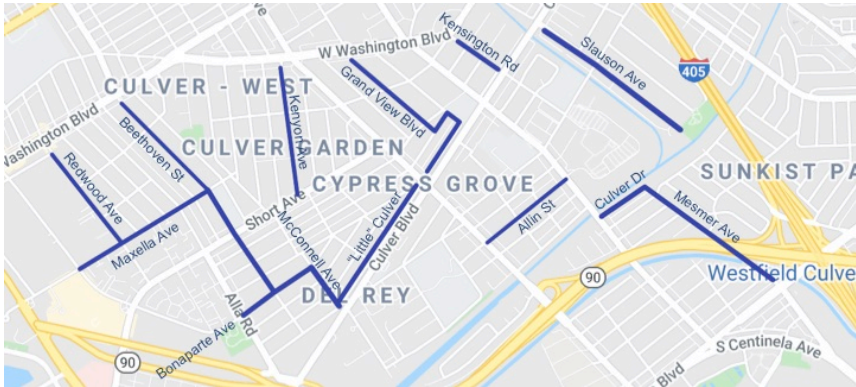
“I don’t think it’ll make much difference,” Brady said of the potential street closures.

Bonin said he plans to write a letter to county health officials to explain the Del Rey program.

“Folks are really disappointed, particularly, because so many other cities are doing this,” Bonin said. “People here are saying, ‘Why can’t we do the same?’”

Del Rey Slow Streets

Whose streets? Our streets!



- Redwood Ave
- Maxella Ave
- Beethoven St
- Bonaparte Ave
- McConnell Ave
- Kenyon Ave
- "Little" Culver
- Grand View Blvd
- Kensington Rd.
- Slauson Ave
- Culver Dr
- Mesmer Ave
- *Streets subject to DOT approval

Background

The Del Rey Neighborhood Council (DRNC), with the support of City Councilmember Mike Bonin, is proposing a **temporary** network of "slow streets" in Del Rey to help residents stay safer at home and in the neighborhood during the COVID-19 emergency. The DRNC is requesting that the City reduce traffic volumes on select neighborhood streets by limiting use to local residents, pedestrians, and bicyclists. By restricting through traffic, those streets will become safer and slower, allowing them to be more comfortably shared by people walking and biking, kids playing in the street, and residents making essential car trips. Parking and local access to homes on the proposed streets will still be allowed.

- ▶ **Streets open to local residents in vehicles**
- ▶ **No parking restrictions are part of program**
- ▶ **Slow Streets are NOT gathering spaces. Users are required to keep distance between themselves and people who are not members of the same household.**
- ▶ **If safe physical distance is not practiced by users, the program will end.**
- ▶ **Slow Streets are created through posting signage and barricades at key intersections.**
- ▶ **Slow Streets will not impede access for emergency vehicles.**
- ▶ **Slow Streets will not be enforced by LAPD.**

Contact: Slow Streets will be adjusted as needed based on experience and feedback from Del Rey residents. Email eric.desobe@delreync.org w/ comments or suggestions



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Matt Wersinger

VICE-PRESIDENT

Eric DeSobe

TREASURER

Daniel Perez

SECRETARY

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Doug Barish

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A: Vacant

B: Travis Tucker

C: Joslyn Treece

D: Dave Bogosian

E: Dan Wierzba

F: Matt Miller

G: Enrique Fernandez

H: Thomas Bangert

Del Rey

Neighborhood Council

board@delreync.org

www.delreync.org

empowerla.org/drenc



April 13th, 2020

Mayor Garcetti, Los Angeles City Council & Seleta Reynolds, General Manager LA DOT,

At its regular Board meeting, held on April 9th, 2020, the Del Rey Neighborhood Council passed the following resolution 14-0.

Whereas COVID-19 has wreaked havoc on the City of Los Angeles, disrupting lives, costing lives, and severely hampering our economy;

Whereas essential workers still need to get to/from their place of work while maintaining 6' between them and another person;

Whereas our road space is now dramatically overbuilt for the current traffic volume;

Whereas Angelenos need access to the outdoors to maintain their physical and mental health during this difficult time;

Whereas our current bike lane network is inadequate to make people feel like cycling is a safe alternative to public transit;

Whereas Los Angeles has seen an increase in speeding since the stay at home order was implemented;

Whereas the average width of our sidewalks in the City of Los Angeles is 4.43', making maintaining 6' impossible even when walking down the street;

Therefore, be it resolved that the Del Rey Neighborhood Council supports enhancing mobility and open space access in Los Angeles during COVID-19, and specifically supports:

- I. Subject to further outreach, pilot a temporary emergency safe streets network throughout the Del Rey Neighborhood Council's jurisdiction, redistributing street space to widen sidewalks and create temporary protected bike lanes using cones or other temporary infrastructure.*
- II. Subject to further outreach, consider closing the certain streets (or alternate ones adjacent to those below)*

entirely to traffic (except local traffic) to allow for the implementation of LADOT's "Play Streets".

The Del Rey Neighborhood Council supports this effort and calls on the Mayor's office and LADOT to quickly enact the proposals above to ensure the safety and livability of our city during this trying time.

Thank you for your timely review of this motion, and please feel free to contact me with any questions at matt.wersinger@delreync.org.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Matt Wersinger', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Matt Wersinger
President

Mobility & Open Space Access in Los Angeles during COVID-19 Motion

TO: Seleta Reynolds, General Manager, LADOT

Eric Garcetti, Mayor, City of Los Angeles

Whereas COVID-19 has wreaked havoc on the City of Los Angeles, disrupting lives, costing lives, and severely hampering our economy;

Whereas essential workers still need to get to/from their place of work while maintaining 6' between them and another person;

Whereas our road space is now dramatically overbuilt for the current traffic volume;

Whereas Angelenos need access to the outdoors to maintain their physical and mental health during this difficult time;

Whereas cycling is the safest possible form of transportation, by default maintaining 6' from another person;

Whereas our current bike lane network is inadequate to make people feel like cycling is a safe alternative to public transit;

Whereas Los Angeles has seen an increase in speeding since the stay at home order was implemented;

Whereas the average width of our sidewalks in the City of Los Angeles is 4.43', making maintaining 6' impossible even when walking down the street;

Therefore be it resolved that the Del Rey Neighborhood Council supports enhancing mobility and open space access in Los Angeles during COVID-19, and specifically supports:

- I. Subject to further outreach, pilot a temporary emergency safe streets network throughout the Del Rey Neighborhood Council's jurisdiction, redistributing street space to widen sidewalks and create temporary protected bike lanes

using cones or other temporary infrastructure:

- A. Centinela from Jefferson to Washington
 - B. Inglewood from Jefferson to Washington
 - C. Maxella from Alla to Lincoln
- II. Subject to further outreach, consider closing the following streets (or alternate ones adjacent to those below) entirely to traffic (except local traffic) to allow for the implementation of LADOT's "Play Streets"
- A. Redwood Ave between Washington & Mindanao
 - B. Little Culver Blvd from Slauson to McConnell
 - C. Short Avenue between Centinela and Alla
 - D. Glencoe Avenue from Mindanao to Alla

The Del Rey Neighborhood Council supports this effort and calls on the Mayor's office and LADOT to quickly enact the proposals above to ensure the safety and livability of our city during this trying time.



Wednesday, April 22, 2020

Mayor Eric Garcetti
200 N. Spring St.
Los Angeles, CA 90012

Council President Nury Martinez
200 N. Spring St. Suite 470
Los Angeles, CA 90012

Seleta Reynolds, General Manager
Los Angeles Department of Transportation
100 S. Main St.
Los Angeles, CA 90012

Kevin James, President
Department of Public Works
1149 S. Broadway
Los Angeles, CA 90015

Adel Hagekhalil, General Manager
Bureau of Street Services (StreetsLA)
1149 S. Broadway 4th Floor
Los Angeles, CA 90015

Dr. Barbara Ferrer
LA County Department of Public Health
313 N. Figueroa St. Room 806
Los Angeles, CA 90012

Cc: Los Angeles City Council

RE: Mobility & Open Space Access in Los Angeles during COVID-19

To our City Leaders,

The above organizations urge the city to promptly implement a plan to keep Angelenos physically and mentally healthy during the COVID-19 crisis.

COVID-19 has wreaked havoc on the City of Los Angeles, disrupting lives, costing lives, and severely hampering our economy. Despite all the disruption, essential workers still need to get to and from their place of work, while maintaining 6' of distance between each other. People also still need to get to and from critical doctor appointments, pick up prescription medication, and access groceries and food centers. Making active transportation safer can provide all Angelenos mobility alternatives, especially for those without access to a vehicle.

The road space in Los Angeles is now dramatically overbuilt for the current vehicle traffic volume, causing vehicles to travel at dangerous speeds - average speeds are up 30% on our wide open roads according to LADOT. At the same time, the average width of our sidewalks is 4.4', too narrow to allow people to pass each other while maintaining 6' of distance. As a result, people are forced to be in close proximity with each other, risking proliferating the virus or walking, running, scooting, or biking in the street next to speeding cars. This isn't just a street safety issue, but a public health issue as well.

All Angelenos should be able to maintain their physical and mental health during this pandemic. Park space comes at a premium in Los Angeles, with many neighborhoods lacking access at a reasonable per capita rate. L.A. County's 2016 Park Need Assessment found 28 of the 42 studied neighborhoods in the City of Los Angeles had "Very High" or "High" need. This amounts to millions of residents who can't access local parks without crowding, and more often than not overlap with areas of concentrated poverty, obesity, asthma, particulate matter, and the city's High Injury Network. Many Angelenos - those most vulnerable according to the City's community equity and health index - live in denser areas next to major arteries and have no safe space for much needed maintenance of psychological and physical health.

While the top priority is limiting COVID-19 spread and saving lives and livelihoods, there must be a long term plan to sustain the mental and physical well being of Angelenos. Isolation and inactivity can lead to increases in chronic health conditions like heart disease and obesity and pose other mental and physical health risks that we may pay for as a society for years to come.

Therefore, for the critical reasons of equity, mental health, safety, and the physical well-being of Angelenos, we ask you to authorize the creation of an emergency people street network - using cones or other temporary infrastructure - to create additional sidewalk and open space for people to walk, run, scoot, and bike in, while maintaining 6' of distancing. On neighborhood streets, this could be as simple as a few cones and a "slow down" sign taking up some of the street, calming traffic but still allowing local and emergency vehicle access. On major arteries, this could be redistributing a parking lane and/or single vehicle traffic lane on each side of the street, while taking care not to interfere with bus stops. These treatments may also advance the Mayor's goals under L.A.'s Green New Deal to "Activate Streets" and "Prioritize Land Use and the Right-of-Way" in [Executive Directive 25](#). All of this can be accomplished inexpensively and without the need of distracting our police or fire departments with enforcement during this critical time.

Los Angeles would be in good company, as cities large and small across the US have taken similar emergency measures to insure people can safely provide critical goods and services as well as maintain physical and mental health while avoiding spreading the virus. Examples include Minneapolis, Oakland, Denver, San Francisco, Boston, Brookline, Cleveland, Philadelphia, Burlington, Duluth, Edmonton, Louisville, Portland, New York, St. Louis, and St. Paul ([Detailed list](#)). As summer weather is nearly here in Los Angeles, and keeping people strictly indoors becomes even more challenging, it's critical now more than ever that we follow suit. To prevent creating an "attraction" and potential crowding, it's also critical that this is implemented city wide.

Attached is a route map for major streets for you to consider and examples of possible treatments. Additionally, many Neighborhood Councils will be taking up this issue in May and some have already passed motions of support and chosen their local streets; we would be happy to do legwork to help organize local communities in choosing their own neighborhood streets. We look forward to working with you to implement this critical plan for our city's short term and long term well being.

Undersigned:

Michael Schneider
Founder
Streets For All

Daniel Bezinovich
Community Partnerships, SoCal
SPIN

Scott Gamzon
Co-Founder
Neighborhoods United for Safe Streets

Denny Zane
Executive Director
MoveLA

John Rossant
Founder
CoMotion LA

Kyler Parris
VP of Policies
Associated Students of Occidental College

Marisa Rodriguez-McGill
Senior Public Policy Mgr
Lyft

Tim Harter
Government Relations
Bird

Nancy Matson
Chair, Transportation Committee
Neighborhood Council Sustainability Alliance

Hilary Norton
Executive Director
FastLinkDTLA

Christopher Chavez
Deputy Policy Director
Coalition for Clean Air

Marilú Guevara
Executive Director
League of Women Voters of Los Angeles

Christine Louise Mills
Director
LA River Communities for Environmental Equity

David Diaz
Executive Director
Active San Gabriel Valley

Cynthia Rose
Director
Santa Monica Spoke

David Coles
President
Bike Culver City

Khristina Rhead
Sunrise LA Political Engagement Team Coordinator
Sunrise Movement

Michael Skiles
Founder
Westwood Forward

Brian Hanlon
President & CEO
CA YIMBY

Kevin Burton
Administrative Chair
West Hollywood Bicycle Coalition

Kyle Wagenschutz
Director of Local Innovation
People For Bikes

Suggested treatment of a “major street” using the parking lane and/or one vehicle traffic lane, while making sure bus stops are not impacted:



Suggested treatment of a “neighborhood street” calming traffic to make it safer and more accessible to people walking, running, scooting and biking while still allowing local and emergency vehicles to pass (photo courtesy of the City of Oakland):



Los Angeles Emergency Safe Streets Network - Major Streets

Link to digital version: <https://bit.ly/2UWOx8g>

City of LA Border

 Untitled

Third Priority

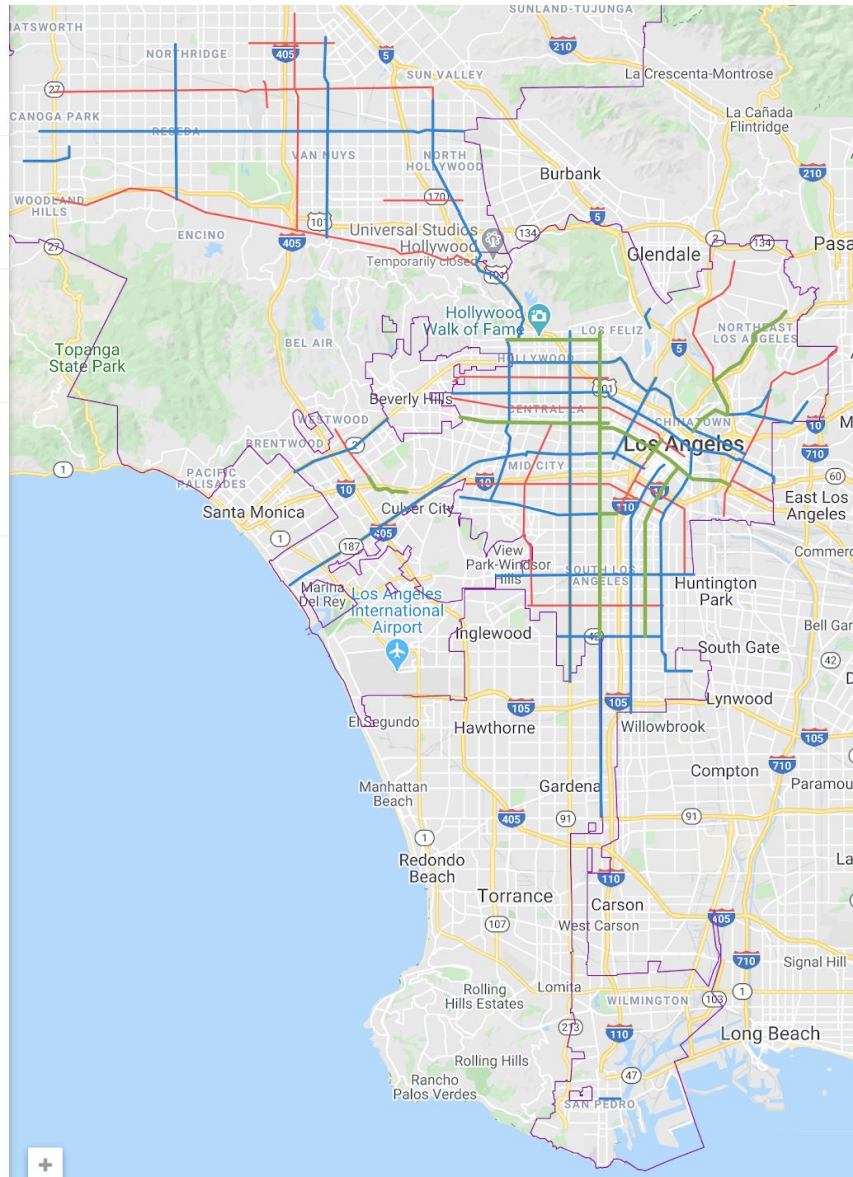
 All items

Second Priority

 All items

First Priority

 All items



			
STREETS			
FOR			
		ALL	



**L.A.'s average sidewalk is 4.4' wide,
not wide enough to pass and
maintain social distance.**



**People need more room to walk, run,
and bike. Transit-dependent
essential workers could use a safer
outdoor option. Park poor parts of
the city need more safe space.**



Oakland Redwood City

San Francisco San Diego



Berlin



Paris



Milan



Bogota

Over 150 cities around the world have opened their streets to people during COVID-19.

Top 10 CITY	PROPOSED / EXISTIN	Summary TACTIC (%)	# Applications
1. Paris, France	403.8	Open Streets (25.7%)	45
2. Lima, Peru	187	Open Curbs (17.1%)	30
3. Portland, OR, USA	107.5	Shared Streets (12%)	21
4. New York City, NY, USA	102	DIY, Unsanctioned Opening (4.6%)	8
5. Pasadena, CA	100	Temporary Bikeways (21.7%)	38
6. Rome, Italy	93	Intersections (18.9%)	33
7. Oakland, CA, USA	74		
8. Bogota, Colombia	49.7		
9. Quito, Ecuador	38.9		
10. Auckland, NZ	37.9		
11. Minneapolis/St. Paul	36.8		
12. Brussels, Belgium	34.17		
13. Burlington, VT	25.86	TOTAL APPLICATIONS	175
14. Milan, Italy	22		
15. Barcelona, Spain	20.5		
16. Seattle, WA	20		
Total:	1353.13		

#Covid19Streets Summary

Major streets: cone off a (not currently needed) parking lane

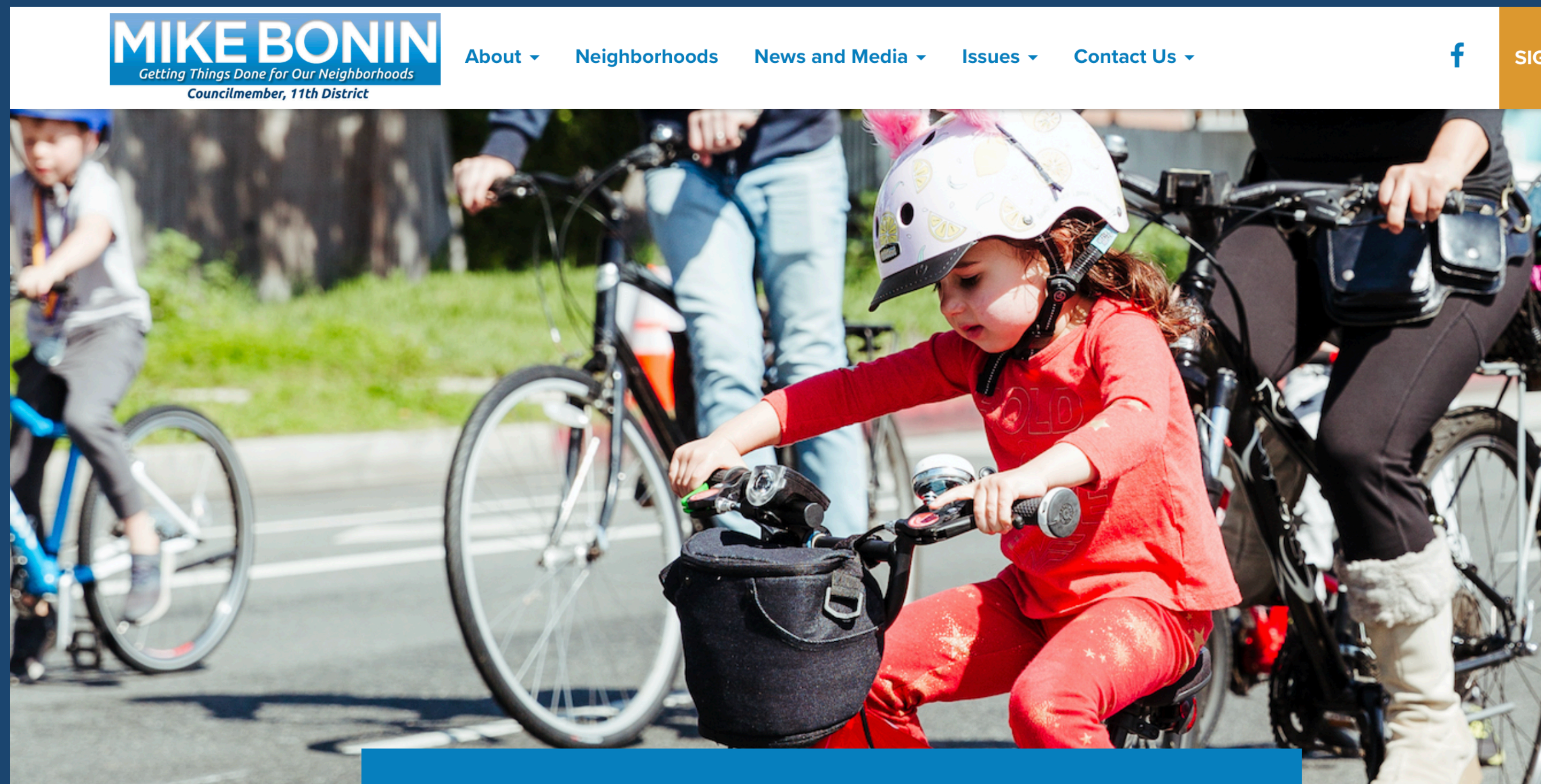


Residential streets: put up cones and signs that encourage only local traffic to proceed



Pasadena

Members of the L.A. City Council want this



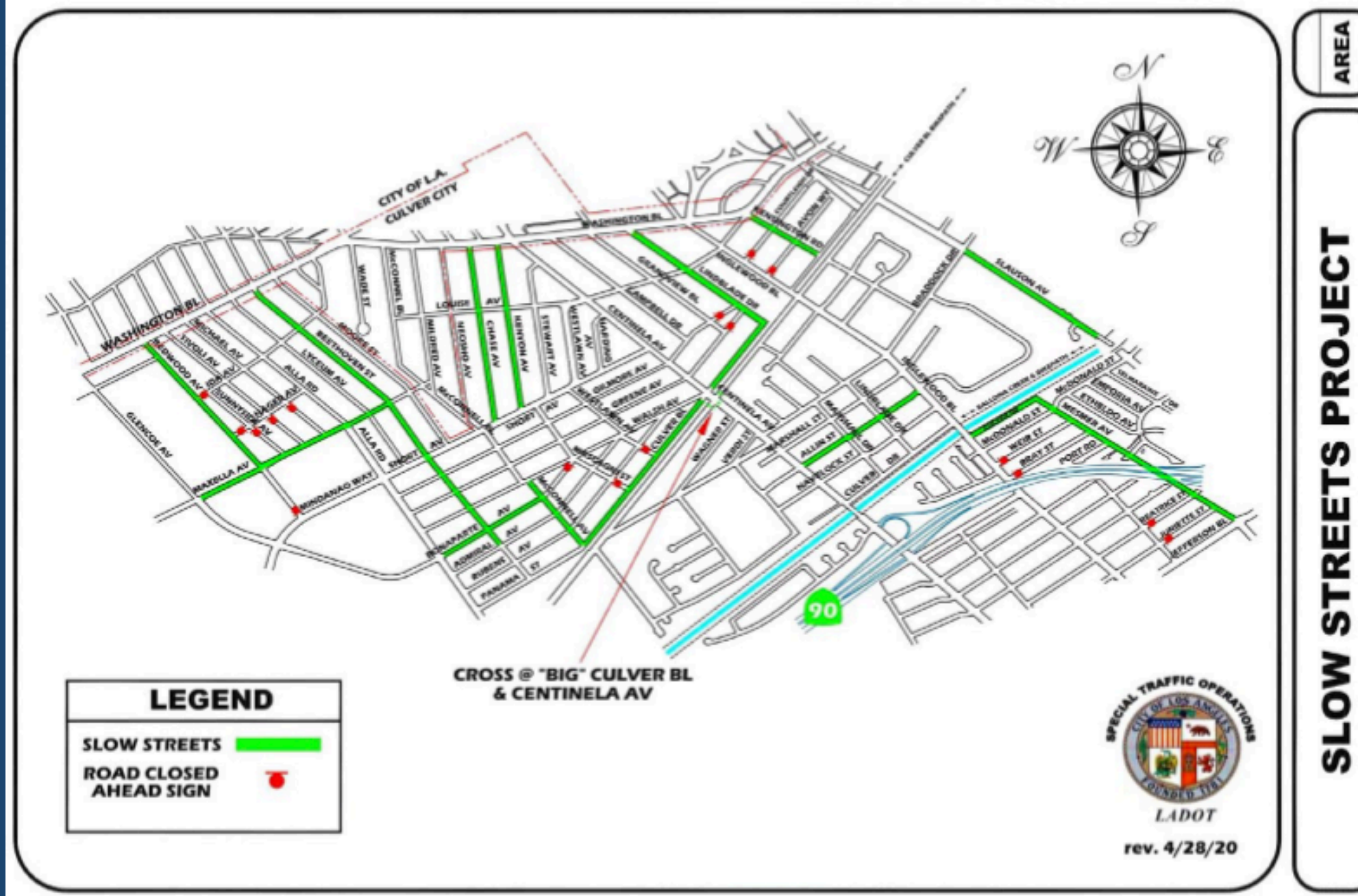
**MIKE CALLS FOR MAKING
L.A. STREETS MORE
“FAMILY-FRIENDLY”
DURING COVID-19 CRISIS**

Many neighborhood councils are interested



Del Rey NC
@DelReyNeighbor

Exciting news! #SlowStreets program starts tmrw, April 30th. See map for #DelRey locations w/ better #socialdistancing spaces and more room to be active and healthy. Shoutout to @MikeBoninLA, @LADOTofficial and @streetsforall for support. pic.twitter.com/YM8mY162tK



**Now is the time to pass a motion
of support, pick the streets the
community feels would work
best, and ask the city to
implement.**



Thank you.

streetsforall.org/covid19