National City Makes Route to Kimball Elementary School Safer for Nearly 400 Kids

Empowered by Environmental Health Coalition, community members win improvements to make West National City more walkable, bikeable

August 14, 2014, National City, CA. — Before the bell rang at Kimball Elementary School this morning, National City parents, students, community members, mayor and council members walked two blocks down Coolidge Avenue to celebrate a new Safe Route to School. The route underwent vast improvements over the past two years to enhance safety, walkability and bikeability in a local project of a national effort to reduce obesity in children.

“I’m really happy to see the outcome of this project. It was really important for me to have stop signs along the avenue so that children could get safely to school,” said National City Resident Maria C. Villanueva, who started walking with her daughter as soon as the changes were completed. “The trees, flowers and lighting make the avenue look beautiful, pleasant and safe to walk on.”

Environmental Health Coalition (EHC), an organization fighting toxic pollution in low-income communities, became involved in the project by going door-to-door in National City and asking residents what changes they wanted to see in their neighborhood. EHC also audited walkability on Coolidge Avenue -- the most popular route children take to Kimball Elementary School -- and talked to community members with children to determine safety priorities.

“By speaking with community members we came to the conclusion the safety of children commuting to and from school was a priority,” says Monserrat Hernandez, community organizer with EHC. “A crucial community request has been met, children are safer and the neighborhood planning process incorporated the voice of residents.”

The route from Coolidge Ave. to Kimball Elementary School now improves safety, walkability and bikeability for the school’s nearly 400 students. Improvements include:

• Expanded street corners to slow traffic and decrease street-crossing distance
• Stop signs at intersections
• Bike lanes and bike racks
• Sidewalk maintenance
• Improved student pick-up and drop-off area
• Increased outdoor lighting
• Installation of trees, benches, and landscaping

“Prior to these enhancements, students struggled getting to school between speeding cars in low-lit outdoor areas without stop signs or well-marked bicycle lanes and with uneven sidewalks,” says Carolina Martinez, policy advocate at Environmental Health Coalition. “These improvements have been in the works
since Old Town residents created a community plan to improve their quality of life in 2005, and community members are ecstatic to see them come to fruition."

For more information on National City projects or community initiatives south of the I-8, please visit www.environmentalhealth.org. To learn more about Safe Routes to School, click here.

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