

Selma gets graded on walking and cycling paths

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Sidewalks that are wide, lighted and have some shade make foot travel in downtown Selma a good experience. However, the area is not bicycle friendly.

A handful of Selma residents and a few out-of-town consultants reached those conclusions after a walking tour of the downtown area on April 20.

"On a scale of one to 10, I think we're a nine," Selma Mayor Dennis Lujan said. However, other people on the tour noted a few problems, including little room for bike lanes and some cracked or uneven sidewalks.

The Fresno County Council of Governments chose Selma for the tour as part of its study of public transportation and getting around cities without a car.

Encouraging people to move about on foot has implications for people's health and the economy, the consultants said. Sidewalks that are inviting because they have summer shade, benches and adequate lighting might lead to more walking and less driving. That could cut vehicle pollution and boost exercise, the consultants said.

If storefronts are inviting as the walkers pass by, it could be good for business, too, they added.

About 15 people took the leisurely tour that started at City Hall, wound through the downtown area, traveled south on McCall Avenue and skirted Lincoln Park. Local residents on the tour were City Council Member Jim Avalos, Irene Boyd, Phil Carpio, Jennifer Earle, Pete Esraelian, city administrative analyst Roseann Galvan and Lujan.

Overall, the people on the tour rated the walkability of the area as slightly better than "pretty good."

They said positives included ramps at street corners to accommodate the handicapped and transit benches with posted schedules.

They also saw some problems, including empty lots that might frighten children and discourage them from walking, lack of shelters and route maps at transit stops and motorists driving too fast.

Several people noted the angled parking on High and other streets, which they said takes up space that could be used for bike lanes.

Changing that parking configuration would be difficult because merchants like it, Esraelian told one of the consultants.

Tour members also noted the sidewalk on the north side of Rose Avenue, east of McCall.

"Picture yourself walking there," said Mary Beatie, one of the consultants. The sidewalk runs along a stretch of barren block wall, which could discourage walkers because people are more prone to use routes that are pleasant and inviting.

Lujan joked: "I guess it gives you a taste of Corcoran prison." He asked what could be done to brighten up that area.

Consultant Julie Eldrige said high school students could paint a mural on the wall.