

Sidewalkology

Sidewalkology – *A Path to Solving San Antonio’s Sidewalk Problem*

Introduction

This memorandum proposes the creation a Pedestrian Mobility Officer (PMO) position and/or an active transportation program manager position for the City of San Antonio. This proposal recognizes the growing community need for (a) staff position(s) specifically charged with ensuring policies, codes, and projects are consistent with city policies and can implement projects according to national and international best practices in land use planning and street design.

San Antonio should create (a) new positions(s) in the current budget process for (a) new, permanent, full-time employee(s) (FTE) beginning in fiscal year 2019.

Below is the rationale for creating (a) new position(s) for San Antonio, options for organizational structure, possible job description for a PMO position.

The Need for New Expertise

The topic of sidewalks (both gap closure and the repair of existing) is perennially the number one concern of the citizens of San Antonio.

Additionally, the SA Tomorrow Comprehensive Plan and the SA Tomorrow Multimodal Plan are the city’s guiding documents for land use and transportation policy. These adopted plans depict a rapidly growing city with increasing land use and transportation challenges. The plans also explicitly communicate goals to create more walkable and bikeable communities, reduce single-occupant vehicle trips, and to increase pedestrian and bicycle trips within San Antonio. Accomplishing these community goals requires hiring staff with the requisite expertise to plan for pedestrians.

The Vision Zero Action Plan details the severity of San Antonio’s traffic safety problem. The number of deaths and serious injuries also represents a growing problem for San Antonio. Like creating land use and transportation systems conducive to active transportation, reducing the number of fatalities amongst pedestrians and bicyclists requires staff that can offer and implement effective countermeasures for these specific modes of travel.

Conventional transportation planners and engineers are typically very motivated by automobile design and the building of infrastructure to support the fast movement and storage of automobiles. Ideally, every engineer and planner hired by a municipality would be wholly knowledgeable and supportive of complete streets and multi-modal infrastructure. But, the reality is that many working professionals were educated and hired before the movement to create complete streets. As such, there is a bureaucratic momentum to continue automobile-oriented plans and designs.

For this reason, large- and medium-size cities have recently sought to combat the momentum of automobile design by their street construction and maintenance departments by creating specialized groups of active transportation planners. Figure 1 displays a sampling of cities with active transportation planners and programs.

Figure 1 Sample of Cities with Active Transportation Planners and Programs

New York, NY - Director, Pedestrian Projects Group	Madison, WI - Pedestrian Bicycle Coordinator
Los Angeles, CA - Multiple pedestrian coordinator positions	Omaha, NE - Bicycle Pedestrian Coordinator
Chicago, IL - Pedestrian Coordinator	Vancouver, WA - Active Transportation Planner
Philadelphia, PA - Pedestrian and Bicycle Coordinator	Flagstaff, AZ - Active Transportation Program Coordinator
Austin, TX - Pedestrian Coordinator	Winston-Salem, NC - Bike Pedestrian Coordinator
Charlotte, NC - Active Transportation Coordinator, Pedestrian Program Coordinator	Columbia, SC - Multimodal Transportation Planner
Seattle, WA - Director, Bicycle Ped Program	Bloomington, IN - Bicycle and Pedestrian Coordinator
Washington DC - Bike Pedestrian Specialist	Davis, CA - Active Transportation Coordinator
Raleigh, NC - Bicycle and Pedestrian Manager	Billings, MT - Active Transportation Planner
Minneapolis, MN - Bicycle Pedestrian Coordinator	Denton, TX - Pedestrian Bicycle Coordinator
Ft. Lauderdale, FL - Livability Planner	Monterey CA - Sustainable Transportation Program Coordinator
Kansas City, MO - Active Transportation Coordinator	Corvallis, OR - Active Transportation Program Specialist
St. Louis, MO - Bicycle Pedestrian Coordinator	Tacoma, WA - Active Transportation Coordinator
Pittsburgh, PA - Bike Ped Coordinator	Santa Ana, CA - Active Transportation Coordinator
Milwaukee, WI - Bicycle Pedestrian Coordinator	Santa Cruz, CA - Bicycle Pedestrian Coordinator
Oakland, CA - Pedestrian Bike Coordinator	Eugene, OR - Bike Pedestrian Coordinator
Memphis, TN - Bike Pedestrian Program Manager	Bettendorf, IA - Bike Pedestrian Coordinator
Alexandria, VA - Ped/bike coordinator	Key West, FL - Bike Pedestrian Coordinator
Evanston, IL - Mobility Coordinator	Honolulu, HI - Pedestrian Coordinator

Projects / Duties

A Pedestrian Mobility Officer would bring a specialized set of skills and knowledge to all projects happening within San Antonio that affect the pedestrian realm. Examples of projects and duties that a pedestrian coordinator would perform include: Completing and Maintaining the Sidewalk Master Plan, support the implementation of the Sidewalk Master Plan, establishing an Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Transition Plan, helping with street design standards, applying for grant funds, educating and supporting Safe Routes to School, helping to review Infrastructure Management Program (IMP) funds and Neighborhood Access and Mobility Program (NAMP) funds, review of subdivision and site plans to comment on pedestrian improvements, coordinating with Vision Zero to improve pedestrian safety, completing a pedestrian safety action plan, serving on the Alamo Area Metropolitan Planning Organization's Pedestrian Mobility Advisory Committee, advising on bond projects and street designs, coordinate with CENTRO on downtown placemaking initiatives and wayfinding efforts, coordinating with SARA on the pedestrian experience along the Riverwalk and San Pedro Creek, working with Bexar County Health Department to increase the health of San Antonio residents by encouraging increased walking, working with Planning & Zoning to implement the regional center plans of SA Tomorrow, working to implement the SA Tomorrow Multimodal Transportation Plan, providing design assistance to implement complete streets within San Antonio, coordinating with VIA to ensure greater number of transit trips and to ensure pedestrian facilities exist around bus stops, establishing a utility pole relocation program with CPS, establishing a safe street crossing program and educational materials, reviewing the land development code and new policies for unintended adverse impacts to pedestrians, etc.

Appendix 1 is a sample job description for a PMO position.

Appendix 2 is a sample organizational chart.

Administrative Structure

Given this new position that will interact across many City departments and is new in concept and scope, the position should ideally be housed in the Office of Innovation. There will be a close working relationship with TCI; however, for a fresh perspective in terms of programming for all future transportation planning, multimodal planning, bicycle facilities, pedestrian safety, and Vision Zero, the position should exist outside of the current TCI Department Structure. This would provide additional and needed, pedestrian expertise to work with, but not inside a department already charged with multimodal planning and programming. A PMO outside of TCI would additionally enable the planner to more independently coordinate with interrelated departments as well as TCI's street design professionals, the sidewalk program, and Vision Zero Program.

Given the scale of operations of pedestrian, bicycle, and transportation safety projects within San Antonio, it might also be justifiable to create an Active Transportation Program at the same level of the Transportation Planning and Programming program. A Program Manager would oversee planning and implementation of active transportation – both bicycle and pedestrian – projects within San Antonio and a PMO would supplement the existing bicycle staff that would migrate to the newly created program.

Concerns have been expressed about the administrative barriers present within the Transportation & Capital Improvement Department, particularly how active transportation efforts are performed. The evolution of the Sidewalk Master Plan reflects some of these problems. The project and execution of consultant contracts for a sidewalk master plan should have been done collaboratively by the Transportation Planning & Programming team and the Asset & Program Management team. Because the contract was executed solely by the Asset & Program Management team, necessary items to a sidewalk plan were neglected. An external pedestrian coordinator would have ensured the contract reflected these items. Moreover, a pedestrian planner could have performed the work themselves.

Conclusion

A PMO position should be created with the 2019 fiscal budget. The increased attention to active transportation within adopted city plans and policies, the need for Vision Zero pedestrian safety support and pedestrian-specific technical knowledge justifies the creation of at least one new position. Elevating active transportation within the administrative structure would require the hiring of an active transportation program manager.